

# TITULAR METROPOLITANS OF ASIA MINOR IN WALACHIA (17<sup>TH</sup>-19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY)

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A less investigated subject in modern historical research was the presence of the titular hierarchs in the Danubian Principalities, mainly Metropolitans and bishops of the disappeared bishoprics of Asia Minor.

This practice of consecrating titular hierarchs had the origin in the Byzantine times and its use increased after 1453.

This practice was applied mainly to the metropolitan See of Anatolia, which were enjoying a high prestige in the Christian world. In Asia Minor, there was over twenty Christian communities about which here are already informations from the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.<sup>1</sup>

Before the invasion of the Seleucid Turks, Asia Minor was the most important and the most populated province of the Byzantine Empire. The decline of this province was the cause for gradually disappearance of many bishoprics mainly from the regions in which can be noticed an important decrease of the Christian population. This fact results very clearly from the analysis of the *Notitiae Episcopatum*. If in the times of Leon VI the metropolitan sees in Anatolia overpassed the number of those in the European provinces, this proportion changed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century when from 71 metropolitan sees under the canonical jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarch, only 17 were in Anatolia and 54 in Europe. The old Byzantine principle “τὰ ἀρχαῖα κρατεῖτω” “the ancient customs must be preserved” was slowly but continuously jolted along six centuries.<sup>2</sup>

Many of the ancient prestigious bishoprics of Anatolia were decreased in the range of hierarchy in the last centuries of Byzantine history in order to leave their places to flourishing urban centers of the European provinces like Thessalonika. But the Ecumenical Patriarchate did not wish the total vanishing of some bishoprics with important contribution to the history of Christianity. One of the methods to “rescue” a bishopric was granting it to another metropolitan, practice described in

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<sup>1</sup> S. Vryonis, *The Decline of the Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the process of islamization* (in Greek), Athens, 1990, p. 252.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 247.

sources as “κατὰ λόγον ἐπιδόσεως”; usually this practice was for the cases in which there still were Christians even in very limited number.<sup>3</sup>

Other times for some of the bishoprics of Asia Minor were consecrated titular hierarchs usually living in Constantinople. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century titular hierarchs of the Ecumenical Patriarchate could be found in Walachia country in which many times they were also elected and consecrated.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century the Romanian Danubian principalities had a different position from all the other territories in the Balcan Peninsula. In the North of the Danube there were, in spite of the severe Othoman control princes trying to restore at their court something from the glory of Byzantium. For centuries, all the Christian East found in these principalities every time it needed support and refuge. It was then, natural for the Romanian Churches to earn a privileged place and to increase its importance in the Orthodox world. This fact results from the frequent visits of Orthodox patriarchs in the Romanian territories from the honorary titles which were conferred to the Metropolitans of Moldavia and Walachia as well as by the presence of the titular hierarchs. Very interesting are the motivation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in consecrating in the Danubian Principalities and mainly in Walachia a great number of “ἐπὶ ψιλῷ ὀνόματι” (“only by the name”) hierarchs.

First it was the practice to confer these titles to persons with great ecclesiastical qualities many times hegumens (both Greeks or Romanians) of some monasteries in Bucharest. Another to this practice could be the practical need of a greater number of bishops in Walachia (in this country there were two bishops in Bucharest and Râmnic, the metropolitan in Bucharest and late in 18<sup>th</sup> century was founded a new bishopric in Curtea de Arges). We must also mention that in Walachia were consecrated till 1700 the metropolitans of Transylvania, fact requiring an increased number of bishops.

Sometimes the titular hierarchs were advanced to actual eparchies and even promoted metropolitans of Walachia. Very often there were persons from the very close cycle of phanariote princes or of the Ecumenical Patriarchs. Some Romanian historians thought that this practice of the Patriarchate to consecrate titular hierarchs was a part of program to impose Greek metropolitans in Walachia or, at least it was a way to increase the phanariote influence mainly in the economical sector.

