

Sergiu-Grigore Popescu¹

ASPECTS REGARDING THE LINKS

between the Romanian Orthodox Church
and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church

Abstract: Sergiu-Grigore Popescu, *Aspects regarding the Links between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.*

The author provides a comprehensive overview of the relationship between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church from the early centuries until the late 20th century. He argues that both local Churches have demonstrated sympathy and mutual understanding with regard to their public presence in their respective societies.

Keywords: *Church History, Ecclesiastical Diplomacy, Romania, Bulgaria, Inter-Orthodox Dialogue*

Along the years, more theologians and Romanian historians have focused on the links the Romanian Orthodox Church has had with the Bulgarian Orthodox Church throughout the centuries. In the following lines we will try to review the main works on the subject and we will also include here some volumes that contain chapters about the liturgical relationships between the Romanian and the Bulgarian people.

Thus, since the beginning of the twentieth century, Nicolae Dobrescu, professor of the History of the Romanian Orthodox Church at the Faculty of Theology from Bucharest, in his work *Contributions to the Romanian Church History in the fifteenth century*, published in Bucharest in 1907, highlighted the importance of the ecclesiastical links between the Romanian and the Bulgarian church. Eudoxiu Hurmuzaki and Nicolae Iorga, in the work: *Documents on the history of the Romanians*, Vol. XIV, Part I, published in Bucharest, in 1915, brought to the fore some new documents that captured the religious connections between the Romanian and Bul-

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garian church. The great Romanian historian, Nicolae Iorga, in his work *The History of the Romanian Church and of the Religious Life of Romanians* (2 volumes), printed in several editions (1908, 1928-1929, 2012, etc.) emphasizes the cooperation between the two sister Orthodox Churches on several time levels, each with unique characteristics. Interestingly is the study of Paul Mihailovici, *Romanian Testimonies from Bulgaria and Greece* (1468-1866), published in the „Journal of Archaeological, Historical Society-Church” (Chişinău), XXIII (1933). The Romanian writer and diplomat Marcu Beza, who went through the entire Balkan Peninsula during the inter-war period, remarked, in his work *Romanian Traces in the East Orthodox*, published in Bucharest in 1939 (second edition), the contribution of some Romanian boyars in building holy places in Bulgaria.

After the Second World War, once with the mutual visits made by the Patriarchs of the two sister Orthodox Churches and increasing the links through the visits of teachers or students exchange, the articles published in the main church periodicals in Romania have multiplied (especially in the magazine „The Romanian Orthodox Church”, the official bulletin of the Romanian Patriarchate) on this issue. Thus, Antonie Plămădeală (future Metropolitan of Transylvania), published in 1954 (the year LXXII) in no. 11-12 of the magazine „The Romanian Orthodox Church” during the visit in Romania of the Cyril Bulgarian Patriarch, the article *On the Path of a Friendship for Centuries*. A year later, Ioan Iufu published the article *Cultural and Religious Romanian-Bulgarian Links, with the Occasion of the Romanian Science Week in the PR of Bulgaria* (1955, December 23 to 30), in the same magazine „The Romanian Orthodox Church”, LXXIII (1955), no. 5 (p. 413-418). Gheorghe Moisescu, Ştefan Lupşa and Alexandru Filipaşcu, in the work *The Romanian Church History* (2 volumes), the Publishing House of the Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1957, attached a generous space to the links between Romanian and Bulgarian church. A few years later, Ion Crăciunaş published in the magazine „The Metropolis of Moldavia and Suceava”, XXXVI (1960), no. 3-4, the study *The Bulgarian Patriarchate*. In the same year, Aurelian Sacerdoţeanu published the study *About the Metropolitan Ignatius the Serbian*, in the magazine „The Romanian Orthodox Church”, LXVIII (1960), no. 11-12. And after 1960, studies and articles about the good ties between Romanian Orthodox Church and Bulgarian Orthodox Church have continued to be published. In the following lines a few of these are mentioned: Alexandru Alexianu, *Two Romanians, found-*

ers in Bulgaria and Pind (1643-1644), in the magazine „The Romanian Orthodox Church”, LXXXIII (1965), no. 7-8 (p. 771-776); Olimp Căciulă, *The Holiness Patriarch Justinian, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church visited Bulgaria on the occasion of celebrating 13 years of the reestablishment of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and of the enthronement as a Patriarch of His Holiness Chiril (1966, May 9 to 16)*, in the magazine „The Romanian Orthodox Church”, LXXXIV (1966), no. 5-6 (p. 425-479); Epifanie Norocel, *Saint Eftimie, the last patriarch of Târnovo and his links with the Romanian church*, in the magazine „The Romanian Orthodox Church”, LXXXIV (1966), no. 5-6 (p. 552-573); A.C. Rădulescu, *The visit of his Holiness Maxim, the Patriarch of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church*, in the magazine „The Romanian Orthodox Church”, XC (1972), no. 9-10; Antonie Plămădeală, *On the trace of the traditional Romanian-Bulgarian ties*, in the magazine „The Romanian Orthodox Church”, XCII (1974), no. 5-6; Tudor Mateescu, *Cherven Diocese of touch with Romanian Countries (XVII-XIX)*, in the magazine „The Romanian Orthodox Church”, XCIV (1976), no. 1-2 (p. 176-179); Lucian Florea, *The Visit of the Holiness Patriarch Teoctist in Bulgaria (1993, September 17 to 20)*, in the magazine „The Romanian Orthodox Church”, CXI (1993), no. 7-9 (p. 3-11). Last but not least, we mention the work of the academician priest Mircea Păcurariu, *The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church* (3 volumes), Trinitas Publishing House, Iași, 2004-2008.

