

## Archive Documents

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### *Romanian Small Convents in Mount Athos\**

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#### **Abstract**

The study brings into question a less researched aspect in the Romanian and foreign history in the past 20 years, namely, cells and Romanian huts set up on Mount Athos in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with hermitages founded there also by Romanian monks. This material presents aspects of religious and administrative life, and their daily lives on Mount Athos in Greece, and relations between communities of Romanian monks from there and Greek monks from Mount Athos during the time, from its establishment – 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present. The information is based on research and documents in the deposits of the National Archives of Romania and those of the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

**Keywords:** monk, hermitage, convent, hut, monastery, Orthodoxy, Patriarchate, Mount Athos

Romanian principalities supported Mount Athos from the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453 until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The settlements

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in the Sacred Mountain couldn't have resisted without of the Romanian massive material and moral support in spite of their autonomy granted by Turks. They had to pay a big annual tribute to the Ottomans and they didn't have resources to maintain their buildings and provide for the monks.

Romanian monks had been living in Mount Athos since the XIV<sup>th</sup> century in the existing ecclesiastic settlements and they didn't set up exclusively Romanian churches.

National conflicts started in Athos beginning with the third decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.\*\* In turns, Russians then Serbs and Bulgarians obtained

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\*\* According to tradition, the origin of the monastic life at Athos dates back to the times of emperors Constantin the Great (313–337 AD) and Theodosie (408–434 AD) when the first monks are thought to have settled in the sacred mountains. A few monks in Palestine and Egypt also sought refuge at Athos after Arabs occupied their countries (Palestine in 638 AD and Egypt in 640 AD) and Athos was the place where monks in the Byzantine empire found shelter during the iconoclast disputes in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The oldest monastery is the Great Lavra that Athanasie of Athos founded in 963 AD. Iviru Monastery followed in 972 AD and then Vatoped and Filoteu, also before 1000 AD. Then Esfigmenu, Dohiar, Xenofon, Xiropotam, Caracalu, Costamonitu and Zografu were built in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Rusicon and Hilandar in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and monasteries Cutlumuş, Pantocrator, Saint Paul, Grigoriu, Simonpetra in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

Along time, the number of monasteries varied with the evolution of historical events. Some of them disappeared, others were assimilated and changed their hierarchies. Twenty big monasteries rule the territory of Athos at present. Besides them, there are also 8 small convents, approximately 200 hermitages, a lot of huts and a few small reclusories. Convents, hermitages, huts and other monastic shelters built on the territory of a monastery are under control and administration of that. They do not dispose freely of their goods and do not take part in the ruling of the Sacred Mountain.

While a Protos ruled the community at Athos until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a board made of the 20 Fathers Superior of the great monasteries has gradually taken the lead. These Fathers Superior who were first named *proisthos* and then *epistates* are organized in 4 men groups (the *Epistasis*) that rule in turns, each group one year, beginning with the first of June and ending with the end of May the following year. The four *epistates* in each group elect on of them as a president who holds the crozier of the Primate and is appointed *Protepistat* or *Protos of the Sacred Mountain*.

The permanent administrative body superior to the *Epistasis* is the Extraordinary Assembly or the Saint *Sinaxis* including representatives of the 20 monasteries. The legislative and judicial body is the Biannual Double Assembly or the Extraordinary Double *Sinaxis* whose members meet twice a year in the small town Careia, the capital of Athos.

The community at Athos was granted territorial and administrative autonomy within the Byzantine Empire, since the 9<sup>th</sup> century until 1453, when the Empire was conquered by the Ottomans. The Ottoman sultans confirmed and reinforced the privileges of the monks and the 8 contracts (*typicons*) I (972), II (1046), III (1394), IV (1406), V (1574), VI (1783), VII (1810), VIII (1911) ensured the religious, political and administrative autonomy of the Sacred Mountain.

representatives in the Careia Assembly (Russians – Rusicon monastery, Serbs – Hilandar monastery, Bulgarians – Zografu monastery). The Greek majority did not acknowledge the right of Romanian monks to distinct organization. They were totally subordinated, both ecclesiastically, canonically and economically to Greek monasteries. Greeks' attitude

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After Byzantium surrendered in 1453 Mount Athos was supported by the Romanian principalities until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With all the autonomy Turks granted, the religious settlements in the Sacred Mountain couldn't have lasted without the substantial Romanian material and moral aid.

Political events in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century raised the Sacred Mountain problem as an issue at European peace conferences. For example, by Berlin 1878 Peace Treaty the privileges of the Sacred Mountain were reinforced. The situation stayed the same until the Balkan wars (1912–1913). The Greek army occupied Athos in November 1912 and European powers claim the right to decide the fate of the Mountain in the London Peace Conference.

Mount Athos was declared autonomous, independent and neutral in November 1913. The First World War blocked the enforcement of the decisions taken at the London Conference. The Greek government appointed police officers to keep the order at Careia. The Careia Church Assembly in collaboration with a Greek public servant drew up a statute in 1918 that specified the autonomy, neutrality and independence of the community under 1913 London Treaty conditions. Greece recognized the autonomy of Mount Athos by the 1920 Sèvres Treaty and after the Russian-Turk war, the Lausanne Conference (July 1923) decided that Mount Athos would have the status of mandated territory under Greek administration. A commission of five Greek clergymen drew up Mount Athos Statute at the beginning of 1924 and the Statute was signed by the representatives of 19 monasteries in Athos on May the 10th, 1924. St. Pantelimon Russian Monastery refused to sign it. In 1925 the Constantinople Patriarchate accepted the Statute and the Greek government issued a law entitled „On the ratification of the regulations of Athos Sacred Mountain” on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September, 1926. The law declares that the convents, huts and hermitages are annexes of the 20 great monasteries, settles to 20 the number of monasteries and denies ownership rights to any settlements but the 20 monasteries. At the same time, all monks in Athos should have Greek citizenship irrespective of nationality, convents, huts and hermitages are declared inalienable property of the tutor monasteries. The law forbids transformation of convents into monasteries, of hermitages into convents and of huts into hermitages and also forbids the sale of hermitages and huts without prior approval of tutor monasteries that are declared first buyers. The number of monks that have the right to inherit a reclusory is reduced to three.

Although Greek Constitution has been amended several times after 1926, Mount Athos status has remained unchanged. According to provisions in the 1975 Greek Constitution, Mount Athos represents a self-governing region but it is a part of the Greek state. As religious institution, Mount Athos is under the direct jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Monks in service at Athos obtain Greek citizenship. Greeks assure maintainance of public order and security in the Sacred Mountain. Therefore, the Greek state acts in fact as a leading organ of the Mount, as it has acquired all civil, political and ecclesiastical powers in the region.

towards Romanians was sharpened by the 1863 secularization of the monastic estates in Romania under the rule of Alexandru Ioan Cuza. Thus Greeks lost their most important resources in Romanian principalities.

Under such circumstances, Romanian monks coming from Romania, Transylvania or Bessarabia started to set up small convents and huts buying land or even buildings from Greek monasteries. By comparing three documents – one signed by plenipotentiary Minister of Romania in Constantinople Ghika Brigadier in march 1901, one signed by Prodromu hermitage superior Antipa Dinescu in September 1905 and the historical-statistical memorial on the situation of Athos monks in 1908 – we find out that there were 32 Romanian centers in Athos at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 628 monks living in the two Romanian hermitages (Lacu and Prodromu) and in the 24 small convents and 26 huts. (1)

Two Romanian clergymen named Orest and Ipatie and coming from Cheia monastery in Prahova district set up St.Ipatie small convent on Vatoped monastery estate in 1850. The convent was surrounded by 25 acres of land growing vine, fruit trees, olive tress and hay and they had 2 water springs for house and garden. They also had a big church and large rooms, church artefacts and a library. The four superiors that ruled the convent until 1905 had paid the third part of the building price each so that the convent had been paid for twice. They paid an annual tax of 5 napoleons to Vatoped monastery and clergyman Teodosie the Confessor had signed “an act with the superior monastery providing that the future heirs of the convent could not sell it to other nations but only to Romanian monks”. Six monks from Transylvania were living in this convent in 1905. (2)

Bessarabian monks Cosma, Domițian and Corg bought the ruins of former convent dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin in 1846. They restored completely the convent set up on the estate of Xiropotam monastery. They paid an annual tax of 2 liras and owned 6 acres of land. Gherasim Stratan was elected superior after the death of father Cosma. (3)

Romanian clergyman Sava who had rtired from Prodromu set up Turlutiu convent in 1867. The convent was on Lavra monastery estate, it had a church dedicated to the Virgin Nativity and it owned 5 acres of land growing vine, olive trees, hay and a forest. Sava was superior of Turlutiu until 1902 when he was replaced by monk Clement Popescu who paid to Lavra “the 30% fee and obtained the acknowledgement as superior entitled to two heirs and obliged to pay an annual tax of 5 napoleons”. That convent also had a library with ecclesiastical books and a few artefacts. Three monks

from Romania were living there in 1905 in old huts needing repairment, keeping themselves by “hand craft and working the land”. (4)

As the number of monks living at the Virgin Assumption Convent – Xiropotam increased, they bought the ruins of former Cucuvinu – Provata convent on Lavra monastery estate in 1869. Cucuvinu was dedicated to St. John Theologian and they set up a church dedicated to the same saint in 1870. The new convent was first ruled by clergyman Domițian and then by his nephew, Teodosie Soroceanu. They had 60 acres of land and 20 monks. That was the nucleus of the future Provata – Romanian Brothers Community. (5)

Romanian clergyman (*schimonah*) Visarion from Tecuci district set up St. Artemie small convent on Lavra monastery estate in 1869. The convent estate included 2 acres of vineyard, olive tress and a garden. The old superior was still living there with some apprentices in 1908. (6)

