

Sokol ÇUNGA*

THE MONASTERY OF ST. JOHN THE VLADIMIR AND ITS ACTIVITY AS RECORDED BY THE DOCUMENTS OF THE CENTRAL STATE ARCHIVE

Abstract: Among the fonts of the Central State Archive, one of them is the collection of the “Monastery of the Saint John the Vladimir” (no. 138). These documents bear testimony, mainly, to the pastoral activity of the monastery, but also of its economical activity. The biggest part of the documents (10 registers), contain information about: the incomes and expenses of the monastery, its properties, buying and selling of properties, the names of those that were baptized, married or had their funeral service effectuated by the vicar of the monastery. Some of the documents contain chronics, as it is that about the travel of one of the abbots of the monastery to the Holy Land, chronics from the life of different hieromonachs who have served in the monastery, or copies of earlier chronics regarding the history of the monastery. These documents date from the middle of the 17th century, to the years ‘30 of the 20th century.

It is of much interest to follow, through these documents, a part of the daily life of the monastery. The gifts dedicated quite often to the monastery, the preference of the Christians of the region for receiving the sacraments from the priests of this monastery, the systematic way in which is kept the inventory of the properties of the monastery, also the fact that the monastery was administered by a commission whose chair was the Metropolitan of Durres, show that the Monastery of St. John the Vladimir was frequently in the center of the attention for the local Christians.

Key words: *Saint John the Vladimir; Monastery of Saint John the Vladimir; Central State Archive of Tirana, Albania*

Among the fonts of the Central State Archive, one of them is the collection of the “Monastery of the Saint John the Vladimir” (Font no. 138). In this font of documents are gathered all the archival materials that reached the CSA after the year 1944, documents that were connected to the Monastery of St. John the Vladimir. Meanwhile, other documents regarding the Monastery may be also found in other archival fonts.

* Sokol Çunga, Central State Archive, Tirana, Albania

The Font of the Monastery of St. John the Vladimir contains 20 folders, in total 838 folios, where each folder contains an unequal number of folios, depending on the type of the document, which varies from single leaf documents, to regesta. It looks that the classification of the documentary material has been random, without following the chronologic order, contrary to the regulation of the archival work. This is clearly shown by the date of the folders. Thus, e. g., Folder no. 1 (4 folios), contains a chronicle dating from 1863, Folder no. 8 (a register) contains different documents dating between 1835 and 1867, while Folder no. 3 (a register) dates between 1849–1890. The same irregularity can be noticed in the other folders.

DATING OF DOCUMENTS AND THEIR TYPES

The CSA collection of documents does not cover the entire lifespan of the Monastery and appears really poor. The oldest document is found in Folder no. 8, dating from year 1835, probably on the month of December¹, while the latest dates from year 1937 (Folder 6) [*Image 1*]. The documents are present in the form of: *a*) single leaf documents: Folders nos. 2, 4, 5, 6, 12, 14; *b*) several folios containing the same document: Folders nos. 1, 7, 13, 15, 16, 17; and *c*) registers: Folders nos. 3, 8, 9, 10, 11, 18, 19, 20. The last category, the registers, do not have a single content, they cover a mixture of thematic. Nevertheless, we will try to give a general description of the types of documents, as follows:

1. *Financial reports*, found in all registers (as mentioned above: Folders nos. 1, 7, 13, 15, 16, 17). The most common type of document that belongs to the collection of the Monastery is the periodical financial report of incomes and expenses. It seems that the reports were not done according to a specific rule, but randomly after the request of the Metropolitan of Durrës. This can be seen in Folder 8, f. 1^v, where the account starts: “On the year 1835, the abbot of the Monastery of St. John the Vladimir gave his financial account, after the request of the Metropolitan of Durrës, Gregorios”. The report gives a detailed account of the incomes of the Monastery during the calendar year 1835. On the next page, f. 2^r, is found the report of the expenses of the Monastery for the same year. This rule (incomes followed by expenses) is followed in all cases where documents contain financial reports. At the end of each report is found the signature of the Metropolitan of Durrës, followed by the signatures of the Custodians (*Epitrops*). It is pretty normal to see the signature of the Metropolitan of Durrës here, since the territory in which the Monastery is found was under

¹ Folder no 8, f. 1^v, it is the financial report of the year 1935.

the jurisdiction of the Metropoly of Durrës. This reality changed only recently, in April 2016², when the Metropoly of Elbasan and Shpat was created. The place of assembly of the Custodians is not always mentioned in the reports. We suggest that in this case the place was the Monastery itself. In another case, in Folder no. 8, f. 6^v, the Custodians were assembled and prepared the financial report of the year 1867 at the Cathedral Church of Neokastron (Elbasan).

