

MODALITIES TO EXPLOIT THE ESTATES OWNED BY STREHAIA MONASTERY*

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Abstract: A monastery from the region of Oltenia, founded by the family Craiovescu, who embellished and endowed it with estates, the monastery of Strehaia, represents an important Romanian religious and cultural objective. Since its construction, it received numerous estates from its founders. To these donations, there were also added the buying of other estates, done by the Father Superiors of the monastery, along the time. In order to exploit the vast landed domain that the monastery owned, there were used the socmen, who were living on the estate. The relations on addressing the services, between them and the monastery, were evidenced by the juridical regulations from the end of the 18th century, and the first half of the 19th century. The socmen were obliged to do the corvee and to sharecrop, as they had been stipulated in Caragea's Law and the Organic Regulation. The corvee days that they had to do and the crops that they had to share, from each product that they were obtaining, were different from one estate, to the other.

For the socmen from the estate of Strehaia, the Organic Regulations did not bring new obligations. They had to work for as many corvee hours as before, as it had been established in Caragea's Law, and if they could not perform their duties, they had to pay with money (12 thalers). Besides the corvee days, the socmen had to give the monastery a cart of logs. If they did not have the necessary means for transporting the logs, they would have to pay three lei. The socmen from this estate had to share the crops with the monastery, all the products that they had obtained after the cultivation of land.

The socmen from Breznița-Motru estate had to do the number of corvee days, which had been established in Caragea's Law and the Organic Regulation.

In conclusion, we can assert that, along the entire period of the Organic Regulations, the monastery of Strehaia, for a better exploitation of the vast landed domain that it owned, resorted to the lease-holding system. On these estates, the manpower was provided by socmen, permanently dissatisfied with the severe labour conditions and the taxes that they had to face.

Keywords: Strehaia Monastery, the corvee, the estates, Caragea's Law, Organic Regulation.

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A monastery from the region of Oltenia, founded by the family Craiovescu, who embellished and endowed it with estates, the monastery of Strehaia, represents an important Romanian religious and cultural objective. Since its construction, it received numerous estates from its founders. To these donations, there were also added the buying of other estates, done by the Father Superiors of the monastery, along the time. In order to exploit the vast landed domain that the monastery owned, there were used the socmen, who were living on the estate. The relations on addressing the services, between them and the monastery, were evidenced by the juridical regulations from the end of the 18th century, and the first half of the 19th century. The socmen were obliged to do the corvee and to sharecrop, as they had been stipulated in Caragea's Law and the Organic Regulation. The corvee days that they had to do and the crops that they had to share, from each product that they were obtaining, were different from one estate, to the other.

For the socmen from the estate of Strehaia, the Organic Regulations did not bring new obligations. They had to work for as many corvee hours as before, as it had been established in Caragea's Law, and if they could not perform their duties, they had to pay with money (12 thalers)¹. Besides the corvee days, the socmen had to give the monastery a cart of logs. If they did not have the necessary means for transporting the logs, they would have to pay three lei. The socmen from this estate had to share the crops with the monastery, all the products that they had obtained after the cultivation of land. The exception was the hay, which was shared as money². The hard working conditions and the increasing demands of Father Superiors of the monastery, determined the socmen to address to the state's authorities, trying to obtain an improvement in their situation. In 1833, the socmen complained to Pavel Kisseleff, denouncing that Axente, the Father Superior of the monastery, along with Dinu Stolojeanu, and the leaseholder of Strehaia estate, refused to tithe the corn, justifying that its price was very low (5 lei). The unsatisfied villagers were showing that the corn they had obtained remained unharvested, most of the crop being rotten of the field³. Towards the end of 1833, the socmen denounced to the Administration of Mehedinți County, the abuses they were subjected to, by the Father Superior of Strehaia monastery and the leaseholder of the estate, requesting the sending of a person to recording their claims on the spot⁴. In January 1834, Chancellor Dincă Stolojanu, the leaseholder of the estate, addressed to the Administration of Mehedinți County, sustaining that 24 dwellers from the village of Strehaia, in the fall of 1833, destroyed his sowings and broke into his barns, stealing 600 bushels of corn. He asked that the Administration to

¹ Mehedinți County Service of the National Archives (it will be further quoted SJAN Mehedinți), Prefect's Office of Mehedinți County, file 1(1160)/1833, f. 343.