Convent Catafighi from Provata dedicated to St. John the Baptist belonged to Lavra monastery. Romanian monks bought it in 1870 and restored it, installing Teodorit Hodorocea, a Bessarabian clergyman (*ieroschimonah*) retired from Prodromu as superior. After the superior died in 1886, monk Antonie Saghin served as superior until 1896 and then was replaced by Ilarion Mârza. Catafighi convent had 23 well maintained rooms in 1906 and an estate of 40 acres of land growing vine and olive trees on half of it and hayfield and forest on the other half. Superior Ilarion Mârza had other two houses and a storehouse built and he endowed the church with books, priest garments, holy vases and 2 silver-bound Gospels, relics and a 250 volume library. 16 Bessarabian monks were living in this convent in 1906, paying an annual tribute of 5 napoleons to Lavra monastery. (7)

Bessarabian clergyman (*ieromonah*) Carion Mirăuț bought St. Prophet Elija convent in Provata from Lavra monastery also in 1870, paying 180 Turk liras for it. The convent had a church and 10-roomed houses, storehouses and a stable and an estate of 25 acres of land growing vineyard, olive trees, hayfield and forest. The founder Mirăuț ruled the convent until 1890 and after his death monk Iosif served as superior for one year, being replaced in 1891 by monk Spiridon Dașchievici. Dașchievici was still ruling St. Prophet Elija convent in 1908 together with other three Bessarabian monks. The convent church had two Gospels and a 50 book library and they paid an annual tax of 5 napoleons to the superior monastery. (8)

Clergyman (*ieromonah*) Antim from Craiova bought from Lavra the convent dedicated to the Veil of the Mother of Lord. The convent came with 1 acre of land and an annual tax of 2 Turk liras and in 1908 was being ruled

by Bessarabian clergyman (*schimonah*) Toma helped by his brother *schimonah* Vichentie. (9)

Monk Ghedeon from Bucovina bought St. Basil convent from Lavra in 1870 and he restored it completely. He was still living there in 1908 paying an annual tribute to Lavra monastery. (10)

Romanian clergyman (*ieroschimonah*) Serapion bought Adinu convent from Dionisiu monastery in 1875. The convent had a church dedicated to the Virgin Assumption, 7.5 acres of land growing vine, olive trees, hay and vegetable garden and a lead waterpipe to provide water. Its annual tribute had been set to 5 napoleons. After superior Serapion died in 1904, Mihail Nicolăescu replaced him and he was living there in 1905 with 6 Bessarabian monks “who are living on working the land and other small products”. (11)

Macedonian monks from Moloviște (Macedonia) Sava and Neofit Dimitrescu received St. Nicholas of Careia convent from their grandfather as “reward for their obedience for 19 years and as a result of the death of [their] predecessor clergyman (*ieromonah*) Onufrie”. The convent stood on Simon Peter monastery estate and it had 0,75 hectares of arable land. The two monks living at the convent joined the Romanian Brothers Community in Provata, Mount Athos in 1899 and appealed for a small aid to “welcome Romanian travellers to our convent”. Five monks were living in St. Nicholas of Careia convent in 1900. (12)

Clergyman (*schimonah*) Ilie Hulpe bought Colciu convent dedicated to the Birth of St. John the Baptist in 1894 paying 260 liras for it to Vatoped monastery. The convent had a church and a few well-maintained houses, 20 acres of land growing vine, olive trees, hay and forest, a garden and a water spring. It was also provided with a boat shelter (*arsana*), another house and a small fishing port to the sea. It was endowed with library and church artefacts and their annual tribute was of 5 napoleons. Eight Bessarabian monks were living there in 1905. (13)

Bessarabian clergyman (*schimonah*) Ioachim Bărcănescu bought a convent dedicated to St Great Martyrs Teodor Tiron and Teodor Stratilat in 1895 paying for it 330 liras to Cutlumuș monastery. The convent included a church and houses and 15 acres of land growing vine, olive trees, forest, garden and two water springs. It also was provided with a library and church artefacts and also with two gospels: one with massive silver binding and another with gilt cover. Their annual tribute was of 5 napoleons and 10 Bessarabian monks were living there in 1905. (14)

Romanian clergyman (*schimonah*) Mihail from Oltenia bought St. George Colciu convent from Vatoped monastery around 1895. Mihail had settled first at Prodromu but when the conflict burst out opposing monks from Wallachia to Moldavian ones, he wrote “I have the conviction that these people cannot do anything to serve our nation and all they are doing is a waste of time”. In association to other Romanian monks, Mihail bought the convent and its estate of 6 acres of arable land and 30 acres of wildland and forest. As the church was ruined and he didn’t have the means to have it rebuilt, they “repaired here and there as they could”. Monk Gavriil Mateescu was elected superior after Mihail. (15)

A convent dedicated to the Birth of St. John the Baptist was in function in 1901 and also in 1908. It was endowed with 4 acres of land and the Bessarabian monk Zosima together with 3 apprentices were living there according to documents. (16)

Monk Antonie Constantinescu and three monks were living at St. Cosma and Damian convent on Grigoriu monastery estate and father Irodion together with 8 monks were living in a convent on Pantocrator monastery estate also in 1901. (17)

Monk Calist bought St. Nicholas of Iufta convent in 1902 paying for it 280 liras to Vatoped monastery. The convent had two churches dedicated to St. Nicholas and to St. Great Martyr George respectively. It also included well maintained houses, 20 acres of land growing vine, olive trees and forest and a lead waterpipe providing water for the convent “at great expense”. Superior Calist retired in 1905 being replaced by his apprentice monk Veniamin who paid the debts and the tax of one third of the convent price as the sale act required. Veniamin had a new contract drawn, providing himself as owner and two apprentices as heirs and the obligation of paying an annual tribute of 5 napoleons. Six monks from Romania were living in the convent among books and church artefacts. Prodromu hermitage took hold of that convent in 1908, and several monks from the hermitage were sent to take care of the place. (18)

1901 and 1908 documents mention a convent dedicated to St. Martyr George of Capsala on Pantocrator monastery estate. Confessor Gherasim, a Romanian coming from Săliște village in Transylvania was the superior of the small community of 7 Romanian and Transylvanian monks. They worked 4 acres of land, paid 5 liras per year and rent rooms to monks who travelled to Careia. (19)

Another convent mentioned both in 1901 and 1908 documents was dedicated to the Healing Spring of Capsala – The Vale of Tears. The

convent stood on the estate of Vatoped monastery and superior clergyman (*schimonah*) Ghemnasie from Ploiești town was ruling over the 7 monks living there in 1901. He had only 2 apprentices left in 1908. The convent had an estate of 1.5 acres of land growing vine and olive trees. (20)

Monk Ioachim Iosifescu bought the convent dedicated to the Three Hierarchs in 1904 paying 186 liras to Stavronichita monastery. The convent was surrounded by 5 acres of “rocky and infertile land, growing a few olive trees, orange and lemon trees” and it included a church and solid new houses. Its annual tax for the monastery rose to 5 napoleons. (21)

Romanian clergyman (*schimonah*) Varvara coming from Tutova district was living in the Assumption convent on Pantocrator monastery estate in 1908 with only one apprentice. The convent had 3 acres of land and the monks were also shoemakers. (22)

A convent named All Saints Chapel belonged to Lavra estate and stood close to the Greek hermitage Capsocalivia. Superior Nicodim of Galatzi and his Greek apprentices were living there in 1908. Nicodem was one of the well-known wood carvers in Mount Athos and he had crafted icons that clergyman (*ieromonah*) Teodosie Soroceanu of Cucuvinu – Provata monastery offered to the Romanian sovereigns. (23)

The convent dedicated to the Birth of the Mother of Lord stood in Catunache settlement on Lavra monastery estate and Marcu of Bessarabia was its superior. The convent had 4 acres of land and paid an annual tax of 2 Turk liras to Lavra. (24)

St. John Theologian convent ruled in 1908 by Bessarabian monk Isaiah stood on Pantocrator monastery estate. Isaiah and his two apprentices owned one acre of land and they also were garment makers. (25)

Romanian monks living in Athos started to fight for their rights in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as their superior Greek monasteries abused them and they were forbidden to build new houses, to work the land, to use the wood from their forests, to access water sources and Romanian monks had difficulties in settling there, being ordained and promoted. Therefore, Romanian clergymen asked the Romanian state to protect them and sponsor them to maintain their status in the Sacred Mountain.

A remarkable Romanian convent for its good maintenance and the assiduous promotion of Romanian monks well being was St. John Theologian – Cucuvinu – Provata convent lead by superior Teodosie Soroceanu. A document dated in November 1906 mentions that the Romanian Brothers Community was set up around Cucuvinu convent in 1895. Associating Cucuvinu to the convents Virgin Assumption – Provata

(superior: Gherasim Stratan), St. John the Baptist – Catafighi (superior: Ilarion Mârza) and St. Prophet Elijah – Provata (superior: Spiridon Daschievici). The community was set up with the aim to “work together in peace and brotherly understanding for the common benefit and to help each other in need”. (26)

Romanian government started to grant a 5,000 lei annual subvention to the Community. Monks in St. George – Colciu convent lead by Gavril Mateescu joined the Community in 1899. (27)

Romanian monks coming from Oltenia region who had settled at St. George – Colciu convent wrote an address in November 1899 explaining that the monks in Athos were part of different groups. The members of the Provata Romanian Brothers Community considered Bessarabian clergyman (*ieromonah*) Teodosie Soroceanu “a very capable man and a worthy leader ... a sort of Columbus who had discovered the Romanian element in Athos” while most of the monks at Prodromu “are emphasizing everywhere their rights of Romanians although they should have introduced a national element in this foreign place. But they proved unworthy of that as they didn’t care at all about patriotism”. (28)

The Provata Romanian Brothers Community tried to unite the “Romanians who are spread apart in the Sacred Mountain and who should join in a national group. In spite of all our efforts, they stepped back and we couldn’t organize a union as they came with all kind of pretexts such as: ‘We belong to the Romanian principalities and we shouldn’t accept as leader a Bessarabian monk. Our government could send a man from Romania to speak about unity’. They don’t want father Teodosie to lead our Community or they don’t want it to be called Provata Romanian Brothers Community but Athos Romanian Brothers Community. Other monks doubt our practice of praying in church for the royal family and they don’t want to do that. With all these conflicts we couldn’t make them understand our goal and we are forced to appeal to your Holiness to give us advice in this respect”. (29)

Romanian monks in Athos seemed to have differences as a result of the conflict between Wallachian and Moldavian monks at Prodromu. Documents show that the 1870–1890 conflict mentioned above had bad consequences upon the whole Romanian community in the Sacred Mountain. The address that we quoted in the previous paragraph was probably written by clergyman (*ieromonah*) Gavriil Mateescu of St. George – Colciu convent who was appealing to the Romanian Metropolitan to support the building of a powerful Romanian community in Athos, comparable to the Russian, Bulgarian, Serbian and especially Greek communities.

