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SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC REASONS FOR FOUNDING NEW MONASTERIES AND SKETES IN THE 18th CENTURY MOLDAVIA (Summary)

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In this paper I will review the economic and social reasons leading to an unprecedented phenomenon in the ecclesiastic history unfolding on Romanian territory. Many sketes and monasteries were founded in Moldavia before 1700, most of them by rulers or by important boyar families. In the eighteenth century, however, over 200 were founded and several other tens were restored, developing a particular ecclesiastic geography as a consequence of major changes and the influence of several factors. In a time characterized by political instability, the phenomenon was unprecedented and was based, besides the obvious spiritual reasons, on economic and social ones. In addition to acquiring the status of founder or benefactor to a place of worship – a particularly important factor in bolstering social prestige – the person investing his fortune in such noble pursuits was implicitly the beneficiary of economic advantages. As to the founders of the period, aside from rulers, they were mostly boyars, hierarchs, monastery abbots, secular priests or mere monks. On the other hand, there was also an interest on the part of eparchies or great monasteries to have sketes or metochions in places where a certain economic production existed (especially in agricultural or wine-growing areas). In addition to the fact that the estates and agricultural production were much more easily managed, prospective shortcomings could be also substituted through these appurtenances placed in different parts of the country, awaiting tax immunity as well as donations from princes and local benefactors.

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