² *Ibidem*, file 17(1847)/1831, f. 274-275.

³ C. A. Protopopescu, *Strehaia în istorie*, Bucharest, Paco Publishing, w.y., p. 262.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 263.

designate a representative who would investigate the claims⁵. The harsh working conditions and the increasing taxes that they had to pay, determined some socmen from Strehaia to run and seek refuge on other estates. In February 1834, Chancellor Dincă Stolojanul asked the Administrator of Mehedinți County to send gendarmes and beaters, who would bring back on Strehaia estate, five of the families who had fled. Among them, there were: Pătru Viașu, Vasile Radu Vulturu, Nicolae Cârciumaru, Dumitru, the son-in-law of Grigore and Stan Dincă Buțu⁶. It was also February 1834, when the leaseholder of the estate addressed again to the Administration of Mehedinți County, asking to send many “boyars” who would measure the land for farming and grazing, which was supposed to be given to the socmen⁷. The misunderstandings between socmen and leaseholders continued until 1835. On the 25th of July, Dincă Stolojanu addressed a letter to the deputy-administration of Motru district, asking that the dwellers from the village of Strehaia to be compelled to give compensations to the monastery, because they had been abusively using some orchards and lands of the monastery, for four years, without having any previous arrangement with the Father Superior. He was also mentioning that, although they had warned the socmen not to use them anymore, they refused to subject to the decision⁸. On the 12th of December 1837, the cupbearer boyar Ioniță Mavrodin, who had been appointed by the Internal Judicial Office to participate to the measurement of the imparted acres, noticed the Administration of Mehedinți County that he reached an agreement with the socmen from Strehaia, who accepted to pay additionally for the received land⁹. On the 22nd of August 1837, the leaseholder of the estate, Dincă Stolojanu, addressed to the Sub-administration of Mehedinți County, sustaining that, although he had agreed with all the socmen to share the wheat and oat crops, the ones from Hușnița quarter did not respect the agreement, deciding to give them sheaves¹⁰. The flight of the socmen continued to take place, during 1843 too. In the month of September of the same year, unsatisfied with the fact that more and more socmen were leaving the estate, the Father Superior demanded the Sub-administration to send more gendarmes that would bring the fugitives back¹¹. Observing that the state’s authorities did not take any measures in this respect, in October and November 1843, the Father Superior sent two other addresses, soliciting to be sent urgently gendarmes that would bring back the fugitives on the estate of Strehaia, but without an obvious result¹². In February 1844, the Father Superior addressed again to the

⁵ SJAN Mehedinți, Prefect’s Office of Mehedinți County, file 91(6382)/1834, f. 7.

⁶ *Ibidem*, f. 20.

⁷ *Ibidem*, file 27(6306)/1834, f. 2.

⁸ *Ibidem*, file 91(6382)/1834, f. 357.

⁹ *Ibidem*, file 27(6306)/1834, f. 552.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, file 91(6382)/1834, f. 1200.

¹¹ C. A. Protopopescu, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

¹² *Ibidem*.

authorities, asserting that, using their own resources, they managed to bring back four families, from the ones that had fled: “They were brought out 4-5 guys, but others were not able to bring that I had no help”¹³. He asked for the estates owners where the fled socmen had settled, to be warned, and to return them to the monastery¹⁴. The misunderstandings between the socmen who remained on the estate and the leaseholder Dincă Stolojanu continued in 1844-1845 too. In August 1845, the leaseholder was complaining to the Sub-administration that the villagers from the estate of Strehaia were refusing to sharecrop the corn¹⁵. In October 1845, the Father Superior complained to the Administration of Mehedinți County arguing that residents refused to perform plowing of autumn: “do not want to go out with plows what we do on this land autumn plowing and by no means unwilling to submit to fulfil even their liability under the statutes rule”¹⁶.