Clergyman (*schimonah*) Mihail who was superior of St. George – Colciu convent also insisted on the disagreements in the Athos communities of Romanian monks. Mihail had lived for a while at Prodromu hermitage but “because a division past healing had emerged among the leaders of the hermitage, opposing Wallachians to Moldavians and bringing great trouble to all brothers” he decided to leave the hermitage and settled at Capsocalivia Greek hermitage. There he was impressed with the national feelings of Greek monks who “were willing to sacrifice their lives to bring to their country the smallest progress”. Living 35 years among Greek monks, clergyman (*schimonah*) Mihail confessed: “I had to prove a martyr’s patience among them as they didn’t suffer to hear any Romanian word and I was tormented to bear their defamation of our glorious nation and the persecutions of these new Phanariots”. In the end, Mihail and other monks coming from Oltenia region bought St. George convent from Vatoped monastery and they joined Provata Community of Romanian Brothers. Nevertheless, clergyman Mihail said: “Many are those who are criticizing this community as they like things to be disturbed”. (30)

The members of Provata Romanian Brothers Community wrote an address to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 1900, informing the Minister that the Community members had had a meeting on the 21<sup>st</sup>–22<sup>nd</sup> of January “aiming at organizing an ecclesiastical assembly to discuss our pitiful state and sad position of Romanians who live in deep valleys and rocky slopes of this sacred Athos mountain”. The authors of the address expressed their opinion: “A blind misunderstanding has been reigning for over 30 years among our Romanian brothers living here: they are not united and amazingly confused and they speak against each other on reasons of one being Bessarabian and other from another region etc. etc.” The Brothers said that the lack of unity among Romanians was notorious in Athos and it had been caused by “Prodromu brothers”. Even the foreigners visiting Mount Athos “looking at our brothers quarelling and arguing are amazed and they cannot find words to ridicule and defame us”. (31) The fact that the members of the Community were praying in church for the Synod and the Romanian royal family provoked “a terrible enmity and hatred of the other monks”. Those who opposed to the Romanian Brothers Community were representing “the black tramps who call themselves Romanians; most of them are immigrants from the king’s army and the boyars’ courts or from commercial stores where they didn’t prove able to serve”. They had retired to Mount Athos “to carry the sacred name of Romanians among foreigners and in the center of the Orthodox

world. Assessing this “decayed state of our brothers that causes only misfortune”, the Community general assembly “pondered that [they] should eradicate the evil and considered that [they] should fight more energetically against brotherly conflicts in order to ensure the future status of the monks in Athos”. They therefore required that the Provata Romanian Brotherhood Community should be put under the protection of the Romanian state and supervised by HM Charles I, King of Romania and submitted an application to the government to support their appeal. A commission of the Community including the clergymen (*ieromonahi*) Gavriil Mateescu, Gherman Popovici and Marchian Mârza went to Lacu hermitage on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 1900 to inform clergyman (*dichiu*) Iustin, superior of the hermitage and sponsors Isaac and Visarion about their objective to unite all the Romanian monks in a more powerful community. Their proposals were rejected “as they said decidedly that Satan was tempting them through his servants and that our words were heretical”. As regards the proposal to ask the Romanian state for help, the monks at Lacu answered that “they don’t need that, they could use a financial help from the country but they wouldn’t even hear of the royal family, priest Teodosie who has started all these troubles and the formalities of the Romanian Orthodox Church”. (32)

The Community representatives suggested that the Minister should “forbid these tramps sheltered by Romanian walls and fed by the bread of poor Romanians” to go to the country for charity as in such a way “they would run out of resources and they would starve and maybe then they would remember there is a proper Romanian way, they would open their eyes to the progress of the other nations and learn something from that”.

They asked the Minister to proceed “in any way you consider appropriate to cast away this poisonous hatred among the Romanian brothers living in the Sacred Mountain as such shameful intrigues are very difficult to bear for a Romanian who can do nothing but blush in the presence of foreigners”. (33)

Indeed the documents certify that some of the Romanian monks in Mount Athos were deserters from the army and even men who had abandoned their families. Such an example is the army deserter Constantin Neagoe Dogariu who wrote an address to the Minister of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 1899 to inform him that Teodosie Soroceanu of Cucuvinu – Provata convent was spending the 5,000 lei subvention for personal use and he was giving to the others “only 2 or 3 grain sacks, 10–15 kilograms of fish and 5–6 napoleons to pay their contributions to the monastery”. (34)

A 1897 report of clergyman (*ieromonah*) Teodosie Soroceanu provides detail on the use of the 5,000 lei subvention. A sum of 3,960 lei was spent in 1897 to buy 12,000 kilograms of grains, 471 lei were spent to bind 157 books and 569 lei to pay the local and imperial taxes. (35)

Romanian monks living in the convents Cucuvinu, Catafighi and Assumption of the Virgin met at Cucuvinu – Provata convent dedicated to St. John Theologian on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1900 to set up the Romanian Brothers Community in Mount Athos. Although documents certify that the Community also included the convents St. Elijah and St. George – Colciu, the representatives of these two convents did not take part in the meeting.

Clergyman (*ieromonah*) Teodosie Soroceanu superior of Cucuvinu – Provata convent dedicated to St. John Theologian said in his introductory speech that they had gathered “to vote for the law that many of us have been looking forward to for a long time”. Soroceanu had been the main actor of setting up the community and that was why he insisted: “It may be very well that some of your holy faces have not been convinced of the need for such a union and others do not understand our purpose”. To enlighten everybody, Teodosie Soroceanu spoke about the evolution of the monastic life in Athos, beginning with Peter of Athos and St. Atanasie and ending with the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He underlined the role of Romanian countries in supporting the Sacred Mountain especially after the fall of the Byzantine Empire and the establishing of the Ottoman domination. Romanian rulers were considered “new founders of the Mountain, new establishers” as they “knew what the Sacred Mountain meant, they knew it was going to be the centre of true faith and realized how important was to protect and help the Sacred Mountain and that was why they set up monasteries. We regard them as great founders of the Holy Agora and dictators. Even to our days can we see the Romanian emblems on the frontispieces of all monasteries which prove as well as the names of the founders Romania’s participation as an Orthodox country in supporting and helping the Sacred Mountain for so many centuries”. (36)

Teodosie Soroceanu appreciated the fact that Athos monks “realized how important was for Romanians to be represented in the Sacred Mountain and even in our days we see some of them building up beautiful holy places”. He gave clergyman (*ieromonah*) Nifon the founder of Prodromu hermitage in 1856 as an example and he also mentioned clergyman (*schimonah*) Cosma “our old man whom we have followed”. He considered that Romanian monks had settled in Athos since remote times and “we exist and we should exist here as an orthodox nation”. (37)

Teodosie Soroceanu continued his speech by going back to the history of the convents that were going to be part of Mount Athos Romanian Brothers Community. Bessarabian monks Cosma Spătaru, Domițian and Corg had bought the ruins of the former convent dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin from Xiropotamu monastery in 1864 and they had rebuilt it. Then the number of monks increased. They bought the ruins of former Cucuvinu convent dedicated to St. John Theologian in 1869. They set up the foundation stone of the Cucuvinu church dedicated to St. John Theologian and to their houses in 1870 when clergyman (*ieromonah*) Domițian was their superior. They further bought the ruins of former Catafighi convent dedicated to St. John the Baptist and they rebuilt it when clergyman (*ieroschimona*) Teodorit Hodorogea was superior. Cucuvinu and Catafighi convents stood on Lavra monastery estate and the old relatives of Teodosie Soroceanu had bought and rebuilt them. Their names were Ștefan, Iordache and Costache Soltani and their monks names were Sava, Gherasie and Calinic. These three clergymen (*schimonahi*) set as objective for their heirs: “These houses should be united as long as the Sacred Mountain exists and you should lead the same life for everybody will benefit from that and others will come to join your brotherhood and thus you will guard the honour of our true faith as Romanians”. Teodosie Soroceanu said that the monks living in the three convents obeyed their ancestors’ advice, they were glad when Romania won the Independence war and they suffered when the south of Bessarabia became part of Russia again. They were happy when the Kingdom of Romania was proclaimed in 1881 and they happily prayed for the sovereigns in their churches, according to the Romanian Orthodox Church directions. As they followed the politics of the Romanian state, these convents were granted a subvention by the Romanian government.

Superior Teodorit Hodorogea and his successor Antonie Saghin died and Ilarion Mârza was superior in 1900. Superior Cosma Stratan from the convent dedicated to Mother of Lord Assumption had died and Gherasim Stratan replaced him. Former Cucuvinu superior Domițian was still alive and the new superior was Teodosie Soroceanu. (38)

Teodosie Soroceanu also pointed out that monks had been growing old with the passing of time and they had to consider what inheritance they were to transmit to their followers. As a consequence, he proposed to the assembly that the Law of the Romanian Brothers Community in Athos should be made known.

Gherasim Stratan, superior of Assumption of the Virgin convent, stated that even before the written law there had been an unwritten one that had served to guide them. Nevertheless, in order to avoid future infringement of that law out of “envy or other reasons” and to maintain what they had convened “after thorough consideration and in full agreement” the written law had been drawn out and they should discuss and enforce it leaving an open door to future improvement. (39)

The 51 Romanian monks from Catafighi, Cucuvinu and Assumption of the Virgin convents had to debate a 32 article law. The first articles settled the name of “Romanian Brothers Community in Mount Athos” and specified that the objectives of the community are to defend the rights of conational brothers, to provide moral support for the “national pride” in order that Romania should be correctly represented at international level and be granted the “rights that Romanians deserve”. Article 4 provided the setting up of a library for purpose of “enlightening the brothers of the same kin”.