To underline the interest that the Romanian theologians and historians have shown towards the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and its history, we also record that only in the pages of the magazine “Romanian Orthodox Church,” the official bulletin of the Romanian Patriarchate, have been published since the beginning of the twentieth century, more than 330 studies, articles and reviews in which there were presented data about the organization, the economic situation, pastoral work, missionary and cultural patterns and prints, press, theological education, religious life, relationships with state, religious issues monasticism and monasteries, personalities, social context, diaspora and foreign relations of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church².

There has been a tight connection between the Romanian and and

² For a complete list of these studies and articles, see Stănciulescu-Bârda, Al. *The Bibliography of the magazine „The Romanian Orthodox Church” (1874-1994)*, vol. II, Cuget Românesc Publishing House, Bârda, 2001, 103-125.

the Bulgarian people along the years, that was manifested religiously under different aspects. The starting point of this relationship seems to be the eleventh century (although it would be possible that they are much older), making their consolidation with the creation of political union that is known in history as the Vlach-Bulgarian Empire.

From the religious point of view, these close ties, were first expressed by the founding of a „*Vlach bishops*” in the south of the Danube (territories belonging today to Bulgaria and Serbia), in XI-XIV centuries. It seems that after 1185-1186, was born even a Vlach-Bulgarian Archiepiscopate in Târnovo, in the state „Vlach-Bulgarian” created then.

The first rulers of Wallachia were strongly related to Bulgarian tsars from Târnovo and Vidin. So, the Tsar Ivan Alexander (1331-1371) was married to Theodora, the daughter of the the Voivode Basarab I of Wallachia (1330-1352), and their son, Ivan Stracimir, tsar of Vidin, married Anna, the daughter of Voivode Nicolae Alexandru Basarab³ (1352-1364).

The Romanian Orthodox Church throughout history has had a close relationship with the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. The latter influenced the Romanian Church, especially in terms of ascetic expression of Christianity north of the Danube - monasticism. This influence was felt, in a first phase until the fall of Târnovo, when many of the Bulgarian monks moved to Romanian monasteries⁴.

During the reign of Vladislav I of Wallachia (1364-1377), the Metropolitan Daniil of Vidin was forced, because of the occupation of the city by the Hungarian kingdom, to take refuge in Wallachia, where he could be met even since 1370. In 1372, he received the approval of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to serve in either of the two metropolises of the Wallachia (Argeş and Severin), he will be provided with basic needs⁵.

The Metropolitan Antim Critopol corresponded (on dogmatic and religious themes) with Saint Eftimie of Târnovo, considered by historians and theologians „an impressive personality with deep religious culture springs, won at Constantinople, especially in solitary meditations on

³ Son and heir of Basarab I.

⁴ Crăciunaş, I. *Bulgarian Patriarchate*, in the magazine „The Metropolitan of Moldavia and Suceava”, XXXVI (1960), no. 3-4, 285.

⁵ Păcurariu, M. *The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, vol. I, 3rd edition, Trinitas Publishing House, Iaşi, 2004, 383.

Mount Athos”⁶. In one of the letters, the Bulgarian bishop complained about the internal dangers (the Bogomil heresy) and external (the Ottomans) that have befallen Bulgaria.

We also record that there are known some news regarding the correspondence between the Romanian reorganizer of the Romanian monastic life, Saint Nicodim from Tismana (1310-1406) and Saint Eftimie of Târnovo. After 1387 and until his pass away it is recorded the so-called „cultural stage of the life of Saint Nicodim”⁷ stage that will take place mostly at Tismana, where he corresponded from with Patriarch Eftimie, the central idea being „the perspective of Incarnation of Christ for the destiny of the human person”⁸. From this correspondence there have been kept two letters: in the first, the Bulgarian patriarch answers to six dogmatic questions: about holy angels, about evil in the world, about the Holy Cross, about the incarnation and soul⁹, and in the second he answers to Saint Nicodim`s question about the research of the moral life, of those above fifteen years, who want to become priests¹⁰.

After the occupation by the Turks of the Csardoms of Târnovo (1393) and Vidin (1396), numerous priests and Bulgarian monks fled in Wallachia. They brought with them many Slavic manuscripts, including the writings of Saint Eftimie. Also now, there were brought from Vidin and placed in the reign church of Argeş Saint`s Filofteia relics¹¹.