The socmen from Slătiniu estate had to do the number of corvee days, which had been established in Caragea’s Law and the Organic Regulation¹⁷. Besides the corvee days, the socmen had to give the monastery a cart of logs. If they did not have the necessary means for transporting the logs, they would have to pay three lei. The socmen from this estate had to share the crops with the monastery, all the products that they had obtained after the cultivation of land¹⁸.

The socmen from Breznița-Motru estate had to do the number of corvee days, which had been established in Caragea’s Law and the Organic Regulation¹⁹. On the 26th of July 1832, Ion Ciocazan, the deputy-administrator of Motru districts, informed the Administration of Mehedinți County about the discontents of the villagers from Breznița. He was showing that the people who were collecting the taxes, obliged the villagers to pay more for the wine and wheat that had obtained. He was also saying that the leaseholder of the estate, Dincă Stolojanu, up until July 1832, did not collect the metayage and the corvee from the villagers²⁰. In 1833, 1,200 families of socmen from Breznița, unsatisfied with the way in which they were required by Dincă Stolojanu to sharecrop, they addressed to the Administration of Mehedinți County, asking for a high official to be appointed, who would solve their request. In the month of November, the same year, the Administration appointed the Chancellor Nae Dobriceanu. Instead of investigating the claims of the socmen, he ordered for them to be brought to monastery and beaten. Some of them, in order to escape from the torment they had been subjected

¹³ *Ibidem.*

¹⁴ *Ibidem.*

¹⁵ *Ibidem.*

¹⁶ *Ibidem.*

¹⁷ SJAN Mehedinți, Prefect’s Office of Mehedinți County, file 91(6382)/1834, f. 612.

¹⁸ *Ibidem.*

¹⁹ *Ibidem.*

²⁰ Elena Jianu-Tutunaru, C. A. Protopopescu, *Istoria așezării Breznița-Motru*, Bucharest, Paco Publishing, 2009, p. 35.

to, declared that they are satisfied with the way in which the leaseholder Dincă Stolojanu was treating them²¹. The misunderstandings between the socmen and the leaseholder continued for the next year too. On the 21st of March 1834, the socmen complained at the Internal Judicial Office about the abuses that they endured from the Father Superior of the monastery and the leaseholder of the estate. They requested to be appointed “a new high official, who would investigate more cautiously their complaints”²². The Judicial Office did not solve the petition of the socmen, preferring to send it, for solving, to the Administration. There were not only the socmen who addressed to the Administration, but also the representatives of the monastery, discontented about the way in which the villagers were carrying out their duties. On the 30th of March, the same year, monk Acsinte, who was holding the position of copyholder, through princely agreement, on the estates from Strehaia, complained to the Internal Judicial Office, against the insurgents from the villages of Strehaia, Breznița and Rocșoreni, sustaining that they were provoking the other people to rise in rebellion²³. The disagreements between the socmen from Breznița estate and Strehaia monastery, continued on the entire year of 1834. On the 17th of November, the villagers complained to the Administration, showing that the leaseholder of the estate did not observe the previous agreements, asking them to pay more than in the anterior years. They claimed that for the grazing of small beasts, they had to pay 20 farthings, not 10, as they had paid before. The socmen asked the Administration to order the leaseholder to observe the agreement that they had concluded²⁴. On the 6th of October 1836, the leaseholder of the estate, Dincă Stolojan, addressed to the deputy-administrator of Motru district, pretending that numerous dwellers from the village of Breznița were refusing to sharecrop the corn, preferring to hide it in barns. He was also mentioning that the villagers tried to reduce the quantity of brandy that they had to give to the monastery, pretending that an alembic of brandy has only 30-36 gallons. Under these circumstances, they had to give only 4 gallons. The Epist Dincă Stolojanu solicited the designation of a committee that would check the barns and the barrels, and to register the discovered quantities. He was also requesting that the guilty ones to be obliged to pay the double, and, if refusing, to be punished “as an example for the other who would do the same”²⁵. The Sub-administration of Motru district designated a committee that would check the declarations of the leaseholder. The way in which the members of the committee carried out their attributions, generated dissatisfaction among the dwellers who were claiming that the designated officials added more bushels when sharecropped the corn and the brandy, considering the

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 36-37.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 36.