In 18<sup>th</sup> century, a case which can be given as a representative one is that of Neophytos from the island of Crete - the prince Constantin Mavrocordat who is

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<sup>3</sup> M. Tipău, *Neophytos I from Crete, Metropolitan of Hungrowalachia (1738-1753)* (in Greek) in “The Spiritual Relation of Hellenism with the Balkan Peoples (18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century) 1<sup>st</sup> Interbalkanic Congress”, Komotini, 1999, pp. 179-184.

consecrated in the year 1738 in Bucharest as the metropolitan of Myra recommended by the Patriarch who answered so that to the prince's request. A year later Neophytos became the Hungrowalachia's metropolitan.

For the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the most important official source regarding to Hungrowalachia metropolitan see is "The holy register" of this, the register in which were recorded all the important documents issued or received in this eparchy. "The holy register" was initiated by the metropolitan Stephan in the year 1668, after the removal of the metropolitan see from Târgoviste to Bucharest.

Its first volume contains documents dated between 1668 and 1820. The documents from the register are draw up either in Greek language or Romanian language. In 18<sup>th</sup> century, in the register s debut had been added a serious of ecclesiastical tipikon texts like the disposition about the choosing bishops, that of the metropolitans removal including those titulars or another eparchy. These texts are representative in fact for the categories of still existing documents in the register. In the matter which we are interested in, we remark that the consecration of titulars hierarchs was not an accidental fact in Walachia metropolitan see, because it was considered necessary that in the debut of the official see documents register to be also include the Greek language tipikon of such ceremonies. The register in question was published in the year 1886 in the "Romanian Orthodox Church"<sup>4</sup> magazine by Ghenadie Enăceanu. Because of the importance of this document for the history of Greek - Romanian ecclesiastical relation, would impose the achievement of a new edition which follows the new principle of historical research.

It is very interesting to stress that although all these consecrations of titulars metropolitans regarding to the metropolitans and bishops under the ecumenical jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and in the confession of faith they bound themselves to respect: "The privileges of the ecumenical and patriarchal see I confess to respect and all matters without any changes (1779 - The metropolitan of Sardes)<sup>5</sup> while in later documents the candidate wrote" the privileges of the holy metropolitan see of Hungrowalachia I confess to respect without any changes until my last breath" (The metropolitan Parthenios of Tralles - 1813)<sup>6</sup>. This fact can be connected with the practical need of the presence in the country of numerous hierarchs, which were in some way subordinated to the metropolitan of the country. In other cases like the election of the metropolitan of Laodiceia Akkackios in 1814

<sup>4</sup> G. Enăceanu, *Mitropolia Ungrovlahiei. Condica Sfântă*, Bucharest, 1886, pp.4-5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 169.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 390.

the candidate promised to keep "the privileges of the patriarchal and ecumenical throne but also those of the most holy metropolitan see of the Hungrowalachia".<sup>7</sup>

In the 1801 the ecumenical Patriarch Calinikos wrote to the metropolitan of Hungrowalachia about the bishop of Sebaste which had to be subject to your holiness and co - working with you in any ecclesiastical needs and cases"<sup>8</sup>. This quotations makes very clear the fact that the titular hierarchs were considered in canonical obedience to the metropolitan of Walachia which created around him an actual "Synod" similar to the practical one. In 1814 at the election for the titular metropolitan of Laodiceia the official document was signed beside the bishop of Buzau by Dionysios of Sebaste, Dionysios of Pogoniana, Benedictos of Troas, Dionysios of Crateia, Laurentios of Chrysopolis, Parthenios of Tralles, Neophytos of Euchariopolis<sup>9</sup>. For comparison we mention that in the letter of the Patriarch Cyrillos by which he asked in 1812 the consecration of the metropolitan of Apameia had only seven signatures of the Synod members<sup>10</sup>.

For longer or shorter periods in Walachia were living titular hierarchs of Sardes, Syde, Amaseia, Myra, Stauropolis, Laodiceia, Paphlagonia, Hierapolis, Troas, Nysse, Sebastopolis, Soteropolis, Thebais, Syrigos, Euchariopolis, Tralles, Eucharia, Crateia, Statonikia, Chrysopolis, Lychna, Heliopolis, Chariopolis (bishopric of Heiracleia), Sebaste (bishopric of Seleucia in Pamphylia).