Since the second half of the XIV century, the papers of the time give us precious news about the Church`s contribution in Wallachia and Moldavia to support several monasteries and hermitages from Bulgaria. With Romanian help, there were built south of the Danube new churches and chapels, plus cash donations, manuscripts, books, icons, liturgical vestments and vessels. Among the holy establishments in Bulgaria mentioned

⁶ Şerbănescu, N. and Nicolae Stoicescu, *Mircea the Great*, Bucharest, 1987, 151; For this issue extensively in Gheorghe Drăgulin, *Saint Nicodim from Tismana and the religious trends in the fourteenth century*, in „The Metropolitan of Oltenia”, XXVIII (1976), no. 11-12.

⁷ Bălaşa, D. *The Monastery of Tismana*, Craiova, 1983, 36.

⁸ Drăgulin, G. *Saint Nicodim from Tismana and the religious currents of the fourteenth century*, 863-869.

⁹ Norocel, E. *St. Eftimie, the last patriarch of Târnovo and his links with Romanian church*, in the magazine „The Romanian Orthodox Church”, LXXXIV (1966), no. 5-6, 566.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 574.

¹¹ Păcurariu, M. *The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, vol. I, 3rd ed., 383.

in the papers of donation of voivodes and boyars in the Romanian Countries can be recorded: Kremikovski monastery near Sofia, built by Wallachian voivode Radu The Great in 1493¹², Şviştov church (dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul) and Vidin (dedicated to the Holy Parascheva), built by the voivode Matei Basarab¹³ and Rila Monastery.

To the latter, the voivode Bogdan III of Moldavia gave away his two altar curtains; later, the Metropolitan Grigorie Roşca donated a covering for his holy table and the bishop of Rădăuţi, Isaia gave a Four Gospels. Otherwise, the old stone tower of the monastery has carved above the gate, the emblem of Moldavia and on the church iconostasis can be seen the coat of arms of Moldavia and the Wallachia, as evidence of the rich donations made by Romanian voivodes to this monastery. Note that at the Rila as well as in the National Libraries from Sofia and Plovdiv there is a copy of the Four Gospels printed by the monk priest Macarie, in Wallachia in 1512¹⁴.

In Craiova there have to shelter a master skillful Bulgarian calligrapher, priest Ivan from Cratovo, who between 1558-1580, handwrote in the south of the Danube more of the Four Gospels and liturgy books. Around 1580, priest Ioan moved to Wallachia, settling at Craiova, where he became an archpriest.

Several Bulgarians monks retired in Romanian monasteries with rich cultural-artistic and spiritual life. Thus, in the life of Saint Gheorghe the New from Sofia it is described the priest Ştefan of Penkoviţa's trip to the

¹² The Romanian voivode buried his two children here and the votive painting that show the founder and his family is still preserved today.

¹³ Matei Basarab was born in 1580 in Brâncoveni, Olt County, not far from the Bulgarian-Romanian border. He ruled for 22 years, between 1632-1654. He died on 19 April 1654. In supporting of the sister Orthodox Church, he was noticed by the donations made to the Holy Mount Athos (here being depicted as a founder), by printing religious books and by raising or restoring of several churches and monasteries in its neighboring countries, among which two in Bulgaria, Vidin and Şviştov (Giurescu, C. *Two foundations of Matei Basarab in Bulgaria*, in „The Magazine of Romanian History”, XI-XII (1940-1941), 390-391; Hrisicu, H. *Several Romanian foundations in Bulgaria*, in the magazine „The Grains of Wheat”, III (1932), no. 3-4, 88-96; Petre, I. *Vasile Năsturel. Genealogy of the Năstureis*, in „Magazine for History, Archaeology and Philosophy”, vol. XI, Part I, 1911, Bucharest, Institute of Graphics Carol Goble, 7; Constantin C. Giurescu and Dinu C. Giurescu, *The history of Romanians from ancient times until today*, Albatros Publishing House, Bucharest, 1972, 138).

¹⁴ Bodogae, T. *Romanian aids to Saint Mount Athos*, Sibiu, 1941, 87.

court of the voivode Radu the Great of Wallachia, where he met the former Ecumenical Patriarch, Metropolitan Nifon II and the Metropolitan Maxim Brancovici¹⁵.

The Monastery of the Holy Apostles in Bucharest (also called the Archimandrite), existing since the end of the sixteenth century, was restored by the voivode Matei Basarab and later dedicated to a monastery in Târnovo, for which it was known as The Târnov Monastery. This holy shrine had to be repaired in 1705 by the Metropolitan Axentie of Sofia, originating in Târnovo¹⁶.

And the Bulgarian monastery of Zografu on Mount Athos received many donations from Romanian rulers, being dedicated to it and Romanian monasteries as well¹⁷.

The voivode Matei Basarab brought an old friend of him from Bulgaria to Wallachia, the priest Ignatie from Nicopole. Then he made him the bishop of Râmnic and later the metropolitan of Wallachia (known in history under the name of Ignatie the „Serbian”)¹⁸. These links were supported and carried forward in the new context of Turkish rule which began in XIV century, not only by Romanian rulers (the most important being Matei Basarab and Constantin Brâncoveanu), and by the scribes (Udriște Năsturel), hierarchs (metropolitans Teofil, Ștefan, Teodosie and Antim Ivireanul of Wallachia) and landowners (Gheorghe and his son Constantin).