²³ SJAN Mehedinți, Prefect's Office of Mehedinți County, file 27(6306)/1834, f. 24, 26; Elena Jianu-Tutunaru, C. A. Protopopescu, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

²⁴ SJAN Mehedinți, Prefect's Office of Mehedinți County, file 18(2209)/1834, f. 287.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, file 91(6382)/1834, f. 942; Elena Jianu-Tutunaru, C. A. Protopopescu, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

alembic as holding 21 gallons. Next year, on the 16th of August, the socmen complained to the Sub-administration of Motru district and the Internal Judicial Office, claiming that the leaseholder of the estate did not want to receive the metayage for wheat (one sheaf for ten), but in seeds. As for the hay, Dincă Stolojanu, was requesting to pay with money²⁶. After these complaints, the Internal Judicial Office sent the high official Ioniță Mavrodin to investigate the situation depicted by the socmen. After the investigations, on the 12th of December 1837, he addressed to the Administration of Mehedinți County, sustaining that he convinced the socmen from the villages of Strehaia, Breznița and Albulești to accept to pay more for the land they had received, “this way, neither would the monks lose, nor the peasants would suffer”²⁷. Breznița estate was leased in 1843 to Polizu. On the 3rd of April 1843, being unsatisfied with the fact that some of the socmen had fled from Breznița estate, which was belonging to Strehaia monastery, and settled on other lands, he addressed to the Administration of Mehedinți County, asking for gendarmes to be sent, who would bring back the fugitives. He was also mentioning that some of the leaseholders of the estates, where the socmen were settling, were asking money to the monastery, in order to allow their return²⁸. On the 29th of April 1845, the Father Superior of Strehaia monastery addressed to the Sub-administration of Motru de Jos district, claiming that the villagers from Breznița estate were refusing to sharecrop the hay. He asked to the Sub-administration to take the necessary measures, in order to determine the socmen to accept to sharecrop the hay, under the conditions requested by the leaseholder²⁹. In the same year, on the 14th of September, the Father Superior of the monastery addressed to the Sub-administration of Motru de Jos district, asking them to order the socmen to divide the corn in ten piles, when they would harvest it, in order to sharecrop faster³⁰. On the 26th of September 1845, the Father Superior of the monastery addressed to the Sub-administration, asking to impose to the leaders of the village, the priest and the chancellor to participate to the wine weighing³¹. On the 14th of October 1845, the Sub-administration of Motru de Jos district addressed to the leaders of Breznița village, asking them to warn the socmen from the estate that, in no more than three days, to divide the harvested corn in ten piles, in order to be easier to be sharecropped by the leaseholder, and to announce the Father Superior of the monastery, about the date when they want to sharecrop³². In case that they were not observing the rules, the socmen were to be harshly punished. The leaders of the village and the dweller from Breznița estate, did not observe the requests of

²⁶ SJAN Mehedinți Prefect's Office of Mehedinți County, file 91(6382)/1834, f. 1096; Elena Jianu-Tutunaru, C. A. Protopopescu, *op. cit.*, p. 38-39.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 40.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 44.

the monastery. That situation determined the Father Superior of the monastery to address again to the Sub-administration of Motru de Jos district, sustaining that the socmen from Breznița refused to distribute corn in ten piles, and they put it in their barns, avoiding in this way to be sharecropped. He asked for a gendarme to be assigned for compelling the peasants to divide the corn in ten piles. Ten days later, the Father Superior of Strehaia monastery, unsatisfied that the socmen had refused to do the autumn ploughing, addressed again to the Sub-administration, asking for actions against them³³.