It is probable that for these eparchies the Patriarchate did not consecrate continuously hierarchs, but one can still find in sources for some periods series of titular bishops or metropolitans. This is true for eparchies like Myra, Stauropolis, Sebaste, Hierapolis. As we mentioned, the ceremonial of consecration of the titular bishops is recorded in the debut of the "Sacred Register" of the eparchy of Hungrowalachia, and in the document of their election is mentioned that they were receiving the see from the Ecumenical Patriarch and his Synod, with the approval of the metropolitan and of the hospodar of the country. In many cases titular hierarchs of eparchies from Asia Minor were living in Walachia and often they were consecrated there.

The first mention about the consecration of a titular metropolitan in the "Sacred Register" dates from 1669, concerning Parthenios, archbishop of Soteriopolis<sup>11</sup>.

In some cases the selection of a titular metropolitan was a degree in the rising to the Walachian eparchies, like the bishopric of Râmnic or even the

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 401.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 316.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 399-401.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 382.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 30-31.

metropolitan see in Bucharest. Thus, Neophytos, the confessor of Constantine Mavrocordat and his adviser, was elected in 1737 titular metropolitan of Myra and an year later, metropolitan of Hungrowalachia<sup>12</sup>. His successor to the Myra's metropolitan see (1748), Gregorios, succeeded him also to the metropolitan see of Walachia in 1753<sup>13</sup>.

The title of metropolitan of Myra was the first hierarchical degree also for Philaretos (1776) who becomes bishop of Râmnic in 1780 (receiving a real eparchy even if it was only a bishopric) and in the 1792 as a result of the request of Ioan Șutu to the Patriarch he became metropolitan of Hungrowalachia. Another case is that of Dionysios who became in 1801 bishop of Sebaste and in 1819 obtained the see of Bucharest<sup>14</sup>. Most of the consecrated in Hungrowalachia titular hierarchs had been living in this country often being hegumens of some monastery from the capital.

Among the documents included in the "Sacred register" of the metropolitan see, many of them are concerning consecrations of titular hierarchs made in Bucharest. This documents are structured in the following manner: a letter of the Ecumenical Patriarch recommending an ecclesiastical personality conferring the right to the metropolitan of Hungrowalachia to consecrate him for one of the long ago disappeared eparchies mainly from Asia Minor. The patriarchal letter was followed generally by a document of the prince approving the election of the hierarch, the main document of the election and the confession of faith of the elected person.

As we already mentioned the oldest document in connection with the election of a titular metropolitan is from 1669. The text refers to the hieromonk Parthenios elected metropolitan of Soteropolis, and the most recent election is that of Neophytos of Hierapolis in 1815<sup>15</sup>.

The importance of the metropolitan see of Walachia for the Ecumenical Patriarchate was stressed in 1746 by the election in Bucharest of the metropolitan Matthaeus of Lybia as Patriarch of Alexandria<sup>16</sup>.

For the practical side of the presence of titular hierarch is the case of the prince Ioan Mihail Sutu who in 1792 intercedes to the Patriarchate in favor of the bishop of Râmnic for being transferred in the metropolitan see of Hungrowalachia transfer which had to be celebrated by the metropolitan Gregorios of Stauropolis present that time in Bucharest<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> M. Țipău, *op.cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>13</sup> G. Enăceanu, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-166.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 431-439.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 402-408.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 137-142.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 251-267.

One of the arguments one can find in the patriarchal letters for titular metropolitans were the exceptional qualities of those persons as we can read for example in the letter for the election of the metropolitan of Sebastopolis (December the 17<sup>th</sup> 1800): "because from the old times there is the custom in the Church to promote as bishop those with experience and qualities and to consecrate them according to the canon law with the name only of sometimes shining eparchies from which today there is not even a trace left"<sup>18</sup>. Alike texts can be found in all the Patriarchal documents of this kind. It is always stressed that the consecration took place "with the name only" for sometime celebrate eparchies.