While reading through the lines of these reports, it is interesting to see that the Monastery is not autonomous, it is not the brotherhood that governs the Monastery, but the Custodians of the Orthodox Community of Elbasan. The abbot of the Monastery is only charged with the responsibility to attend the Monastery, but he has no jurisdictional rights, except for practicing his pastoral obligations. This can be seen, as an example, in Folder 8, f. 3^v, where the abbot Georgios was called by the Metropolitan of Durrës to make the financial report for the years 1837–1839 in front of the Custodians.

2. *Chronicles*. We found three chronicle notes in the collection of the documents of the Monastery. The first one, Folder 1, ff. 1–2 is an account of the Archimandrite Gregorios, abbot of the Monastery, who made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in year 1863, together with Anastasios Popa [*Image 2*]. The chronicle is a later copy (20th century), probably copied by a register, that we were not able to find among the collection of documents.

Besides being a latter copy of some earlier account, the account of the Abbot about the trip to the Holy Land stops at the f. 2^v, probably because the folios were lost, and there the second chronicle note starts. This is an account about the new buildings that the same Abbot Gregorios built between the gate of the Monastery and the gate of the courtyard in year 1852. The new building also included, on its second floor, the “oda of the Tirana people” (ὄντιας τῶν Τυρανλήδων) [*Image 3*]. This brings us in front of a new aspect of the life in the Monastery: its relation with Tirana. It is very intriguing to inquire this relation, but we are not in the position to interpret this relation in this paper.

The third chronicle is found in Folder 14, f. 1, also a latter copy (20th century) of an older note that we could not detect among the collection. As the text says: “This is a copy from the old Eucologion”, meaning that this was written somewhere in the pages of a liturgical book. It is interesting to bring here the chronicle [*Image 4*]:

² <http://orthodoxalbania.org/alb/index.php/al/kisha-jone/sinodi-i-shenjte> (accessed on October 19th 2016).

“1st of September, 1835, a big fight happened here. The goddamned regular army³ fought against the goddamned Dibra and Mati people, destroying the Monastery. The holy relics and the body of the martyr were thrown around the church floor; they stole the holy vests, gospels and oil lamps. Here were some monks [namely] hieromonachos Gabriel from Tirana, pupil of father Ambrosios, monk Sofronios, the Abbot and oikonomos father George.”

The chronicle is undersigned by D. Iakovos.

Also this chronicle needs to be interpreted and confronted with other sources. Rather than the destruction of the Monastery, we were surprised by the adjective “τυρανλής”, Tirana man, given to one of the monks. Tirana, the nowadays capital, was still a village in the first half of the 19th century. Between the muslim inhabitants of the area, there was a community of Christian Orthodox, which also built the community church with its own expenses, as shown by the “Codex of St. Prokopios”⁴.

3. *Election of the custodian and Abbot.* In Folder 3, f. 37^v, is found an act of the Custodians of the Monastery. Through it we are informed that on January 12nd of the year 1898 Artemios the Pilgrim was appointed custodian and Abbot of the Monastery, by proposal of the Custodians of the Community of Elbasan, and after the agreement of the Metropolitan of Durrës, Vissarion. Hieromonach Artemios was a monk of the Monastery since April 15th, 1854 [Image 5].

4. *Donations.* As it is known from the tradition of the monasteries, they accepted gifts from all those who wanted to donate to the monastery. The same is true for the Monastery of St. John the Vladimir. A list of donations is part of the register in Folder 3, f. 143. The donations mentioned are vineyards, lands and houses [Image 6].

