MIHAI MÎRZA*

AN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY FOUNDATION AND TWO FOUNDERS. THE FILE OF THE CONSTRUCTION, CREATION AND ENDOWMENT OF THE MONASTERY OF PRECISTA MARE [MOTHER OF GOD] IN ROMAN

(Summary)

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The Holy Virgin (‘Precista Mare’) Monastery from Roman was built by bishop Ioanichie of Roman, in 1753–1764, with the substantial support of Constantin Racoviţă, the ruler of Moldavia, on the spot of a humble brick church dedicated to the Assumption of Mary founded by Ruxandra Lăpuşneanu, Alexandru Lăpuşneanu’s (the well-known ruler of Moldavia) widow. By analysing several tens of unpublished acts kept in the collection of St. Spiridon’s Hospital trusteeship from the National Archives of Iaşi, from which seven are edited in the annex, the author analyses the main moments of the foundational act of this monastic edifice. The initiative of re-building Ruxandra Lăpuşneanu’s church unequivocally belongs to bishop Ioanichie, as does the initiative of making it a monastery. At first, Constantin Racoviţă grants the bishop the sum of 1,275 Romanian lei to rebuild the church, after which he is mainly preoccupied with equipping it with sacred vessels, clerical robes, icons and other treasures. According to the custom of the age, the ruler bestowed numerous lands from the royal estates, lands situated close to small Moldavian towns (Hârlău, Roman and Vaslui), Gypsy serfs and tax privileges upon his newly founded church. The peak of his donations is reached on 20th February 1757, when, in a solemn act, he unexpectedly gifts the Holy Virgin Monastery with all of the land he had inherited from his father, consisting of tens of estates from the counties of Neamţ and

* Arhivist la Arhivele Naționale Iași.

Dorohoi, as well as 18 vineyard ‘falce’ (27 ha) in Cotnari. Thus, without consulting with his brothers and nephews, who had equal inheritance rights on the parental estate, Constantin Racoviţă was giving his entire family’s wealth away.

In the almost five years in which he occupied the throne of Moldavia, Constantin Racoviţă founded several other monasteries and churches, among which the monasteries St. Samuel the Prophet from Focşani and St. Nicholas Popăuţi. All his foundation documents pay homage to his parents and his wife, all of the three of whom died shortly one after the other around 1750. Their loss, the lack of offspring and some political failures took an extreme emotional toll, and the signs of the depression he was going through are clearly seen in his excesses of piety, with the main result of privileging the interests of the Church even by harming those of his family, as well as the predisposition towards the excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages (wine and Melissa water), as well as hallucinogenic substances (opium). Moreover, according to contemporary chroniclers, this ruler also bore the burden of the negative image his father had in Moldavia following three rules of unprecedented taxation. To pacify the Moldavians and ‘redeem the sins of his father’, Constantin Racoviţă abolished the tax on cows, the harshest of the tax obligations to ever fall upon the population of the Romanian Principalities. By accident or not, the abolition of this law took place on 20th February 1757, on the same day Constantin Racoviţă gave away his fortune, giving it to the monastery he had founded in Roman. At the same time, at the likely counsel of bishop Ioanichie, his trusted confessor, Constantin Racoviţă sought to provide the Holy Virgin Monastery with a similar status with that of those founded by the great voievodes of Moldavia (the monasteries of Neamţ, Putna, Slatina, Voroneţ, Humor).

Aware that his rule was drawing to an end, on 20th January 1757 Constantin Racoviţă dedicated his own church, the St. Prophet Samuel of Focşani, to the Holy Virgin Monastery, leaving both in the care of bishop Ioanichie. At the same time, through the dedication act, all attempts to subordinate these monasteries to the Holy Lands or to other Moldavian monasteries were forbidden, as was the naming foreign Father Superiors. The bishop was also left with the task of completing the inner walls, the towers and administrative annexes of both monasteries, which were unfinished in January 1757. The high official did not deceive his benefactor’s trust, fulfilling all commitments.