As it concerns the latter, we note that in the interwar period, the writer and diplomat Marcu Beza, in one of his travels through the Balkans, discovered at the Monastery of Vlasiu (in Pind) a fresco with two unknown officials¹⁹ and an inscription „it was built with the expense of too noble Arhon Gheorghe, his wife, Cherata and their son Constantin, year 1644”²⁰.

¹⁵ Păcurariu, M. *The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, vol. I, 3rd ed., 550.

¹⁶ Idem, *The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, vol. II, 3rd edition, Trinitas Publishing House, Iași, 2006, 245.

¹⁷ Mihailovici, P. *Romanian Testimonies from Bulgaria and Greece (1468-1866)*, in „The Magazine of Ecclesiastical, Archaeological-Historical Society” (Chișinău), year XXIII (1933), 327-345.

¹⁸ Sacerdoțeanu, Au. *About the Metropolitan Ignatie, the Serbian*, in the magazine „The Romanian Orthodox Church”, year LXVIII (1960), no. 11-12, 1054-1077.

¹⁹ Beza, M. *Romanian traces in the Orthodox East*, Bucharest, 1939, 192-193.

²⁰ Alexianu, Al. *Two Romanians, founders in Bulgaria and Pind (1643-1644)*, in the magazine „The Romanian Orthodox Church”, year LXXXIII (1965), no. 7-8, 771.

Still continuing the research at this monastery it was found a letter from 1639, attesting the Romanian origin of both two landowners and functions (dignitaries) held: Constantine was Chamberlain and his father, slugger²¹. Note that these two Romanian boyars were discovered in a fresco of 1643 of the Bacicovo monastery in Bulgaria. Although initially they were considered Wallachian boyars, apparently they were related to the Ruler of Moldavia, Vasile Lupu, their names being encountered on the list of the Moldavian boyars during this ruler. They came from the numerous generations of boyars Roșca²², so that in the Moldavian Divan, Gheorghe had become, in 1641, the second treasurer and Constantin was keeper governor²³. As it concerns Cherata, Gheorghe's wife and mother of Constantin, it is very likely that she is the cousin of the Voivode Vasile Lupu, named to accompany the Syrian Deacon Paul of Aleppo in his journey through Moldavia²⁴.

It is assumed that these two noblemen, father and son built the settlements mentioned in the above lines, between 1641-1645, a period in which their names are recorded on the lists of the Divan of Moldavia. Perhaps, from a reason that we do not know, they were exiled by the ruler, and they spent the period of exile in the south of the Danube. In 1645 they were mentioned again on the list of Moldavian boyars, having the dignities originally intended.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, Grigore Ghica, the ruler of Wallachia, built a cathedral for the Metropolitan of Dristra (Siliștra), as it resulted from a 1777 decree given by the voivode Alexandru Ipsilanti²⁵.

In the late seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century, the ruler Constantin Brâncoveanu (1688-1714)²⁶, supported by Antim Ivireanu²⁷ printer monk, originally from Georgia, and became

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² It seems that the family name Roșca, is of Macedo-Romanian origin, who came from Macedonia.

²³ Alexianu, Al. *Two Romanians, founders in Bulgaria and Pind* (1643-1644), 774.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 776.

²⁵ Hurmuzaki, Eudoxiu and Nicolae Iorga, *Documents about the history of the Romanians*, Vol. XIV, Part I, Bucharest, 1915, 232.

²⁶ It was martyred by the Ottomans on 15 August 1714 in Istanbul, with their four sons, Constantin, Ștefan, Radu and Matei and his son in law, counselor Ianache.

²⁷ He was born around 1650 in the Iveria (today Georgia) and received first name Andrei. Between 1688-1690, he was brought north of the Danube by the Romanian ruler Con-

bishop of Râmnic and later metropolitan of Wallachia, care for their brothers south of the Danube, printing for their spiritual needs liturgical and spiritual building books. Moreover, Antim Ivireanul can be noticed through his work, by printing 64 books (of which 38 worked by himself) in Romanian, Slavic, Greek and Arabic. His bilingual prints or trilingual Chisar: Slavic-Romanian, Greek-Arabic, Greek-Romanian and Greek-Slavic-Romanian are very interesting. The Slavonic was made more for the monks coming from Bulgaria, forced to leave their homeland because of the Turkish invasions. It is possible that some of these prints to have arrived south of the Danube as well. Nicolae Iorga, the greatest Romanian historian characterizes him as „a fighter for Christendom who died as a disciple of Christendom”.

Romanian rulers have helped the five churches in Arbănași, near Tarnovo as well; in one of them there was buried a son of Constantin Brâncoveanu²⁸.

The collaboration and the mutual support the two sister Orthodox Churches have given one to another over the time results from the connections Romanians had with the Diocese of Cerven, about which some Romanian researchers said that „existed in the North of Bulgaria, towards the Danube, not far from Russe, in a place called Cerven known to us because there was an Orthodox diocese headquarters since the late sixteenth century”²⁹. Not far from the Diocese of Cerven there was the birthplace of Vasile Lupu, namely the Arvanitochori town, as it was outlined in a gramata from April 1642, of the Patriarch Partenie of Constantinople³⁰. Related to this, most Romanian historians believe that his place of birth was the

stantin Brâncoveanu, and in 1691 he became the head of the printing house from Bucharest. Five years later he reached Snagov Monastery as an abbot and between 1705-1708, he is found in the episcopal chair of Râmnic. Between 1708-1716, occupies the chair of metropolitan of Wallachia. He was killed while on his way to exile, after he took a stance against the new ruler, Nicolae Mavrocordat, who, fearing the Austrians, had taken refuge in the south of the Danube; in return, the first punished was Antim himself, in 1716 the Metropolitan was killed and his body thrown into a river.

