Phanariot Donations to the Mega Spileon Monastery (18th Century)

Abstract:

The monastery of Great Cave (Mega Spileon) from Moreea has occupied a special place in the consciousness of the Eastern Christianity subjected to the Ottoman sultan, being at a certain moment named the New Jerusalem. According to tradition, this monastery keeps a miracle-working icon of the Holy Virgin painted by the holy Apostle and Evangelist Luke. This monastery received donations from 'Phanariote' princes of Moldova and Wallachia. The chronology of these donations seems to connect their beginning to the restoration of Ottoman rule in Pelopones and the return of the monastery (with other monasteries from the region) under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchy of Constantinople in 1715-16. Although it is possible that occasional aids were sent to this monastery in early sixteenth century, the lack of consistent Romanian donations to Pelopones in general and especially to Mega Spileon may be explain by the lack of migration from that region to northern Danube. The first donations of Moldavian and Wallachia princes to the Great Cave "imperial and patriarchal" monastery belong to those from Ghica family, while they were ruling in Wallachia in eighteenth century. These initiatives originated essentially in the attribute of Byzantine inspiration, which gave the prince the role of patron of the Orthodox Church supplemented by motivations concerned with devotional traditions of the economy of salvation, the expressing of filial piety of donors, social assistance practices and administration of properties acquired by emigrants in their destination countries. There is a long series of donations made by various Ghica princes – Gregory Ghica, 1733-35, 1748-52, Matei Ghica, 1752-53, Scarlat Ghica, probably in both his reigns in Bucharest and for sure on 5 February 1759, Alexandru Scarlat Ghica on 20 February 1768, Grigore III Ghica on 6 February 1769. To these one may add the donation of the chapel dedicated to the 'Dormition of the Mother of God' of Vlah Serai princely palace from Constantinople (The Empress of Fortresses). A possible interpretation may be an attempt of this family carrying out an ambitious dynastic project, reflected symbolically on diverse levels. The reason of writing this paper is the discovery in the archive of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences from Sankt Petersburg of an unknown document issued by Grigore Alexandru Ghica. The documented issued on 6 February 1769 is edited together with two other contemporary documents in the annexes of the paper.

Keywords: *Mega Spileon, New Jerusalem, donations, Ghica princes, Moldavia, Wallachia.*