The community aimed to support the interests of those who provided financial help for them and to strengthen the rights of Romanian monks who had become a persecuted orthodox nation in Mount Athos. Community members were to help each other “in every way” and to treat politely Greek, Russian, Bulgarian and Serb monks if those monks did not “cross or prejudice the community’s national interest”. All ecclesiastic settlements in the Community were to adopt the same internal regulations and to conform to commands of the “Mother Church”. Religious service had to be conducted only in Romanian. Only Romanian monks could join the Community and those who were detected to work against the Community could not be sheltered in the Community convents. A council was set up including the superiors and one apprentice from each community settlement. The council board included a president who was at the same time superior of the whole community and elected for life. The other members were a vicepresident, a secretary and a report-maker, all elected for one year. The president had to be one of the superiors of the three community convents, properly prepared and not “selfish or impulsive”, He was to be elected by vote. After election, he had to take an oath and to commit himself to contribute to the community development and to abide by the law. In their turn, community members would take an oath of unconditional submission to the elected president “as long as he obeys the law”. The president had absolute administrative and political power to lead the community and he could ask for the removal of any monk in any convent if “there was proof that that particular monk had brought prejudice to the community”. As far as

external problems were concerned, the president could be authorized to represent the community by a certificate signed by all community members. The president could summon the council “whenever need be” and the council meetings were to take place in the convent where the president was living at the time. Any settlement who wished to join the Community had to abide by that law and the law was to be completed with other “necessary provisions”. (40)

The 51 monks of the three convents voted for the law in the above-presented form. Those who would dare to break the law faced anathema.

Teodosie Soroceanu who had assumed the provisional management of the common affairs of the three convents resigned and thanked the monks for their “patriotic and brotherly support that bore fruit like the granting of the subvention, the moral support for community brothers and finally that much expected law”. (41) Gherasim Stratan, superior of Assumption of the Virgin convent thanked clergyman (ieromonah) Teodosie Soroceanu for the manner he “lead, administered and solved all community matters” and Ilarion Mârza, superior of Catafighi convent suggested that a commission should be set up to administer the community affairs until the election of a new president. The commission was set up and included Gherasim Stratan and fathers Marchian and Epifanie. Nominations for president had to be submitted until April 9<sup>th</sup> and the president was to be elected by vote of all monks at Catafighi convent on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April.

As nobody ran in for president Gherasim Stratan proposed that Teodosie Soroceanu remain president in the meeting on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April 1900. Teodosie Soroceanu was a proper candidate as “one who set up the community and had all the qualities required by article 18”. There were 50 votes in favour of Soroceanu and one vote against him and he became president of the Romanian Brothers Community in Mount Athos. The community members took the obedience oath and the council proceeded to the election of the new members. Teodosie Soroceanu proposed Ilarion Mârza (superior of Catafighi convent) as vicepresident, Gherasim Stratan (superior of Assumption of the Virgin convent) as secretary and father Epifanie as report-maker. All these clergymen were voted as the new members of the community council.

A commission was set up under the lead of the council secretary and including Serafim Duhovnicu (*duhovnic* is Romanian for confessor), Prohor Economu and father Nicandru. They were assigned to draw up the community regulations until the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 1900 when the document was to be adopted at Cucuvinu convent. (42)

Father Epifanie presented the Regulations of the Romanian Brothers Community in Mount Athos on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 1900. There were six chapters in the Regulations and a sanction register. The first chapter included regulations for the spiritual and economic councils and its 12 articles provided that the spiritual council was composed of four members nominated by the superior and the administrative (economic) council was composed of 12 members also nominated by the superior. The decisive vote in both councils belonged to the president and in his absence to the substitute assigned by the president.

The spiritual council dealt with admission or removal of monks, setting up canons for monks for periods longer than 30 days, setting up the appropriate behaviour for church guests, setting up holy orders and all other spiritual affairs.

The administrative (economic) council was charged with internal and external revenues management, improvement of the land quality on the convents estate, drawing up the weekly food lists and receiving the monthly accounts of the community members.

The two councils had to elect the president deputy, drew up reports three times a year (in January, May and September), sent monks outside Athos on holy duty, elected the holy order candidates (although in this last case the spiritual council had the decisive vote).

The spiritual council assembled on the date of 15<sup>th</sup> of every month when reports were also drawn up, at the end of each month in the absence of the superior and whenever their activity was needed. The administrative council assembled at the end of each month to report to the superior on income and expenditures, they met to draw up reports and whenever needed. The superior could summon the two councils or the deputy could do that in his absence. The superior also checked the activity of both councils and the spiritual council had the right to check the superior council. (43)

The second chapter of the Regulations referred to church services setting up the religious services schedule hour by hour and also the appropriate conduct during religious service. One had to enter the church piously and fearfully, to cross himself three times, to kiss the icons, to bow to the strangers and then to settle in his place. On holidays, on Saturdays and Sundays all monks had to enter the church wearing their kamelavkions. They had to listen humbly to the sermon and pay attention to the holy texts. They were not allowed to turn their heads to the door when someone entered the church and they had to look down. If the new-comer was a guest then the youngest monk had to offer him his seat. If they could, young monks

would rather stand during the service. Those entering the Holy Altar had to uncover their heads, to genuflect thrice before the Holy Table and go about their work very humbly. When they took part in the Holy Liturgy, they had to set aside any earthly concern (material concerns, quarrels and envy) and forgive everything to their wrong-doers in order to be forgiven by God in their turn. (44)

The third chapter of the Regulations concerned obedience and tasks for the obedient ones. The superior and the spiritual council set up the obedience acts. A confessor was selected out of the oldest and enhanced monks as he should advise carefully and cast aside all anger, envy, revenge thoughts, futile words or greed. A confessor had to advise and guide the sinners. A cashier was selected out of the most faithful and virtuous monks. He kept the community money and assigned the appropriate sums to the administrator. He also kept the income and expense register up to date. An ecclesiarch was selected out of the clergymen “with special fear of God”, an administrator out of the best managers a guest responsible (*arhondar*) out of the monks who liked receiving guests and all the brothers in a community had to serve as cooks in turns. There were also a gardener and a shoemaker selected out of those with proven abilities in the respective fields and a librarian who had to be more learned than others and had to keep the books in perfect order.

The sixth chapter of the regulations also included a library regulation book, stating that the library was set up “to develop the reading taste among the brothers living in these places and to benefit all visitors”. The books in the library were ordered alphabetically and they were catalogued in two registers, by alphabet and by number. The alphabetical register contained columns for number of the book, title, author, translator, sponsor, edition year, editing place and observations. In order to borrow a book one had to obtain a written approval from the superior and that document was kept within the library until the returning of the book. A book had to be returned within 30 days in a proper condition. When he gave it back, the reader had to provide a short abstract of the book which was annexed to the register by number. The monks community had to publicly thank the library sponsors once or twice a year. Books available in only one copy couldn't be borrowed. As it depended on the church, the library was “holy place accordingly”. (45)

Each member of the community had to submit to obedience regulations. A member of the spiritual council inspected obediences and the obedient ones twice a month and he drew up a report on their evolution. In

case of breaking the obedience regulations, the inspector would report to the superior who could take proper measures.

Once his obedience was assigned to him, a monk had to submit to the order “without a murmur” and if he couldn’t get used to his task in 30 days, he could inform the superior so as to be assigned another obedience. (46)

The fourth chapter concerned regulations for cleaning and tidying the monks refectory and kitchen. Meals hours were set up and excessive fasting or greedy eating were forbidden. The monks were not allowed to bring food from outside the convent.

The fifth chapter included regulations for proper behaviour indoors and outdoors. It was recommended that monks should have an appropriate behaviour, to respect their superiors, to act like brothers in relations to those equal to them and to look kindly after the inferior ones. All monks were obliged to pay “absolute obedience” to the superior and the spiritual council. Nobody was allowed to force an obedient to fulfill his wish or to address him trivial or biting words or to argue with him. They were recommended to speak only when needed. After the last religious service of the day (*pavecernie*) eating, drinking, speaking and talk inside cells were forbidden. Brothers had to help each other. Beating was forbidden. When they went outside community, monks had to wear appropriate garments, to behave politely to strangers and “to keep national prestige unsmeared”. The community did not take responsibility for misbehaviour of its members outside their convents as all its members were responsible “to keep up the national pretige and not to allow criticism of their country and kinfolk in their presence”. (47)

It was decided in the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 1900 meeting that the Regulations should be enforced beginning with the 10<sup>th</sup> of May. A new meeting took place at Cucuvinu convent on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April 1900 to approve the community’s sanction register proposed by father Epifanie. The following sanctions were provided for infringements of the regulations: canon in the church or in the refectory, skipping a course or wine during meal, degradation to a servant’s status, casting the guilty one away for a while to another community settlement, expulsion and anathema for treason. Any sanction came with an official report that specified the causes that lead to sanctioning. Unconfessed sins, passionate drinking and theft were followed by immediate expulsion out of community. Those who formed “parties”, betrayed and committed similar facts that endangered the community were also cast away immediately and if their treason had lead to negative consequences they were cursed in church; those who allowed their country

or people to be criticized in front of them were also expelled; those who estranged holy artefact were also cast away out of community and the Mountain; if the confessor, administrator or ecclesiarch had proved negligence regarding to their obedience they could submit to a 40 day canon; those who were interested to find out about a monk's past or gave advice without being confessors were expelled. Sanctions were enforced according to the gravity of mistakes for 40 days, a year or for good. Mistakes outside community determined also expulsion and religious mistakes drew out the most drastic sanctioning.

At the end of the meeting, president Teodosie Soroceanu announced that the Romanian government had decreased the subvention from 5,000 to 2,500 lei per year out of difficulties in the country. Vicepresident Ilarion Mârza commented that it was "natural to suffer when our country suffers as that is why we have come here in the first place" but he asked what they should do as they had no grains for that year. Father Gherasim also asked Teodosie Soroceanu what measures they should take following the diminishing of subvention as they were "not 10–12 people but 50".