PROVENANCE OF THE DOCUMENTS

One of the permanent problems when studying at the CSA is to track back the provenance of the documents. The bulk quantity of the documents has reached the CSA by different means: donations (voluntary or forced donations), sales or confiscations. In the case of the Monastery collection, it was impossible to argue how the collection moved from the Monastery to the CSA. Anyway, we can bring forward some hypotheses that need to be supported later. Older archivists have kept alive the tradition of telling to the youngest, that when

³ Probably the Ottoman army.

⁴ Dh. Beduli: *Kodiku i kishës së Shën Prokopit të Tiranës (1818–1922)*, Tiranë, 1997.

the Central Historical Archive was part of the Central State Archive, under the control of the Ministry of Interior Affairs (from 1951 until 1962), each document entering the archive was matriculated with a four digit number of Arabic digits, or a six digit number that was a combination of roman and Arabic digits [see the encircled number at *Image 2*]. Judging by the 4 digit number in blue pencil, that the documents bear, we can conclude that the collection of the Fund “Monastery of St. John the Vladimir” became part of the state collections sometime between 1951 and 1963. When the whole bulk of documents compiling the CSA changed location, the record sheets that proved the provenance of the documents were kept by the archive of the Ministry of the Interior Affairs, where they, logically, should be preserved until now. While visiting that archive during the month September 2016, we were told that these documents did not exist there, without supporting this information with any reasonable explanations.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE DOCUMENTS

Since the language used traditionally by the Orthodox Church in Albania, up to 1922, was Greek, the documents of our collection of the Monastery are all written in Greek. There is only one exception, in the case of one signature. In Folder 8, ff. 1–4, etc., among the signatures of the Custodians we could detect one signature written with a local alphabet of Elbasan, known as the Alphabet of Theodore Hadjiphilipides. We could read only the name “Konstandin” on the signature [*Image 7*].

CONCLUSIONS

The collection of documents originating from the Monastery of St. John the Vladimir, as seen above, is really poor and simple. It does not preserve any documents related to the glorious times when the monastery was built. It presents, nevertheless, the everyday life of a simple monastery situated in Central Albania during the Ottoman invasion, which is, most probably, the reason of the destruction of such documents. While the collection of documents does not correspond to the glorious image of the Prince and Saint John the Vladimir, it talks about people that are united around a spiritual center, as it was typical for the orthodox community during the Ottoman period.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1] Inventory of the Fund „Saint John the Vladimir” (no. 138), Central State Archive, Tirana, Albania.
- [2] Dh. Beduli: *Kodiku i kishës së Shën Prokopit të Tiranës (1818–1922)*, Tiranë, 1997