²⁸ Păcurariu, M. *The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, vol. II, 3rd ed., 245.

²⁹ Mateescu, T. *From the Diocese of Cerven`s ties with the Romanian Countries (XVII-XIX)*, in the magazine „The Romanian Orthodox Church”, XCIV (1976), no. 1-2, 176.

³⁰ Hurmuzaki, Eudoxiu and Nicolae Iorga, *Documents about the history of Romanians*, Vol. XIV, Bucharest, 1915, 728-729.

Arbănași town, near Tirana, Albania, or Poroişce, near Razgrad, Bulgaria³¹.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the town of Cerven can be reached among the places visited by the Patriarch Dosoftei of Jerusalem, who came for help in Wallachia and Moldavia on three occasions in 1664, 1667 and 1687.

Due to situating of this bishops around the Danube, several Romanian rulers have turned their attention to it, supporting it materially and financially. Also, several bishops of Cerven came to Wallachia, for various reasons. Thus, in 1669, on the the act of electing of Theodosius as the Metropolitan of Wallachia was signed by the Bishop of Cerven, along with other Orthodox hierarchs³².

The ruler Constantin Brâncoveanu has always shown his kindness to this eparchy. To him complained the Bishop of Cerven in 1696, that the annually rendering to the Ecumenical Patriarch was too big, over his eparchy`s possibilities. This was the reason why in the book of the Wallachia`s storehouse from 1703 there was the following note: „were given to the bishop of Cerven ... for spending 100 thalers and to two companions and a horseman going with him, 38 thalers”³³.

The special relations of the eparchy of Cerven with Wallachia can be found reflected in the documents from the eighteenth century. Thus, in 1713, a letter of the Patriarch Chiril of Constantinople was sent to both Metropolitan Antim Ivireanul from Bucharest and the Bishop of Cerven, but whose name is not given.

Romanians fully understood the sufferings of the people and of the Bulgarian Church during the Turkish bondage. North of the Danube it has been known about the hard trials to which the Bulgarians were subjected after Târnovo was conquered; it has also been known about the destroying of the churches by Sultan Bayazid, about the transformation of the holy bays in the “mosque” (including the cathedral of patriarch Eftimie). It also has been known about the turkishing attempts which continued in the fifteenth century (especially during Sultan Selim I and Suleiman I) and targeted key regions such as Lovech, Şviştov, Nicopole and Târnovo. The Romanian people by the rulers, hierarchs and his nobles, tried to help as

³¹ <https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/VasileLupu> (on July 8, 2015, at 16.32).

³² Mateescu, T. *From the Diocese of Cerven`s ties with the Romanian Countries (XVII-XIX)*, 177.

³³ *Ibid.*

much as possible, their brothers south of the Danube after 1656 as well, when there was the last wave of turkishing, in the Rhodope Mountains³⁴, where many Bulgarians who refused to accept Mohammedanism were killed and churches were completely destroyed.

Those who managed to escape and fled across the Danube were received like brothers, for them (and other Slavs oppressed by the Ottomans) being initiated in our country in the eighteenth century, a veritable cultural Slavonic movement³⁵.

The beginning of the eighteenth century marked painful moments for the Romanian people as well. Between 1698-1701, in Transylvania, pressure, threats and the blackmail of the Roman Catholic Church supported by the Habsburg Empire (under whose master this ancient Romanian province had entered) on the Romanian population led to a painful split within the Romanian Orthodox Church by creating the Greek Catholic Church and forcing a significant number of priests and faithful to „convert” the new religious doctrine. Moreover, for six decades, the Orthodox Transylvanian Romanians were left without a bishop, in 1761 only after a bitter rebellion, the authorities accepting a Serbian Orthodox hierarch for the Romanians who refused to convert to the Greek Catholic Church, who were still a majority. And in the other two Romanian provinces, Moldavia and Wallachia, the pressure of another great empire, the Ottoman, put the Romanian people and the ancestral church in a difficult situation. First, Moldavia had to come in 1711, under the Phanariote authority³⁶ and in 1716 and Wallachia, after two years earlier, in 1714, it was martyred in Istanbul the voivode Constantin Brâncoveanu, with this four sons (Constantin, Ștefan, Radu and Matei) and his son in law, counselor Ianache.