Gherasim proposed to initiate an action to secure Romanian protection of their community "as the latest blows were only the beginning of Greek actions against us". (48)

Teodosie Soroceanu agreed with monk Gherasim's proposal and suggested that they should adopt a patient and thrifty attitude. They came to the solution that Teodosie Soroceanu should be empowered by the Community to go to Romania to obtain protection and to cash the subvention. In the president's absence, vicepresident Ilarion Mârza was to replace him. (49)

I have chosen to present this Regulations in detail as it is quite comprising and sets up clear rules for the organization of the Community, its leaders and its spiritual and economical activities.

There were 52 monks living in the three Romanian convents that formed the Romanian Brothers Community in Mount Athos. The settlement act does not mention the monks in St. Elijah – Provata convent (superior Spiridon Daschievici) and St. George – Colciu convent (superior clergyman/*schimonah* Mihail and then superior Gavriil Mateescu).

The monks of St. Nicholas convent in Careia joined the Community in October 1900. (50)

Demonstrating further his managerial abilities, Teodosie Soroceanu started to put into practice the objectives provided in the community regulations.

An address on the situation of Romanian monks in Mount Athos dated 12 June 1900 mentions the Greek monks politics aiming at “blocking out our aspiration to keep our language and nationality” and using “all kind of cavils, overruling conditions provided in our common documents and threatening to cast us out of the property we have bought”. Teodosie Soroceanu considered that such a situation had been provoked by the generosity of Romanian rulers who had been “founders of some of the imperial monasteries who thought that such monasteries would shelter monks of all nationalities whose rights wouldn’t be denied. Nevertheless, such noble provisions didn’t survive for long and Greeks imposed their language and nationality while the Romanian element was suppressed and not represented anymore in the big monasteries”. Russian, Bulgarian and Serb monks “acted wisely and managed to obtain equal rights to the Greeks” but the attitude of rejecting Romanians “grew stronger and I don’t understand the cause of this rejection; all I know is that Romanians are prevented systematically to use their most holy rights; there were cases when the Superior Assembly (*Chinon*) threatened Romanian monks for their Romanian feelings going so far as to attack international rights by blocking Romanian passports with no reason and even voicing threats”. Soroceanu thought that the cause of that bad situation was disagreement among Romanian monks and the lack of interest proven by Romanian authorities as different from the “representatives of other Christian Orthodox states who sought to defend the rights of their conationals. Foreigners know too well that Romanians are not supported and helped by their own people”. (51)

Archimandrit Antipa Dinescu, superior of Prodromu hermitage wrote an address to the Minister of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction on the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 1905, drawing out the same problems. The clergyman wrote that Romanian monks were living in the 20 Athos monasteries, over 100 of them in St. Pantelimon Russian monastery and 20 in Zografu Bulgarian monastery. 68 monks were currently living in Lacu hermitage, paying an annual tribute of one ducat per person to St. Paul monastery and they had the right to take fire wood from the monastery forest “and also wood for their crafts. Monks were obliged to work one week per year on the monastery land”. (52) Another Romanian hermitage mentioned in the address was Calmiția, a hermitage with “10 houses and without any church where 16 Romanians could barely live fasting and praying, eating only dry bread and very little food, acting like real embodied angels and deserving a lot of help”. (53) Antipa Dinescu wrote that there were 213 convents in Mount Athos “26 of which Romanian and inhabited by 117 Romanian

monks”. The biggest Romanian convent was Cucuvinu – Provata with 15 monks lead by Teodosie Soroceanu, then there was Catafighi – Provata convent with 12 monks lead by Ilarion Mârza. The convents St. George (8 monks, superior Gavriil Mateescu), St. John the Baptist (10 monks, superior Ilie Hulpe), St. Ipatie (superior Filaret Șerban) and St. Nicholas Iufta/Ghiuftadica (6 monks, superior Veniamin) stood on a place called Colciu on Vatoped monastery estate. (54)

Besides monasteries, hermitages and convents, there were also “533 small houses without churches inhabited by one or two monks. 21 of those houses are Romanian. They have one or two acres around the houses and some of them have no land at all, only a small yard and those are called reclusions”. Archimandrit Antipa Dinescu wrote that 3280 Greek monks, 4896 Russian monks, 586 Romanian monks, 370 Bulgarian monks, 25 Serb monks, 51 Georgian monks and 20 Albanian monks were living in Athos. (55)

The same clergyman considered that “all orthodox nations living in the Sacred Mountain enjoy their privileges under the protection of their national monasteries except for Romanians, Georgians and Albanians who are considered of a lower status, they have no right or protection, they are abused and ill treated by the monasteries officials and that is why they are very humble and obey all imposition and most of them live scarcely by handwork or charity given by Prodromu Romanian hermitage or by Russians.

“Except monks living in Prodromu Romanian hermitage and in a few more prestigious convents, Greek consider the other Romanian monks as the lowest kind of people. When they have to ask for a right or to seek approval from their superior monastery they are forced to go there five or six times to present their request and ask for approval, often offering many gifts. In the end, their request is rejected or they obtain only a partial approval and they are offended and called “Paleowlachs” and other insulting words. If they want to appeal to a superior authority, they find the same Greeks and in the end they can lose their rights for good”. (56)

Antipa Dinescu further presented the situation of Prodromu hermitage, writing that they had appealed many times to the superior Lavra monastery to receive one more water source from the place called Kir-Isaia as they were running short of water during the summer. Although there were several water sources in that place, Lavra monastery “couldn’t find unanimous approval of our request with all our promises and presents. They refused our request on pretext of the monastery needing that water although the water is running with no use. They also said that our hermitage could later appeal to them with other pretense impossible to satisfy and that is why they had to make us know

our place”. Eventually, Lavra monastery officials suggested that Antipa Dinescu should appeal to the Romanian government to pay 200,000 francs to the monastery out of the income of secularized churchly estates and they should deposit it with a Greek bank in Athens in the monastery account and “only that way they could spare the little water spring”.

Archimandrit Antipa Dinescu concluded his address by saying that: “As presented above, Romanian monks have the most difficult position in the Sacred Mountain. They have no protection, no authority, no right and they are considered the lowest and the last in the Sacred Mountain”. He suggested that the Romanian government “should acknowledge the hermitage by its right name of Prodromu Romanian Community in Athos Sacred Mountain, representative and protector of Romanian monks in Athos Sacred Mountain and in the Orient” and that they should negotiate the hermitage status with the Ottoman government, determining the public acknowledgement of the hermitage status. “Having such rights and title the hermitage could protect Romanians under difficult circumstances and its prestige and honour would be much enhanced although Greeks will surely protest but an approved decision stays valid and forceful in time and that way we shall have support to fulfill our golden dream”. (57)

Antipa Dinescu presented a solution that most Romanian monks in Athos favoured: he suggested to avoid the authority of the Constantinople Patriarchate and the Careia Assembly (*Chinotita*) and to appeal to the Ottoman empire to support the rights of the Romanians. Such a solution was not realistic because of the special status of Mount Athos and the powerful opposition of the Greek state which was involved in a diplomatic conflict with the Romanian state at the time. Unlike in case of the law named *Iradea* dated three days before Dinescu’s address (on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 1905) that granted educational and religious rights to Aromanians living in the Ottoman empire, direct Romanian – Ottoman negotiations could not be repeated regarding Athos Romanian monks and could not solve their problems. Nevertheless the content of the address proves the strong impact of *Iradea* upon Romanian monks in Athos as they were influenced by the diplomatic victory of the Romanian state leading to the support for the Aromanian minority and they thought that was a favourable moment to try to obtain their right of being represented in the ecclesiastic Careia Assembly.

Later, the members of the Romanian Brothers Community in Mount Athos were not content anymore with the authoritarian presidency of Teodosie Soroceanu and the manner of administering the subvention from the Romanian state.

The Society of Romanian Monks Colony in Athos Sacred Mountain was set up in 1906 under the lead of Antipa Dinescu, superior of Prodromu hermitage. The monks in Catafighi and St. Elijah – Provata convents who had been former members of the Community joined the Society in November 1906. The superiors of the two convents (Ilarion Mârza and Spiridon Daschievici) explained in their reports on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1906 the reasons that prompted the monks of their convents to leave the Romanian Brothers Community in Mount Athos. After over 11 years they saw that their effort was useless because they were “totally exploited by father Teodosie. He kept only for his community (St. John Theologian convent) the 2,500 franc subvention granted by the honourable Romanian government and he deserted the other three convents. He has received over 36,000 francs from the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Romania presenting false receipts in the name of the Community and when we asked him to share the subvention with us he answered that we didn’t have a share in that as the money was granted only for his community”. (58)

The complaints signed by the two monks are corroborated by an address sent by Teodosie Soroceanu of Cucuvinu convent to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction in June 1906. The president of the Provata Romanian Brothers Community was surprised that the superiors of Catafighi, St. Elijah – Provata and Assumption of the Virgin – Xiropotamu convents “pretended to have a share out of the subvention”. He cleared things out, explaining that the community’s aim had been to “receive in the holy place ... Romanians who want to become monks ... and to fight so as all Romanians living in Athos convents should form only one society. The above purpose has not been fulfilled yet as they tend to favour Russian interests. We are suprised by the fact that father Ilarion says he is part of our community together with the other two convents when in truth they administer their income separately. The fact is certified by their seals and by the subvention justificative documents that they don’t have the right to interfere with our community of the Romanian Brothers dedicated to St. John Theologian”. (59)

Without taking into account the conflicts between the two communities, the Romanian state continued to pay an annual subvention to Cucuvinu – Provata Romanian Brothers Community and granted a 3,000 lei annual subvention to the Society of Romanian Monks Colony in Athos Sacred Mountain. Prodromu and Lacu hermitages and also Cucuvinu convent were severely damaged following the earthquake during the night of 26–27 October 1905. The Romanian state granted a 48,300 lei subvention

to rebuild the church of Prodromu hermitage (60) and a 20,000 lei subvention to rebuild the church of Cucuvinu convent. (61)