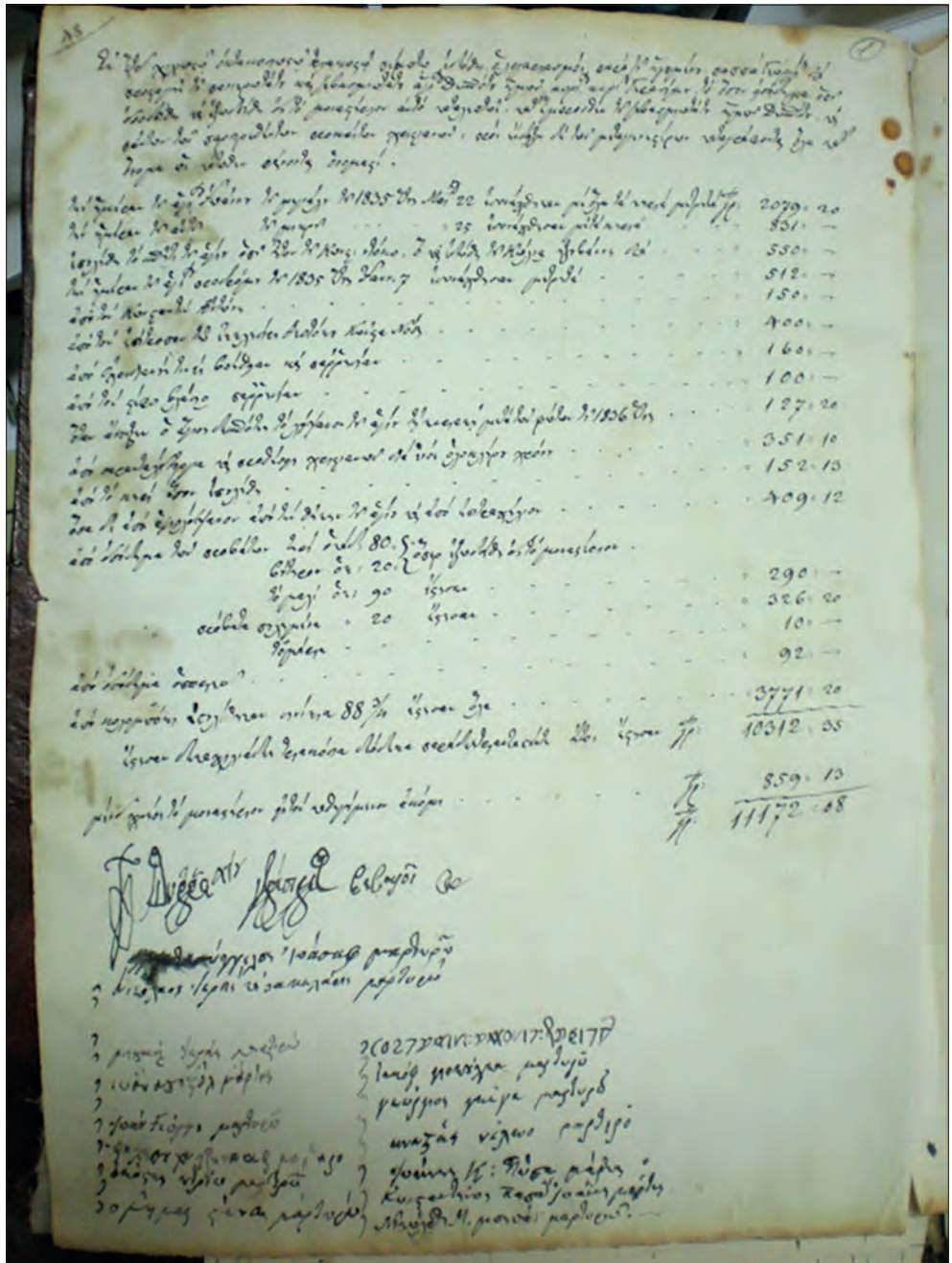


Image 1. Folder 8, folio 1v

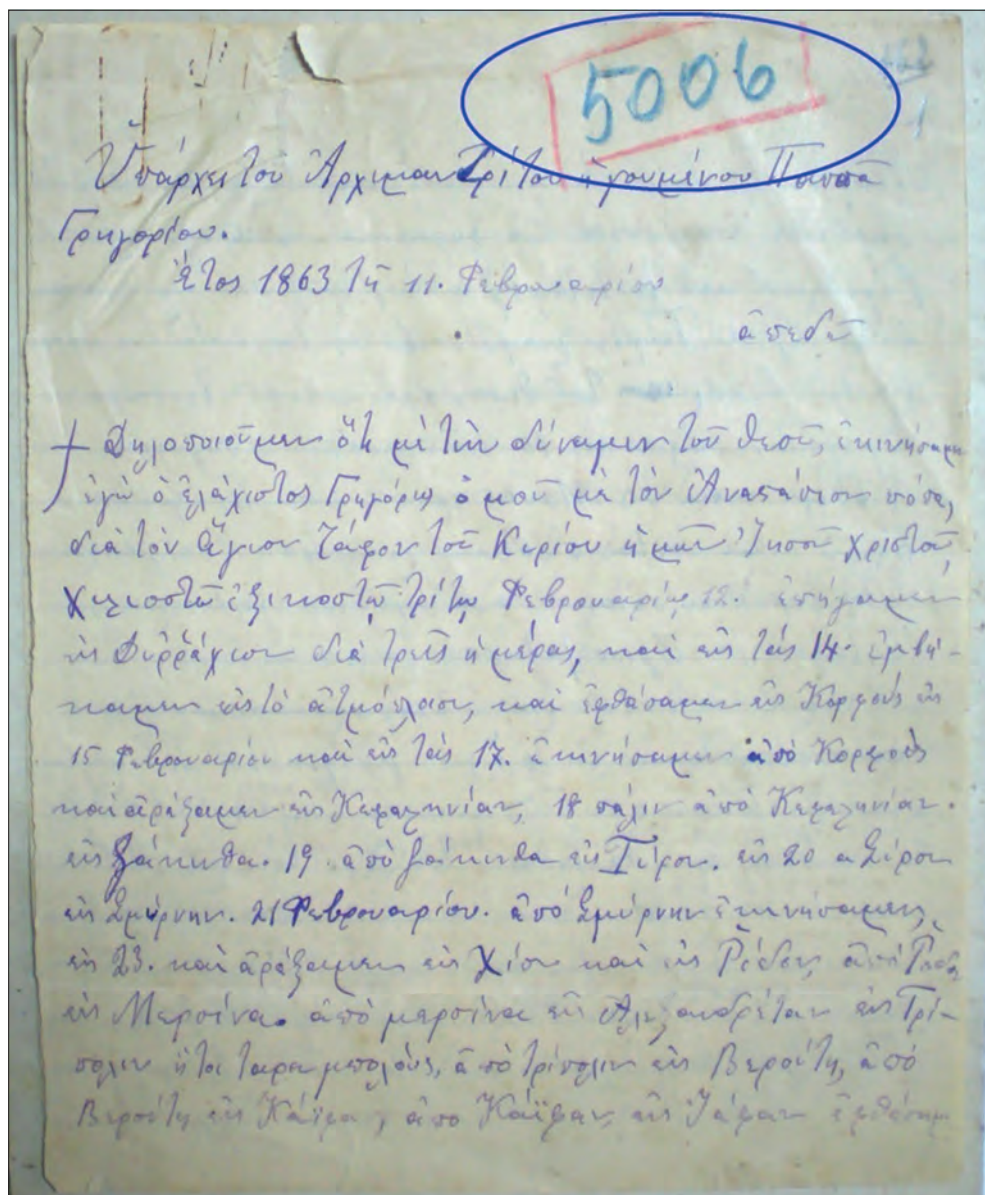


Image 2. Folder 1, the chronicle of the Abbot Gregorios in the Holy Land

3

ἴσους ἐγὼ γίνουμι σενίτα ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἔξω σογγῆα ἢ ἄλλο
 ἡγορέω. εἰς δὲ τὰ χεῖρα ὄντα ὡσαύτως σενίτα δι' ἑῶς
 ἀπὸ Χριστοῦ. ἐκὼσα τὰ νῆα κήρια, ἀπὸ τῆς πόλεως τοῦ
 Μοναστηρίου καὶ τῆς πόλεως τοῦ μεγάλου ἐσάνω καὶ
 ὄχι τοῦ ὄντα τῶν Τυρανλίδων καὶ ἐξοδῶσα πρόσωπα
 εἰς αὐτὰ χεῖρας, καὶ σενίτα ὅσα ἐστὶν πρόσωπα
 τὰ ὅσα ἐκὼσα τὰ βάρη καὶ ἐκὼσα ἀπὸ τῆς