Because of the above, and the relations between the Orthodox Romanian Church and the Bulgarian Church suffered in the eighteenth century,

³⁴ Crăciunaș, I. *The Bulgarian Patriarchate*, 283.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ For more than 100 years, until 1821, Moldavia and Wallachia were led by Greek rulers, coming from the Phanar district of Istanbul, named by the Ottoman Empire by the desire to better politically control these states, but also to ruthlessly exploit the people. The two Romanian countries have experienced such a period of decline, both economically and socially and culturally. Church had also suffered, many hierarchs of this period being Greek as well, brought by rulers and with little love for their flock. In addition, many monasteries were occupied by Greek monks and transformed into mere „farms” for different establishments abroad, ruining the remaining without creatures in the end.

the deprivation and oppression of all kinds marking the history of the two sister Churches. However, even in this period the two peoples have communicated continuously. Romanian monks and clergy went over the Danube wearing religious books and religious objects and the holy relics from south of the Danube have reached the Romanian earth. The Church of the Holy Archangels from Arbănași was adorned with frescoes by painters Mihail from Thessaloniki and Gheorghe from Bucharest in 1760. In 1774, the Metropolitan Grigore II of Wallachia received from the Russian General Peter Saltăcov the relics of Saint Dimitrie the New, originally from the village of Basarabov, on the Lom river in Bulgaria. The relics were deposited in the Metropolitan Cathedral in Bucharest, the saint being considered today the patron saint of the Romanian capital³⁷.

Until the first half of the nineteenth century, many Romanian clerics have received the grace of the priesthood in Vidin.

The nineteenth century represents for Bulgaria, the revival era and of its independence after five centuries of Ottoman rule. In the fight they wore, the Bulgarian revolutionaries (priests and laity) for the cultural development and the political empowerment of Bulgaria, have enjoyed a fraternal support, disinterested from Romanians.

In the Neamț Monastery, which became an important Interorthodox monastic center, many Bulgarian monks have lived. Among them it is included the Monk Spiridon, the first writer of the Bulgarian Renaissance on Romanian earth, who wrote here, around 1790, a Slav-Bulgarian History, a particularly valuable work.

In the early nineteenth century, more and more Bulgarian monks come in the Romanian Provinces. Thus, in 1806, it was printed in Râmnic the first book in Bulgarian, the Nedelnic or The Chiriadromion of the Bishop Sofronie of Vrața, who lived 10 years in Bucharest³⁸.

Indeed, an important role in strengthening ties between the two churches, in the early nineteenth century, had the Bishop Sofronie of Vrața who was considered an apostle of Bulgaria's political and cultural revival. Because of the reign of terror of Pasvan-Oglu, pasha of Vidin, he left his diocese, crossing Wallachia. In 1803 he came to Bucharest, where he was received „like a brother”, as he himself confessed, by the Metropolitan Dositei Filitti. To his request, the ruler Constantin Ipsilanti (1802-1806),

³⁷ Păcurariu, M. *The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, vol. II, 3rd ed., 553.

³⁸ Crăciunaș, I. *Bulgarian Patriarchate*, 283.

casked the Ecumenical Patriarchate to accept his resignation from the Episcopal chair of Vrața. He stayed several years in Bucharest, committing various jobs and over 60 ordinations, taking part in the election of some bishops in Bucharest.

As mentioned above, in 1806 the first book in Bulgarian appeared at Râmnic, the Nedelnic or the Chiriadromion of the Bishop Sofronie, a massive work, with about 530 pages. To its printing contributed almost all the hierarchs from Wallachia at that time: the Metropolitan Dositei Filitti and the bishops Costandie from Buzău and Iosif from Argeș, other clergy, headed by Archimandrite Nicodim Greceanu. In terms of content, the work consisted of homilies on all Sundays, at royal feasts and at great saints, most of which were translated from Slavonic and Greek. Crafts printers were Dimitrie Mihai Popovici and his son, Gheorghe.

The masterpiece of Bishop Sofronie, during his stay in Bucharest, also includes other works: Sunday Lessons, a Catechism, a Book about the three religions - Christian, Jewish and Mohammedan, and an Autobiography. They all remained in manuscript.

Also from Bucharest, Bishop Sofronie also conducted a fruitful political activity, especially during the Russian-Turkish War from 1806-1812. He was a member and then chairman of the Bulgarian Committee in Bucharest, who supported the liberation of his country from the Turks, in 1810, published in Bucharest a *Proclamation to the Bulgarian people*, in which he urged his countrymen to help the Russian troops. He died in 1813 at the Mărcuța monastery near Bucharest³⁹.

Another personality of the Bulgarian church who came in the Romanian provinces it was the Archimandrite Polycarp. First he served as an abbot of the Romanian monasteries dedicated to Saint Catherine Monastery from Mount Sinai: Mărgineni and Râmnicu Sărat. Later he was elected bishop of Patara; he also chose to remain on Romanian land in Galați and

³⁹ For more information see: Dobrescu, N. *Contributions to the History of the Romanian Church in the fifteenth century*, Bucharest, 1907; Moiescu, G., Ștefan Lupșa and Alexandru Filipașcu, *The Romanian Church History*, vol. I-II, The Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church Publishing House, Bucharest, 1957; Mateescu, T. *From the Diocese of Cerven ties with the Romanian Countries (XVII-XIX)*, in "The Romanian Orthodox Church" year XCIV (1976), no. 1-2; Păcurariu, M. *The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church* (3 volumes), 3rd edition, Trinitas Publishing House, Iași, 2004-2008; Iorga, N. *The Romanian Church History and the religious life of the Romanians*, Vol. I-II, Bucharest, 2012.