The Society asked for a subvention rise on the 26<sup>th</sup> of December 1907 as the sum was not sufficient for the 22 communities that had gathered around them and “others are still joining us as they have booked their places since the foundation of our colony and we still have estates to buy and encourage all monks to increase the number of Romanian properties in the Sacred Mountain as such an enlargement will surely lead to better acknowledgement of our rights”. (62)

Gavriil Mateescu was authorized to receive the subvention for the Society of Romanian Monks Colony from the Church House Administration on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 1907 and to deposit it in the Society safe in order for the sum “to be distributed to each associate convent according to its rights and in exchange for a receipt”. (63)

Clergyman (*ieromonah*) Gavriil Mateescu of St. George – Colciu convent wrote an address to the Church House Administration on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 1909 informing them that Greek monks from the superior Vatoped monastery had attacked St. John the Baptist Romanian convent lead by superior Ilie Hulpe and they had pulled down two of its buildings “roaring like beasts and shouting fiercely: ‘Come to destroy the Wlachs for they have become many and are damaging our monastery. They took our estates and chased away our own from Romania and now it is time for us to defeat them as we are powerful and no match for them’”. The monks of Vatoped monastery also attacked St. George – Colciu convent and destroyed one of its buildings on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May. After “very humble begging to have mercy and leave our house undamaged”, they gave up destroying the larger building too. The Romanian monks were summoned to Vatoped monastery on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and asked to pay a fine of 30 kilograms of wax in exchange for the “favour” of not destroying their house. The Greek monks warned the Romanians against further building and receiving new monks in their community and advised them to submit to the “great imperial power of the monastery as they could do whatever pleased them without opposition and I genuflected to appease their agitation”. (64) Gavriil Mateescu also wrote in his address that Greek monks went to Calimița, the place where Romanian recluses were living in 8 isolated huts and they threatened them with ruin and chasing and “hearing this, the poor monks took their goods out of the huts and sought refuge in the woods, waiting for the monastery persecution”. (65)

The superior of St. George – Colciu convent estimated his community damages to over 2,000 francs “only as far as money is concerned but who

can assess the work and overwhelming effort needed to rebuild that house in such an unfavourable position? We cannot do otherwise but pray to our merciful God as we have no protection somewhere else”. (66)

Antipa Dinescu, president of the Society of Romanian Monks Colony in Athos Sacred Mountain wrote an address to the Minister of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1910 asking for material support to rebuild the house of St. George – Colciu convent that Greek monks of Vatoped monastery had destroyed and to build an embankment to avoid a landslide which was imminent because of abundant rains. (67)

Following the request of Archimandrit Teodosie Soroceanu of Cucuvinu convent Metropolitan Pimen of Moldavia and Suceava gave his approval on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 1911 to build a guest house provided with chapel in commune Bucium, Jassy district especially for Bessarabian guests. (68)

The first Balkan war modified substantially the political situation of the region, influencing the regime of Athos community related to the Constantinople Patriarchate or international bodies. The Greek army occupied the Chalkidic peninsula in November 1912, setting up a siege. Ottoman authorities were removed and local autonomy was granted as Greek officials expressed their intention to occupy the entire peninsula. The situation of Athos monks became thus an international problem. Several solutions were formulated regarding the future of Mount Athos: to remain within the Ottoman empire keeping its former status; to be included into the Greek state as an autonomous region; to become a distinct, independent organization protected by international guarantee. These solutions were discussed in the European capitals and also at the London Conference after the armistice. Given the circumstances, Romanian diplomats increased their efforts to improve the situation of Romanian monks in Athos. They had meetings with Russian, Austrian and Greek diplomats. Archimandrit Antipa Dinescu submitted an address to Prime Minister Titu Maiorescu on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 1912 asking “to be allowed to live in peace... We ask to be taken out of the present arbitration and receive equal rights to all the other monks in Athos. An elementary moral gesture should be made, as today’s arbitrary rulers should be reminded of the luxurious philanthropy acts of the old times Romanians”. (69)

Romanian monks in Athos drew out a project on their rights in the same year, asking for Prodromu hermitage to be invested as monastery and for Romanian convents “to be free of any control coming from the

monasteries, to have the right to shelter as many monks as the conditions allow and to ordain only with the superior's approval. They should be free to work their land and to build as many churches and houses as they need". They also asked to have a representative in the Careia Assembly (*Chinotita*) to defend their rights, to be given "water and enough wood from the forests" as water and wood should be common property of all Athos monks. They asked for Cucuvinu – Provata convent to be acknowledged as a hermitage with a representative in the Assembly and also for Lacu hermitage to be able to send a representative in the *Chinotita*. (70)

All the requests included in the Romanian monks' project were the expression of their difficult life experience in Athos in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Under Greek military occupation in the following years Romanian monks in Athos went through even more difficult circumstances. Their numerous letters sent to Bucharest account for the persecution they suffered. Following the intervention of Romanian Minister in Athens Djuvara to the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs Cormilos Greek monks started to show a more moderate attitude towards Romanian monks. The latter continued to send concomitantly addresses to Athens and Bucharest. Antipa Dinescu submitted a new address written in Romanian and in French to Prime Ministers Titu Maiorescu and E. Venizelos of Greece in June 1913. The clergyman repeated his previous requests regarding the promotion of Prodromu hermitage to the rank of monastery with a representative in the church Assembly (*Chinotita*) and the monks' "complete liberation of the wrongly imposed authority of various monasteries as well as the acknowledgement of their equality to the other religious institutions in the country". (71)

N. Mişu, Romanian Minister to London informed Titu Maiorescu in a report dated 8<sup>th</sup> August 1913 on the future status of Mount Athos, suggesting: "I think that the most favourable solution for defending Romanian interest in the Sacred Mountain can be obtained by your agreement with Greece, as Greece has all the means to influence both the Constantinople Patriarchate and the superiors of Greek monasteries who constitute an overwhelming majority in Athos. Our main concern should be to obtain at least a vote in the Careia Assembly be it by buying the autonomous rights of a deserted monastery or by gaining the acknowledgement of our convents as independent monasteries which is more difficult". (72)

After the end of Balkan wars and the Bucharest peace treaty that acknowledged the educational and religious rights of Romanians living in

the Balkan Peninsula, the synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church decided to submit an address to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on September the 7<sup>th</sup> 1913. The Synod asked for the Ministerial intervention “regarding the acknowledgement and setting up of an equal and independent status of our ecclesiastic settlements (in Mount Athos) in relation to the other nations and states and especially to the Greeks”. The address mentioned the abusing of Romanian monks in Athos by their superior monasteries and asked that Prodromu and Lacu hermitages and Cucuvinu convent “be allowed to have their own representatives in the great common council called Chinon”. The Synod recommended the government “to take advantage of the good occasion to set up a new order of things in Mount Athos... Our government should hurry to take serious measures in order to support Romanians to claim or buy back all our historical part in the great monasteries founded by our rulers and endowed with precious estate and artefacts”. (73)

An extraordinary meeting took place at Careia on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 1913, reuniting the Sacred Community of Athos Sacred Mountain, represented by the superiors of the 20 Athos monasteries. The participants decided to keep the system of administering Mount Athos unchanged but to transfer the legal rights of the Ottoman empire to the Greek kingdom that they considered their “liberator”. They rejected the idea of international or neutral authority, considering that their connection to Greece was too powerful and the Greek state was entitled to secure protection for Athos. The clergymen asked the diplomats responsible for the London conference not to take “a hazardous decision with political and religious implications and dangerous for peace in the Orient” as they were ready to reject such a decision. From London, their opinion spread to the other interested countries. (74)

The diplomatic contacts between Greece and Romania continued after the London conference, in order to reach a favourable solution for Romanian Athos monks. Several suggestions were made, among which buying a monastery for Romanians. I. C. Filitti submitted the proposition on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 1914 to buy Prodromu hermitage once and for all from Lavra monastery or to buy Morfono monastery after a price could be advanced. (75)

Meanwhile, the new status of Mount Athos under Greek authority was meeting only Romanian and Russian opposition. The situation of Romanian monks in Athos had not been improved. A favourable political situation had been wasted without obtaining for Romanians a comparable status to that of Russian, Bulgarian or Serb monks.

The burst out of the destructive First World War had a dramatic effect upon the life of Romanian monks in Athos as they didn't have a representative in the Careia assembly to defend their rights and spare them abuse and theft, which lead to a long term drawback in their evolution.

A conflict opposing a part of the monks at Prodrumu hermitage to their superior Antipa Dinescu emerged in 1914 as the monks accused Antipa Dinescu of having broken the 1891 regulations. The superior was cast away of the hermitage by force. Romania's General Consul G. C. Ionescu was sent to solve the conflict. He came to the conclusion in February 1915 that Lavra monastery had actually started the conflict and "the disorder and dishonesty reigning in Greek monasteries is going to take root at Prodrumu too". (76) The conflict inside the largest Romanian hermitage in Athos was to unfold between 1914–1917 and caught new flame in March 1919 when the rebellious monks who had been expelled were sheltered again in the hermitage by help of Greek officials. (77)

Material difficulties suffered by Athos Romanian monks grew harder during the First World War as they had no food and no possibility to get help from their country. The superior of St. George – Colciu convent asked the Church House Administration to send the 2, 000 lei annual subvention on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 1914, as "all monks are living here under straitened circumstances lacking the money to supply their basic needs and food is so expensive and noboddy sells goods on credit so that we face a mortal peril". Clergyman (*ieromonah*) Gavriil Mateescu wrote further that only Greek currency and gold were accepted in Mount Athos and gold had purchased all the gold with 10% interest. The answer to the clergyman's address, coming from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction, mentioned that the Ministerial budget provided a subvention but they didn't find a way to send it to the monks. (78)

We couldn't find enough documents to give evidence for the situation of Romanian monks in Athos within 1915–1918. The superior of Cucuvinu convent Archimandrit Teodosie Soroceanu wrote an address from a settlement in Bucium (Jassy district, Romania) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on May the 16<sup>th</sup> 1916 complaining that rehabilitation works began in 1911 at his convent went on with difficulty as the money was scarce. He asked for Cucuvinu convent to be protected by the laws of Athens and Thessaloniki Consulate as he could not do much from Romania. (79) Clergymen (*ieromonahi*) Ilie Hulpe of St. John the Baptist – Colciu convent, Gherasim Sperchez of St. George – Capsala convent and Teodosie Domnariu of St. Ipatie convent and clergyman (*schimonah*) Ioachim