Another proof of the particular place of Walachia and of its church are the honorific titles conferred in different times to the metropolitan of Hungrowalachia. Already from the Byzantine period the new - founded eparchies received the right to have an equal place in the Episcopal catalogues with that of the historical sees. The first places belonged to famous metropolitan sees of Asia Minor, most of them with origins in the apostolic ages.

Only in the last Byzantine centuries changes started to occur in the episcopal catalogues (*notitiae episcopatum*) of the times of Leon VI the Wise. The decline of the Christian communities of Asia Minor in first reflected in the episcopal catalogues by the unification of several metropolitan sees and later by the complete disappearance of some eparchies. For example in the 14<sup>th</sup> century the sees of Sebasteia, Iconion and Euchaita (for these eparchies the Patriarchate was consecrating later titular metropolitans which were living in Walachia) were unified in 1327 with the see of Caesareea<sup>19</sup>. In the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century many of the famous metropolitan see of Anatolia leave their places to European ones. For example in 1371 the metropolitan of Larisa was mentioned as "having the place of the (metropolitan of) Side"<sup>20</sup>.

When in the 14<sup>th</sup> century the political authority of Byzantium was only a glorious past, the Ecumenical Patriarchate obtained a particular importance and the "universality" of the Byzantine state became synonyme with the universality of the "Great Church", the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which had a successfully missionary work in this time, the Patriarchate recognized the Metropolitans of Moldavia and Walachia.

Because many of the celebrated eparchies of Asia Minor were lost for the Patriarchate, the new created metropolitan See of Ungrowalachia gave contents to

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 300.

<sup>19</sup> S. Vryonis, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 252

the power of the Byzantine Church and from this fact results the important place the new eparchy held.

Already for the beginnings, the Patriarchate conferred to the metropolitan of Walachia the title of "hypertimos". In the canonical series the new eparchy had the 70<sup>th</sup> place but from the beginnings was conferred to it equal place with the see of Melitene and later with that of Nicomedia. Later, the metropolitan of Ungrowalachia received the right to intitulate himself "having the place of (the metropolitan of) Ancyra". (Ancyra had the 4<sup>th</sup> place in the episcopal catalogues).

The case of the equal place of a metropolitan see with another was completely different from those of the titular hierarchs. Metropolitan sees like Ancyra still existed till 20<sup>th</sup> century while having the same place with the metropolitan of Ancyra meant only a honorary distinction for some hierarchs.

The see of the Caesars in Cappadocia was, in the Byzantine times, "protothronos" in the catalogues of hierarchy and it was always very famous in the Orthodox Church. It also continued to exist as a metropolitan see till the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As a proof of the prestige of the metropolitans of Hungrowalachia, the Ecumenical Patriarch Sofronios conferred to them the title "having the place of (the metropolitan of) Caesareea in Cappadocia" the highest title which the "great Church" could give to one hierarch. In this decision maybe it was important the presence on the throne of Walachia of the Phanariote princes which organized at their court according to the traditions of Byzantium, regenerated on the shores of the Danube<sup>21</sup>.

The patriarchal letter dating from 1776 by which the honorary title was accorded to the metropolitan of Hungrowalachia contained as motivation the fact that the old title (i.e. the equal position with the metropolitan of Ancyra) was no lower in the hierarchical scale and in consequence no longer in keeping with the Hungrowalachia status. It was also mentioned the request of the prince Alexander Ipsilanti to the Patriarch concerning the same issue. But before 1776 the same honorary title was conferred at least to one other metropolitan of Walachia - Neophitos from Crete, perhaps for personal merit<sup>22</sup>.

The presence of the titular metropolitans is a proof for the place Walachia had being as country that, according to a patriarchal letter dated 1776 "offer no little glory to our poor nation (i.e. the Rhomeic) in these times and ages."<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 183-187.

<sup>22</sup> M. Țipău, *op. cit.* p. 182.

<sup>23</sup> G. Enăceanu, *op. cit.* p. 184.