Buzău, where he dies in 1865.

Through the Romanian Countries has worn his steps Natanail too, originally from Macedonia and future Metropolitan of Ohrid and Plovdiv. During his studies at the Academy from Kiev he was a colleague of Melchisedec Ștefănescu, the future bishop and one of the best Romanian scholars hierarchs in the nineteenth century. He was several years abbot at Dobrovăț.

It should be noted that in the first half of the nineteenth century, more young Bulgarians came to study in Bucharest. Among them was and monk Neofit from Rila, who opened in Gabrovo, in 1835, the first elementary school in Bulgaria and then led the first Bulgarian high-school in the same city.

The first Bulgarian Primer (Bukvar) made by Dr. Petar Beron was edited in Brașov in 1824, with the help of the Bulgarian merchants in this town. In 1825, Vasile Nenovici has printed a Bible History, and in 1826, a new edition of Bukvar, appeared in Brașov as well. In 1842, the renowned typographer Zaharia Carcalechi from Buda printed, also in Brasov, a new Bukvar in Bulgarian that reached 15 editions⁴⁰.

Parallel to these textbooks there were printed in Bucharest several religious books in Bulgarian. Thus, in 1825, it appeared a Breviary (reissued in 1828) and in 1828, appeared the Four Gospels, translated and printed by Priest Serafim from Stara Zagora and Petar Sapunov from Treavna (both refugees in Wallachia) of exhortation and with the material support of Metropolitan Grigorie the Teacher. It can be noted the fact that the Metropolitan Grigorie corresponded with the Ecumenical Patriarch Agathangel (1826-1830). The theme of these letters was the printing of the first edition of the New Testament in Bulgarian. At the insistences of the Romanian Metropolitan (he sent to the Ecumenical Patriarch a part of the translation, for research), the Patriarchate of Constantinople has given its consent. In the preface of the work, Petar Sapunov reminded with gratitude by the material and moral help of the Metropolitan Grigorie.

In 1833, in Bucharest there was printed the second edition of the Four Gospels in Bulgarian. Appeared with Romanian support, this work played an important role in shaping the modern literary Bulgarian language and

⁴⁰ Păcurariu, M. *The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, vol. III, 2nd edition, The Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church Publishing House, Bucharest, 1994, 397.

in awakening the religious and Bulgarian national conscience.

After 1850, there were printed in Romania other books in Bulgarian as well, especially textbooks. There were published the first newspapers and magazines in Bucharest, Giurgiu, Ploiești and Brăila by Bulgarian scholars emigrated in the north of the Danube. In 1853, 1857 and 1859 there were printed in Bucharest other editions of the New Testament in Bulgarian, translated by Neofit of Rila. Bulgarian Schools were founded, also Bulgarian revolutionary committees and cultural associations. Great Bulgarian patriots: George Racovschi, Lyuben Karavelov, Hristo Botev and the Hierodeacon Vasil Levski and many others have worked in several Romanian cities (Bucharest, Giurgiu, Galați, Brăila, etc.).

Also during this period many Bulgarian craftsmen (painters and sculptors), trained at famous schools from Treavna, Debar, Samocov and Bansko, worked in churches from Romania (especially in Dobrogea).

The close links between the two sister churches continued after 1872, when it was constituted a Synod of the Bulgarian Church and the Metropolitan Antim was declared Exarch of them, headquartered in Constantinople. The attitude of the Ecumenical Patriarch Antonie VI and his council, which declared schismatic Bulgarian Church did not influence in any way the liturgical good relations (and not only) of Romanian and Bulgarian. The Romanian Orthodox Church, through its hierarchs, priests and faithful people, urged permanently the schism raising which happened only in 1945⁴¹. After 1882, for the cultic needs, the Romanian Orthodox Church sent the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the Holy and Great Chrism, and in May 1884 the learned bishop Melchisedec of Roman made a study trip in Bulgaria, investigating several religious centers (Rusciuk, Târnovo, Gabrovo, Lovech, Pleven), being received by the hierarchs of the place, some of them former colleagues from the Academy of spiritual studies in Kiev. In the early years of the twentieth century, feeling the need for a Romanian church in Sofia, the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, according to the canons, asked the Will of the Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church for raising the new settlement. At the dedication of the holy place in 1923, Romanian and Bulgarian hierarchs and clergy concelebrated together.

It is notable that, currently, both the Romanian community in Bulgaria and the Bulgarian community in Romania have a church of their own.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 398.

The collaboration between the two sister Churches manifested through numerous official visits. Thus, in 1925, at the enthronement of the Patriarch Miron of Romania attended a Bulgarian delegation, whose members were remembered at services, along with other Orthodox Churches delegations present then in Bucharest.

In the spring of 1953, when the Bulgarian Orthodox Church has re-established the old patriarchal chair at the religious celebrations that took place in Sofia attended a delegation of the Romanian Orthodox Church, led by the Patriarch Justinian Marina (in the 29 years of patriarchy, Justinian Marina visited the Bulgarian Orthodox Church three times). A year later, the Patriarch Kiril of Bulgaria visited the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Patriarch Kiril was Romanian maternal, with a doctorate in theology from Cernauti (important interwar Romanian university center, today in Ukraine). Besides Bucharest, the Bulgarian high hierarch wanted to visit cities like Curtea de Arges (place that Basarabi rulers reign link of from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the beginning of the fight against the Ottoman invaders, and the becoming related as in-laws of the Romanian voivodes and the Bulgarian tsars) and Craiova⁴².