Bărcănescu of Saints Teodor Tiron and Teodor Stratilat convent who were sponsors of the Society of Romanian Monks Colony in Athos Sacred Mountain wrote an address to the Church House Administration as late as the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 1919. They wrote that “although we as monks should’t make the situation of our beloved country more difficult we are forced to do so by the most straitened circumstances and the lack of our daily bread. For we have accumulated great debts with amazing interest rates in the course of six years because of high prices, even ten times higher than before for all our necessary goods”. They asked for the 5,000 lei annual subvention for the Society within 1914–1919 as their great debts with 12% interest rate “put us in danger to lose all our Romanian properties and to become the laughing stock of Greeks as they have lent us money and they hope we won’t be able to pay back our debts so that they could sell our houses”. (80)

The above address was also signed by other 11 convent superiors: Ilarion Mârza (St. John the Baptist – Catafighi), Veniamin Vasiliu (St. Nicholas – Iufta), Ioachim Iosifescu (Saints Three Hierarchs), Zossima Mateescu (St. John the Baptist Nativity), Mihail Nicolescu (Mother of Lord Assumption – Adinu), Macarie Ionescu (Healing Spring – Capsala), Modest Caciuc (St. Prophet Elijah – Provata), Clement Popescu (Mother of Lord Nativity – Turlutiu), Doroftei Cristescu (Mother of Lord Nativity – Catunache) and also by monk Ignatie Ionescu and clergyman (*ieromonah*) Calinic Pleșia. (81)

The report drawn up to the address specified that the Society of Romanian Monks Colony hadn’t been granted the subvention since 1914 as it “had been erased from the budget” beginning with that year.

Clergyman (*schimonah*) Ilarion Mârza of St. John the Baptist – Catafighi convent wrote a letter to Prodromu superior clergyman (*ieromonah*) Pimen on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 1919 asking him to pay the value of two 2,000 lei bonds deposited in the hermitage safe or if he was not able to give them the money, to send them the bonds back as they were in danger “to lose their homes to the Greeks that had credited them”. Prodromu superior Pimen noted in his report on the letter: “To inform the honourable National Bank”. (82)

Superior Pimen wrote an address to the administrator of Romania’s National Bank on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1919 informing the bank that the hermitage had accumulated credits of 11, 579 Ottoman liras and 266, 317 francs in the previous six years and he asked to withdraw the money in the hermitage account with the bank or to be given back their bonds. (83)

Clergyman (*protosinghel*) Simeon Ciomandra, authorized representative of Prodromu hermitage, sent several addresses to the Metropolitan and to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Arts from Icon Darvari hermitage in Bucharest in October 1920. Ciomandra explained the difficult situation of Prodromu caused by the accumulated credits that had put them in the position of losing their estate on Thassos island. The clergyman asked the Romanian authorities to be allowed to export custom-free 10 grain waggons, 5 maize waggons, 5 beans waggons, 2,000 kilograms of fish, 100 kilograms of Romanian pressed cheese and 2,000 liters of lamp oil “for our brothers in Prodromu and Lacu hermitage and to give to our creditor monasteries instead of money”. (84) His request was approved and the goods reached Mount Athos in August 1921. (85)

After the end of the First World War, Romanian monks in Athos were strictly under control of the Greek monasteries and living under straitened circumstances. They were prevented to bring new apprentices to inherit them, instigated against each other and lacking a representative in the Careia assembly who could have defended their rights. Under such circumstances, they gradually lost their estates maintained with such effort until then and their number decreased dramatically.

Clergyman (*ieroschimonah*) Gherasim Sperchez, clergyman (*schimonah*) Ioachim Bărcănescu, clergyman (*schimonah*) Ilarion Mârza and clergyman (*ieromonah*) Serafim Șoima who were members in the Committee of the Society of Romanian Monks Colony in Athos Sacred Mountain wrote to the bishop of Argeș Visarion Puiu asking him to intervene to the Ministry of Religious Affairs as they feared that their plea was “again to be in vain...” and they hoped that their “humble request” should be considered in the future budget of the Ministry. (86) The table listing the Romanian convents and huts members of the Colony Society in 1922 mentions the following settlements: Catafighi convent (superior clergyman – *schimonah* Ilarion Mârza – 12 monks) and St. Prophet Elijah Convent (clergyman – *schimonah* Modest – 4 monks), Mother of Lord Nativity – Găvăneasca (clergyman – *schimonah* Gerasim – 8 monks), Turlutiu (*schimonah* Clement – 3 monks) and 5 huts with churches plus 12 churchless huts inhabited by 39 Romanian monks – all on Lavra monastery estate; Saints Teodor – Careia convent (*schimonah* Ioachim Iosif – 6 monks) on St. Paul monastery estate; Assumption convent (clergyman – *ieromonah* Mihail Niculescu – 5 monks) on Dioniisu monastery estate; St. Sava hut (*schimonah* Irotei – 3 monks) on Simon Petru monastery estate; Saints Teodor convent (*schimonah* Ioachim Bărcănescu – 9 monks) and Mother of Lord Iviritza hut (*ieromonah* Ioasaf – 2

monks) on Cutlumuși monastery estate; Assumption of the Virgin (*ieromonah* Arsenie – 4 monks) on Xiropotam monastery estate; St. John the Baptist convent (*schimonah* Zosima – 4 monks) on Iviru monastery estate; Saints Three Hierarchs convent (*schimonah* Grigore Tudor – 3 monks) and 4 huts (2 with churches and 2 without) inhabited by 11 monks on Stavronichita monastery estate; St. Geroge convent (*ieromonah* Gherasim Sperchez – 9 monks) and 4 churchless huts inhabited by 12 monks on Pantocrator monastery estate; and Nativity of St. John the Baptist convent (*ieromonah* Ilie Hulpe – 9 monks), St. Ipatie convent (*ieroschimonah* Teodosie Domnariu – 8 monks), St. Nicholas convent (monk Veniamin Vasiliu – 3 monks), Healing Spring convent (*schimonah* Evloghie – 3 monks) and 2 huts with churches inhabited by 6 monks, all on Vatoped monastery estate. (87)

157 monks were living at the time in the 15 convents and 28 huts in Athos and the authors of the statistics estimated that there were 233 Romanian monks in all Athos settlements.

Comparing the above data to the statistics in the first decades of the XX<sup>th</sup> century one can notice the dramatic decrease of Romanian monks in Athos. Besides the members of the Society of Romanian Monks Colony, there were the monks living in Cucuvinu – Provata and St. George – Colciu convents. Documents mention that superior Teodosie Soroceanu of Romanian Brothers Community around St. John Theologian – Cucuvinu convent died in the explosion of a munition storehouse near Cozmoaia – Jassy church on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 1918. The next superior of the Community was Archimandrit Epifanie Dumitrescu who had the burnt church and hermitage rebuilt, financing that operation with a 500,000 lei subvention granted by the Romanian state and with money obtained out of selling the church production of wine. Metropolitan Pimen of Moldavia consecrated the new church on November the 4<sup>th</sup>, 1928. (88) Monks still living at Cucuvinu complained that superior Epifanie hadn't sent them any money resulted of the Romanian church income in November 1934. After the changes of regulations in Mount Athos monks statute, providing that a leaving Athos more than a year without ecclesiastic authorities' approval determined a monk's expellment out of the community, Archimandrit Epifanie was dismissed from his post as superior in 1932 and replaced by clergyman (*protosinghel*) Varlam Nemțanu. (89)

The Athos monks situation grew even more difficult after the Chart on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 1924 by which the 20 monasteries sanctioned the dominance of the Greek element in Mount Athos and imposed Greek citizenship to all the monks living there. The Synod of the Romanian

Orthodox Church wrote and address to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in March 1927 to explain that Greek citizenship for monks in Athos would represent a privilege only for Greek monks and the Romanian hermitages and convents “would lose their Romanian quality and their estates in Greece and Romania”. (90)

Superior Varlam Nemțanu of Cucuvinu – Provata convent and superior Ilarion Mârza of Catafighi convent signalled in a September 1930 document the decrease of the number of Romanian monks in Athos caused by the Greek and Sacred Mountain authorities policy of preventing new monks to settle in the Romanian ecclesiastic communities. That was considered “a disguised confiscation of Romanian settlements, houses and goods as without heirs they become property of the dominant Greek monasteries”. The two superiors asked Romanian officials to intervene in favour of Athos Romanian monks to the diplomats meeting in the Balkan Conference that was due in Athens in October 1930. (91)

Romanian monks living in Athos submitted an address to the League of Nations in September 1931 to protest against the imposition of Greek citizenship and the opposition of Greek authorities to young monks coming to Athos. That led to the impossibility of replacing old monks by new ones and “as a consequence, in 30 or 40 years from now there will be no Romanian monk in the Sacred Mountain and hermitages and convents with their substantial assets will become property of the superior Greek monasteries without anybody asking for damages as this practice is current when a convent remains without heir”. (92) Ed. Ciuntu, representative of Romanian Embassy to the League of Nations, noticed in a report the dramatic accent of the monks’ address which he considered “appealing but less efficient as a diplomatic enterprise”. (93)

Romanian diplomatic authorities and the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church led by Patriarch Miron Cristea sent several addresses to the Greek government and the Constantinople Patriarchate asking them to allow more Romanian monks to settle in Athos as a constant number of monks was needed there in order to replace the deceased. There were some promises but actually officials in the Sacred Mountain made it very difficult for Romanian monks to settle in Athos.