 σογγῆς, ὡς φαίνεται τῆς σήμερον. ἡγορέω καὶ ἐκὼσα
 τῶν ἡγορέων βεῖν καὶ τῆς μεγάλου ῥοῖδας ὄντα
 τὸ μέγεθος διὰ πρόσωπα ἡγορέω. εἶναι δὲ καὶ ἄλλα
 κήρια καὶ κήρια καὶ μερμῆνα εἰς τὸ Μοναστη-
 ριον καὶ εἰς τὸν μέγαν ἀνάκτορον. σάξιν εἰς τὰ χεῖρα
 ὄντα ὡσαύτως ἐξ ὅσων σενίτα ἐκὼσα τὰ ἄλλα κήρια ἢ τοῖς
 τοῦ Μοναστηρίου ἀπὸ τῶν ὄντα τῶν Τυρανλίδων εἰς τὸ μέγεθος
 ὄντα ἀπὸ τῆς ἐκὼσα τῆς πόλεως καὶ ὄντα καὶ
 ἐξοδῶσα εἰς αὐτὰ χεῖρας. ἀπὸ 1849 μέχρι 1865 Μοναστηρίου
 + ἡγορέω καὶ ἡγορέω καὶ τῶν ἡγορέων
 ὄντα ἐκὼσα τῶν ἡγορέων.
 Τακενὸς Δυρεχ. Βουσορίων ἐκὼσα τῶν.