The socmen from Rocșoreni estate had the obligation that, in exchange for 12 days of corvee that they had to do, to pay 12 thalers annually. They had to pay with money for the cart of logs (3 thalers) and the ploughing day (1 leu). They had to sharecrop for every products that they obtained after the cultivation of the land, to the monastery, representing the tenth part of the harvest. The exception was the metayage for hay, which was paid with money. For the wine that they obtained, after the exploitation of the vineyards that belonged to the monastery's estate, the socmen had to give three gallons. For their sheep to graze on the commons of the monastery, the villagers from Rocșoreni had to give, each of them, a lamb and common pasture from the cheese. Every year, the monastery also received from the socmen 2-3 hens³⁴. The harsh working conditions and the permanently increasing duties, determined the villagers from Rocșoreni to revolt against the monastery and the leaseholder. On the 20th of March 1834, monk Acsinte, appointed copyholder on the estates of the monastery, through a princely decree, addressed to the High Internal Judicial Office, claiming that 8 villagers from Rocșoreni revolted and advised the other dwellers of the village to not agree with the rules. He asked for a person to investigate the declarations and to take the necessary measures. High Internal Judicial Office gave a disposition to the Administration of Mehedinți County to research the complaint of the monk, and to take the necessary measures, for re-establishing the order³⁵. The disagreements between the leaseholder and the socmen continued during the entire year of 1834. On the 12th of May, the socmen from Rocșoreni complained to the Administration of Mehedinți County, sustaining that the leaseholder Dincă Stolojanu left for grazing only a small part of the commons, the rest keeping for him. They were also mentioning that, in order benefit again from the access to the entire area, they had to reach a new agreement with the leaseholder, paying new taxes³⁶. In April 1836, the archimandrite Acsente addressed to the Administration of Mehedinți County, sustaining that the previous year, when the agreements had been concluded, with all the socmen from all the estates of the monastery, and the legal imparted had been assigned, the villagers from Rocșoreni refused to settle an agreement, and in the spring of the same year,

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 44-45.

³⁴ SJAN Dolj, Prefect's Office of Mehedinți County, file 17(1847)/1831, f. 302-308.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, file 27(6306)/1834, f. 24, 26.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, f. 56.

they had tried to extend the surfaces that were not theirs. They asked the Administration to take the necessary measures for the villagers from Rocșoreni to conclude the new agreements and to not use abusively the land surfaces that they were not entitled to. The Administration gave the necessary orders to the Sub-administration of Motru district to act in such a manner that the villagers from Rocșoreni to reach an agreement with the Father Superior³⁷. On the 12th of December 1837, the official Ioniță Mavrodin, who had been appointed by the Internal Judicial Office to participate to the measurement of the imparted acres, noticed the Administration of Mehedinți County that he had reached an agreement with the socmen from different estates of Strehaia monastery, to pay additionally for the received land. He was showing that, not being able to travel to Rocșoreni, due to the impracticable road, he called the counsellor of the village and some of the socmen at Breznița, but the last ones did not accept the new conditions of agreement: “They began to cry and not know any transformation in their debts or count what is legally”³⁸. The official Ioniță Mavrodin came forward with the proposal that, for solving the situation, to be brought in front of the administrators, the both sides, the socmen and the Father Superior of the monastery. In July 1839, Theoharie, the new leaseholder of Rocșoreni estate, addressed to the Administration of Mehedinți County, claiming that the villagers from the estate refused to reach an agreement, trespassing though the commons and causing damages. He was also showing that the villages from the estate had had an agreement with the former leaseholder, Dimitrie Pleniceanu, to have their ploughing acres and commons measured. On the 27th of July 1839, the Administration asked the Sub-administration of Dumbrava district to investigate the situation presented by the new leaseholder, and to take the necessary measures that are imposing for keeping the order on Rocșoreni estate³⁹.

In conclusion, we can assert that, along the entire period of the Organic Regulations, the monastery of Strehaia, for a better exploitation of the vast landed domain that it owned, resorted to the lease-holding system. On these estates, the manpower was provided by socmen, permanently dissatisfied with the severe labour conditions and the taxes that they had to face.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, Sub-administration of Motru district, file 91(6382)/1834, f. 626.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, file 27(6306)/1834, f. 552.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, Sub-administration of Dumbrava District, file 216(2247)/1838, f. 371.