Radu Cruțescu, an official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, pointed out the essence in his May 1931 report: “As a formal Romanian – Greek agreement hasn’t been reached in this matter, the denationalization policy of the Greek government in the Sacred Mountain will surely prompt them to find all kind of pretexts to prevent the satisfaction of our rightful requests

and keep us further into the terrible misery that is going to make us lose a status that we have earned in five centuries of faith and sacrifice”. (94)

Unfortunately his pessimistic prediction came true. Meanwhile, Prodromu monks were engaged into a conflict fueled by Lavra monastery. As we have explained above, Lavra officials had brought back the rebellious Romanian monks to the hermitage in 1919 and they had replaced Antipa Dinescu who had made great efforts to raise the status of the hermitage to that of monastery in order for Romanian monks to be better represented in the ecclesiastical assembly and to avoid abuse.

The few documents on the evolution of Athos Romanian convents in the next period mention that a part of the spiritual leaders had passed away. Superior Ilarion Mârza of Catafighi convent wrote to Visarion Puiu on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 1931 about the difficulties of Romanian monks living in Athos, especially because monks were getting old and dying and Greek officials didn't allow young ones to replace them. A part of the Romanian communities had become property of monasteries. They desperately needed the protection of the Romanian state that they had lost because of the rebellious monks at Prodromu. “Those villains dared to attack impertinently the high hierarchs of the Holy Romanian Church and to offend the Holy Synod and that is why our country MAY not hurry to take measures to grant us protection; but the Romanian officials shouldn't pay attention to the slandering of three or four rebels who have stolen the administration of Prodromu hermitage and then they were sent back by the superior Greek monastery in order to speed the hermitage destruction. If we do not get help there is no hope for us and the Greeks are going to take over our heavily indebted hermitage. The villains should be replaced by well-intended fathers. It is a pity to lose the harvest because of the few weeds and it is a pity to abandon a lot of Romanian monks communities because there are 3 or 4 misbehaved monks among a hundred who know their duty towards their country and church and political leaders”. Visarion Puiu was asked to intervene to the Holy Synod and the government to have some measures taken in order to help the Romanian monks in Athos “to gain the rights that we had in the past: to receive and ordain brothers from the country in our communities. Young monks should get free access to the Sacred Mountain as the ancient emperors have proclaimed it inter-orthodox settlement and not only Greek. Most monasteries here have been restored by our Romanian rulers therefore Romania is fully entitled to protect its subjects living in the Sacred Mountain” (Ilarion Mârza). (95)

The Society of Romanian Monks Colony in Athos Sacred Mountain which had been created in 1906 was still functioning in 1934 still under the presidency of Archimandrit Antipa Dinescu who had been dismissed as superior of Prodromu hermitage but had come back from Romania and he was coordinating the actions of Athos Romanian monks in 1934. The Society wrote an address to the Minister of Religious Affairs and Arts on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 1934 explaining that after the Greek Parliament had voted Mount Athos Statute in 1929 “absolutely no one coming from Romania is allowed to settle in the Sacred Mountain and to begin a monk’s life. During the latest five years we have come across numerous cases of Romanian brothers who have been rejected although they have come with all the necessary documents to become monks that are provided in the so-called Statute”. That was considered a disguised way to confiscate the Romanian properties “as there is nobody to inherit us and all these beautiful churches and well-maintained households by donations of the Romanian people are going to be taken over by the superior Greek monasteries”. The Society considered that all the promises the Greek government had made to its Romanian counterpart, ensuring Romanians that “they are going to approve the wish to settle in the Sacred Mountain of any Romanian willing to start a monastic life” were not going to be observed by the Careia assembly. They thought the Greek church officials intended to come up with all kind of pretexts to reject Romanian applicants. They further compared the commercial, navigation, ecclesiastic and schooling rights granted to Greece by the Romanian government to the Greek attitude: “we just need them to allow Romanian brother to come and settle here and become gradually rightful heirs of our communities”. (96) Among other names, the address was signed by president Varlam Nemțanu of Romanian Brothers Community St. John Theologian – Provata, which shows that the Community had become part of the Society of Romanian Monks Colony in Athos Sacred Mountain.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent to the Athos Romanian communities a document providing that they should send to the Athens Embassy tables with the names of all the monks and let the Embassy know about any modifications of the number of monks by decease or removal from the communities. They had to address complaints to their superior monasteries and only in the last analysis to appeal to the Embassy and they were warned “to watch carefully for the communities shouldn’t have under six members (monks and apprentices) unless Romanian monks want to lose them to Greek hands”. The monks were not allowed to go away from Athos

without the approval of their superior monastery and the Greek Foreign Ministry and they should't be absent more than a year. They had to get their visa from the Greek Embassy in Bucharest ten months before their return to the Sacred Mountain. Otherwise they had to know that they would never be allowed to come back to the Sacred Mountain. (97) It appears obvious that Greek officials were very strict and Romanian diplomats couldn't help the monks unless their rights had been clearly violated.

The Romanian Consul in Thessaloniki sent a report together with two addresses signed by Romanian monks in Athos on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 1940, asking that priest parishioner Dimitrie Brindu of the Romanian community in Thessaloniki should be maintained in his function "as he is of great help with local authorities". (98) The monks signing the addresses were superior clergyman (*ieromonah*) Gavril of Lacu hermitage, superior clergyman (*protosinghel*) Varlam Nemțanu of Cucuvinu Provata convent, superior Antonie Moisei of Catafighi Provata convent, president Archimandrit Antipa Dinescu of the Society of Romanian Monks Colony and clergymen (*ieromonahi*) Dinoid Valasă (St. Ipatie), Macarie Ionescu (Healing Spring – Capsala), Serafim Șoimu (Adinu convent) and Ghimnasie Ignat. (99)

After 70 years since the foundation of the first Romanian convents, most of them had survived to material and administrative obstacles created by Greek authorities and superior monasteries. Of course, they had help from the country but they had also administered carefully their lands, becoming good householders. All Romanian convents had been bought from the superior Greek monasteries at high prices and the monks had strived hard to administer and maintain their property under difficult historical circumstances.

The Second World War made the situation of Romanian monks in Athos even more difficult. Their connection to the country was interrupted, Mount Athos went through an economic crisis and their number decreased while their buildings were deteriorating and they couldn't repair and maintain them. Most monks dying without heirs, their convent and huts were taken over by Greek superior monasteries or were abandoned.

On the celebration of a millennium since the setting up of Romanian monastic life in Athos in June 1963, a delegation of the Romanian Orthodox Church lead by Patriarch Justinian took part in the festivity and visited a few Romanian settlements. Among other places, the Romanian delegation visited St. Ipatie convent on Vatoped monastery estate. Four monks were living there at the time. Their superior was Dionid Valasă helped by clergyman (*ieromonah*) Dometie Trihenea. (100)

Archimandrit Ioanichie Bălan visited Mount Athos in 1986 and mentioned a few data on Catafighi and Cucuvinu convents where two apprentices from Romanian Sihăstria monastery had come in 1975. Visarion Moisei was the last superior in the older generation at Catafighi. He died in 1979 and was replaced by the new apprentice, clergyman (*schimonah*) Calistrat Țoca. Monk Nectarie Lazăr set up at Cucuvinu convent in 1975 and since 1997 he has been living alone there. Three elderly monks were living at St. George – Colciu convent in 1997: Dionisie Ignat, the most reputed Romanian confessor in Mount Athos, clergyman (*protosinghel*) Ghedeon Chelaru who had come to Athos in 1920 and monk Ioan Șova. Superior Dometie Trihenea from Tilișca village (Sibiu district, Romania) was administering St. Ipatie convent, helped by clergyman (*protosinghel*) Ilarion Lupașcu from Cernica monastery (near Bucharest, Romania) and monk Ilarion Dincă from Sihăstria monastery (Moldavia). (101)

Dometie Trihenea was superior of St. Ipatie convent two times after having been superior of Zografu monastery within 1965–1974. Ilarion Dincă followed him as superior within 1985–2004 and after his death, objects, books and letters from the convent were transferred to Vatoped monastery. Only monk Ignatie Bozianu was still living there in 2005. (102) Four monks were living in St. John the Baptist convent on Vatoped monastery estate in 2005: Vitalie Hostiuc, Ilie, Alexandru and Nicolae. (103) St. George – Colciu convent also on Vatoped estate was inhabited by monks Dionisie the Young, Ioan, Ghedeon, Ghimnasie, Mamant and Fodan Daniel in 2005. (104)

Two monks were living in St. John the Baptist – Catafighi convent in 2005. Both were named Michail, one of them old and the other one, rather young, coming from Bessarabia. Their buildings hadn't been repaired for a long time and needed restoring. In 2005, St. John Theologian – Cucuvinu convent, the core of Romanian Brothers Community in Mount Athos, was inhabited by superior Siluan and monks Lavrentie and Vasile (all three from Bessarabia) together with a monk from Romania. They still kept the library set up by Teodosie Soroceanu and the archive of the convent. (105)

Documents prove that most Romanian convents were taken over by their superior Greek monasteries after the death of the last Romanian monks or were simply abandoned in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Prodromu and Lacu hermitages and the convents St. George – Colciu, St. Ipatie, Catafighi, Cucuvinu, St. John the Baptist – Colciu and St. George – Capsala have survived up to the present.

Romanian monastic settlements in Mount Athos still represent Romanian orthodoxy and Romanian society shouldn't look indifferently at the decrease of the number of monks in Athos and the decay of their settlements. The fact that the Romanian government supported constantly Athos communities in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the First World War sets an example for the governments in our days who should take measures for maintaining at least the two hermitages and the few convents that are still surviving grace to the admirable effort of the monks who continue the Romanian tradition in the Sacred Mountain.

The 250,000 euro subvention granted to Prodromu hermitage by the Romanian government in 2007 is the first sign that Romanians haven't abandoned their conationals who have chosen to lead an isolated life in Mount Athos and pray for their people. Nevertheless, the same financial and material support should also be granted to Lacu hermitage and to the 160 year old convents who are maintaining Romanian monastic tradition. (106, 107)

Therefore the Government, the Patriarchate and the Romanian society should join hands to provide a decent life for the Athos monks as they should be able to represent the values of Romanian orthodoxy in Mount Athos. To put it in the words of superior Petroniu Tănase of Prodromu hermitage: "The documents we have kept are living proof of what these monks have thought and did far away from their country but acting at the call of their Romanian national conscience". (108)

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- (48) *Ibidem*, f. 82.
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