Image 3. Folder 1, f. 3, mentioning the ὄντα τῶν Τυρανλίδων the room of the Tirana people

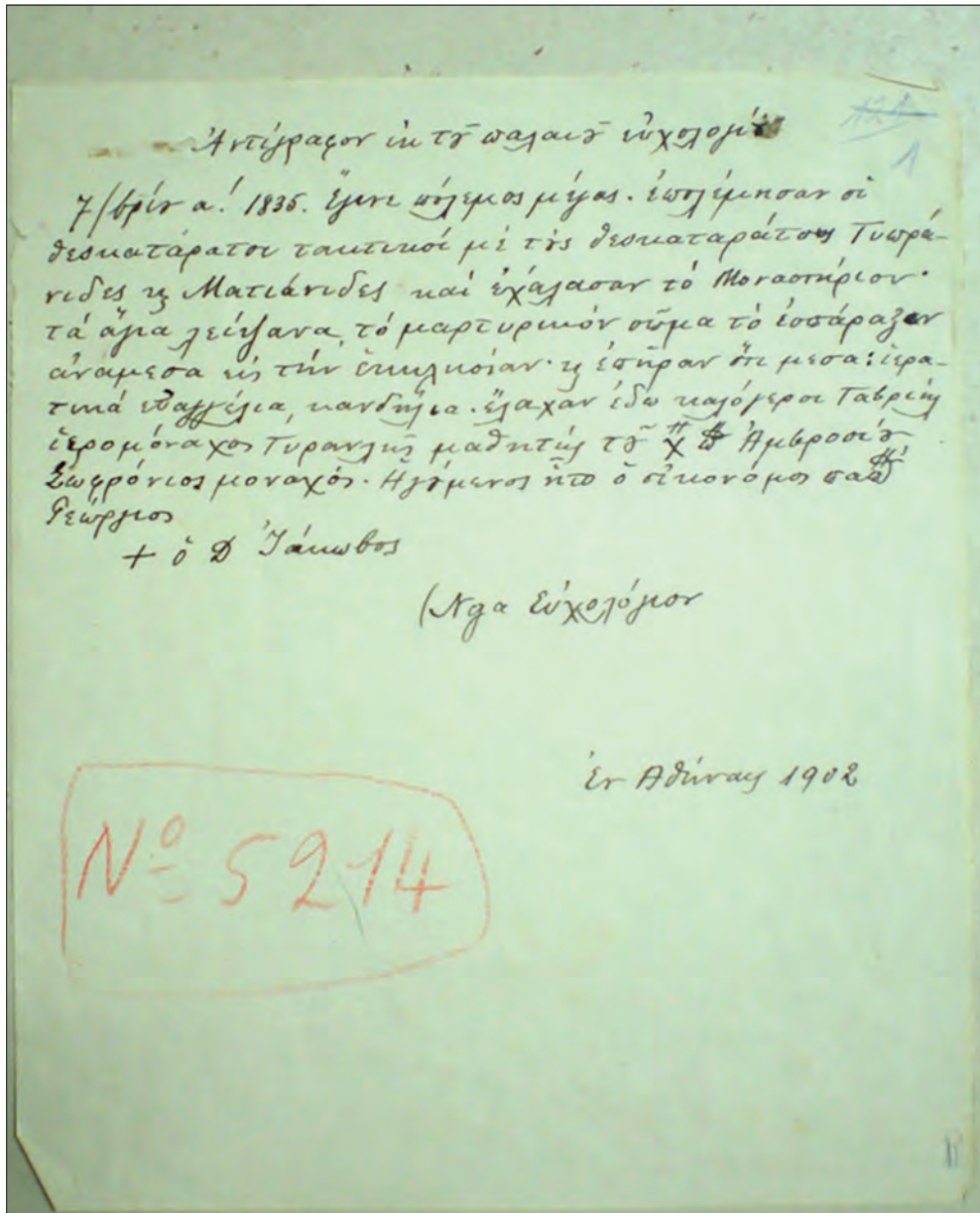


Image 4. Folder 14, f. 1, the copy of the chronicle of the Eucologion