Between 10 and 17 October 1972 a delegation of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, led by Patriarch Maxim, made a new visit to the Romanian Orthodox Church, at the invitation of Patriarch Justinian Marina⁴³. Other visits of Bulgarian Patriarch in Romania took place in 1986, first at the funeral of Patriarch Iustin Moiescu and then the enthronement of Patriarch Teoctist Arăpașu.

In September 1993 a delegation of the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, led by the Patriarch Teoctist Arăpașu, visited the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. After a short stop made at the museum in Ruse, the Romanian hierarchs visited the town Târnovo, one of the former capitals of Bulgaria. At the monastery Saints Peter and Paul, the Romanian delegation was met by the Patriarch Maxim of Bulgaria and other Bulgar-

⁴² Plămădeală, An. *On the trace of a friendship for centuries*, in „The Romanian Orthodox Church” LXXII (1954), no. 11-12; Iufu, I. *Cultural and religious Romanian-Bulgarian links, during the Romanian Science Week in P.R. Bulgaria (1955, December 23 to 30)*, in the magazine „The Romanian Orthodox Church”, LXXIII (1955), no. 5, 413-418.

⁴³ Rădulescu, A.C. *The visit of His Holiness Maxim, Patriarch of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in Romania*, in the magazine „The Romanian Orthodox Church”, XC (1972), no. 9-10; Antonie Plămădeală, *The line of the traditional relations between Romania and Bulgaria*, in the magazine „The Romanian Orthodox Church”, XCII (1974), no. 5-6.

ian senior prelates. From the word of Father Patriarch Teoctist it could be noted that from all the relationships, interests and common goods of Romanians and Bulgarians, it was the oldest was the religious one. The two nations have been communicating for over a millennium in the same faith, in which they have always felt united. No one and nothing could lead them to forget about the communion of faith. Both Romanians and Bulgarians resisted the Turkish oppression, especially through their religious feeling⁴⁴.

To the visits mentioned above, some other visits or participation of delegations led by metropolitans can be added.

So, between the Romanian and the Bulgarian, brothers in Orthodoxy, there have existed since ancient times close relationships that were based on a profound religious feeling and a steadfast ancient faith.

Friendship relations between the two sister Churches, Romanian and Bulgarian have existed ever since the beginning of the second millennium, when the Bulgarian Church exercised a beneficent influence on the church life of Romanians situated in the north of the Danube. There are known until nowadays the influences on the Bulgarian monasticism on the Romanian one, Saint Nicodim of Tismana` dialogue with Saint Eftimie, the last patriarch of Târnovo, etc. These good relations have continued throughout the following centuries and intensified in the times of crisis they have crossed along the Bulgarian people`s history. Many Romanian rulers, scholars, noblemen and bishops in the XVII and XVIII century have contributed to raising churches in the south of the Danube, have also supported some bishops in difficulty (Cerven), have printed books of worship for the spiritual benefit of the Bulgarian believers, have received priests and monks repudiated across the Danube because of the Turkish persecution.

The Romanian Patriarchal insistence for the recognition of the Bulgarian autocephaly, procurement of the Holy Great Myrrh by the Bulgarian Church from Bucharest, the existence of some Bulgarian communities and churches in our country and the existence of a Romanian community and church in Sofia, amply testified the existence and the importance of the soul and church bonds between the two peoples, bonds that were permanent and unchangeable. The Community of faith and Orthodox piety was known and felt in all circumstances; it has lived in the consciousness of our

⁴⁴ Florea, L. *The visit of His Holiness Patriarch Teoctist in Bulgaria (September 17 to 20, 1993)*, in „The Romanian Orthodox Church”, year CXI (1993), no. 7-9, 3-11.

peoples even when it was not able to manifest in official and solemn forms.

These relations were strengthened more and took a larger scale after lifting the Bulgarian Church to the rank of Patriarchate, ceremony that the Patriarch Justinian Marina, Primate of the Romanian Orthodox Church attended at. At the time, the ecclesiastical periodicals from Romania have reported extensively on receipt of warmth that enjoyed Romanian Patriarch and the other members of the Romanian delegation church in Bulgaria.

With the same sympathy and respect was greeted in Romania the Patriarch Cyril of Bulgaria and the delegation he led. His desire to visit Curtea de Argeş, one of the old political and ecclesiastical residences of Romanians and Craiova, the capital of the province Oltenia, produced a strong impression among the faithful people of these cities.

The next visits undertaken by the Patriarch Maxim in Bucharest in October 1972 and by the Patriarch Teoctist in Sofia, in September 1993, marked another important milestone on the map of the good links between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

This collaboration has continued through other mutual visits by delegations of teachers, but also by exchange students.

All these have contributed to strengthening the centuries friendship between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and between the Romanian and the Bulgarian people as well.