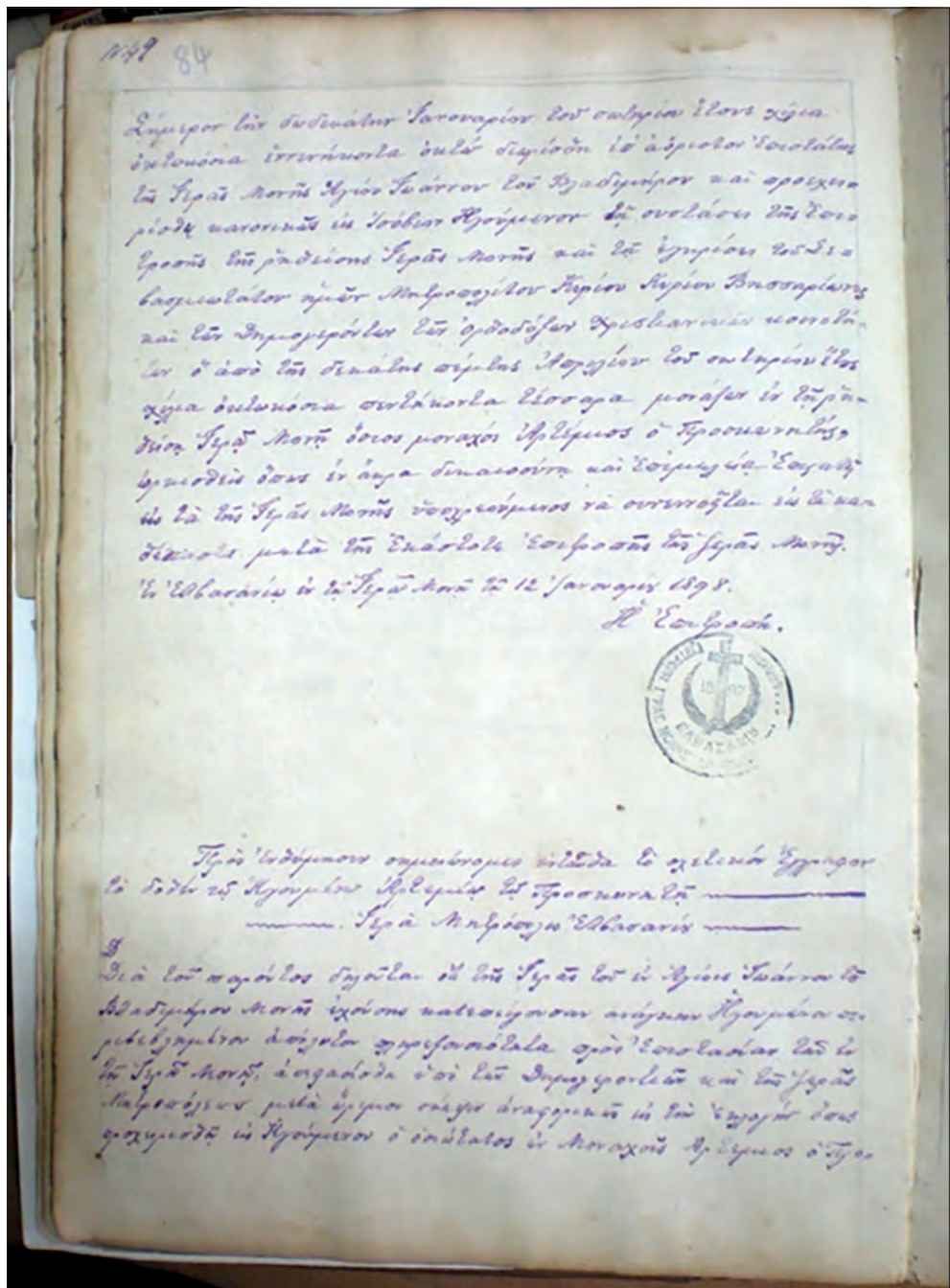


Image 5. Folder 3, f. 37 v, election of the Custodian and Abbot of the Monastery



Image 6. Folder 3, f. 143, donations

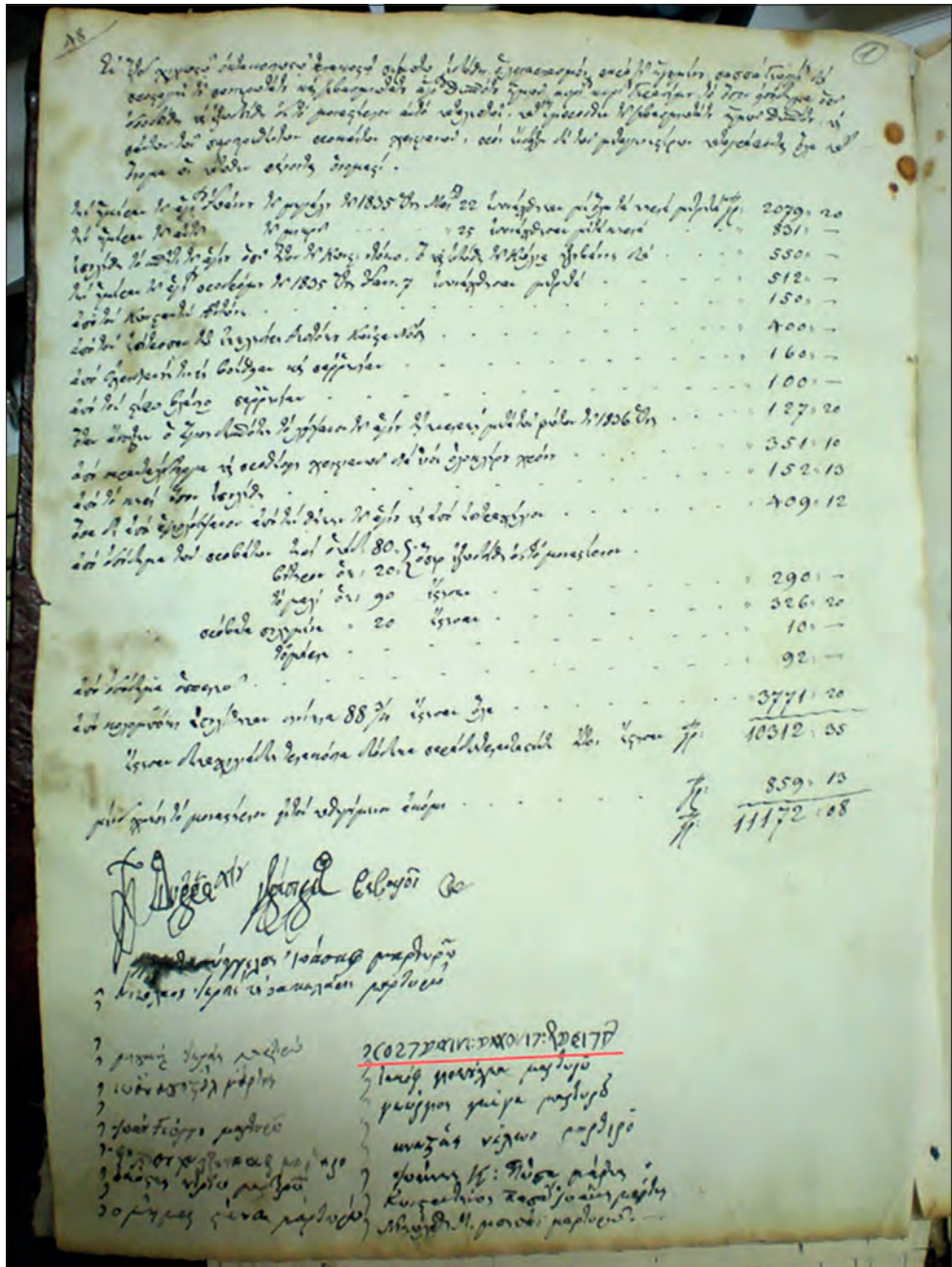


Image 7. Folder 8, f. 1', where „Konstantin” writes his name using the alphabet of Theodore Hadjiphilipides (from Elbasan)