

AN EPITAPH OF THE SPIRTAS
FAMILY IN THE YUGOSLAV TOWN OF ZEMUN

Among those families of Macedonia that had emigrated during Ottoman rule to the northern provinces of the Balkans and central Europe¹, the Spirtas family deserves mention. The family originated in the small town of Kleisura² in Western Macedonia which is situated in the prefecture of Kastoria and is today a part of Greece. The Spirtas family first settled in the Yugoslav town of Zemun, which was then a free military municipality belonging to the Empire of the Hapsburgs³, in the first half of the 18th century.

Unfortunately, too little historical research has been devoted to this important family. This accounts for the fact that many aspects of their life and activities are still unknown. The purpose of my brief study therefore, is to shed some light on one of the unknown aspects of the life of this distinguished family.

When, in June of 1974 I went to do some research in the northwestern provinces of the Balkans⁴, I visited, among other sites, the cemetery of Zemun. I was pleasantly surprised to encounter there an imposing monument which was in fact the family grave of the Spirtas family. The octagonal building of fine quality marble bears the Spirtas coat of arms on its eastern face, directly

1. For Macedonian migrations and the reasons for these, see A. E. Vacalopoulos, *Οἱ Δυτικομακεδόνες ἀπόδημοι ἐπὶ τουρκοκρατίας*, Thessaloniki 1958, p. 3ff., and by the same, *History of Macedonia 1354-1833*, Thessaloniki 1973, p. 379 ff. Also Ödön Füves, *Οἱ Ἕλληνες τῆς Οὐγγαρίας*, Thessaloniki 1965, pp. 11-13.

2. We are informed that the Spirtas family originated in Kleisura, by the reliable source, *Βιβλίον τῶν μνημονευομένων τεθνηκότων (κεκοιμημένων) Ἀδελφῶν ἡμῶν, τῶν συντρεφάντων εἰς τὸ Φοῦντος τοῦ τῆς τῶν ἐν Ζέμῳ Ῥωμῶν καὶ Μακεδονοβλάχων Ἀδελφότητος Ἑλληνικοῦ Σχολείου, τῷ Σαββάτῳ τῆς ἀποδόσεως τῆς Ἀγίας Πεντηκοστῆς, καθ' ἣν γίνονται αἱ πρὸς Θεὸν ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν Παρακλήσεις*. This book, which is still unpublished, survives without any archival notation in the church of the Mother of God (Crkva Bogorodice) in Zemun and consists of 34 unnumbered folios which are blank on the verso sides. The folios that concern us here are numbers 10^r, 15^r and 21^r (my own numbering).

3. For the importance of Zemun as a free military municipality of the Hapsburg Empire see Tanasije Ž. Ilić, *Iz prošlosti Zemuna i Vojne Granice. Separat predgovora za I knjigu gradje iz zemunskih arhiva za istoriju prvog srpskog ustanka*, Beograd 1955, p. XXIV.

4. I was able to undertake this research thanks to the special grant given me by the Institute for Balkan Studies in memory of the late director of the Institute, Basil Laourdas. I wish here to express my warm thanks to the members of the Board of the Institute, and in particular its present director Professor K. Mitsakis, for his encouragement and support.

above the entrance. In the interior of this family tomb there survives an epitaph consisting of two sections, one above and the other below. The upper inscription is recorded in Greek in capital letters and the lower in Serbo-Croatian in Cyrillic capitals.

The upper inscription has hitherto been unpublished. This reads as follows (the original spelling is retained):

ΜΝΗΜΕΙΟΝ
ΤΩΝ ΜΕΛΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗΣ
ΟΙΚΟΓΕΝΕΙΑΣ ΣΠΙΡΤΑ
1739-1909
ΑΝΑΓΕΡΘΕΝ ΥΠΟ ΣΟΦΙΑΣ ΣΥΖΥΓΟΥ
ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΥ ΠΑΥΛΟΥ ΦΟΝ ΣΠΙΡΤΑ
ΤΕΛΕΥΤΑΙΟΥ ΓΟΝΟΥ ΟΙΚΟΓΕΝΕΙΑΣ
ΠΡΟΣ ΑΪΔΙΟΝ ΑΝΑΜΝΗΣΙΝ, ΦΟΡΟΝ
ΑΠΟΝΕΜΟΥΣΑ ΣΥΖΥΓΙΚΗΣ
ΛΑΤΡΕΙΑΣ

The lower epitaph which differs only slightly from the upper, was published by the Serbian historian Dušan Popović¹. According to his publication the inscription reads as follows:

OVAJ SPOMENIK PODIGLA JE SOFIJA
SUPRUGA PAVLA PL. SPIRTA
POSLEDNJEG ČLANA TE ČUVENE
PATRICIJSKE PORODICE²

But in examining the inscription I ascertained that in the second line between the words SUPRUGA and PAVLA there is the name DJORDJA which Popović omitted in his edition. The second line should therefore be restored to read:

SUPRUGA DJORDJA PAVLA PL. SPIRTA

The translation of the Serbo-Croatian part of the inscription reads as follows: «This monument was erected by Sophia, wife of George Pavlou von Spirtas, last in line of this distinguished family of patricians».

1. Dušan J. Popović, *O cincarima. Prilozi pitanju postanka našeg građanskog društva*, 2nd ed., Beograd 1937, p. 450.

2. As already pointed out (p. 1), this part of the epitaph is recorded in Cyrillic script but for purely technical reasons is transcribed in Latin letters.



Fig. 1. The family grave of the Spirtas.



Fig. 2. The coat of arms of the Spirtas family.



Fig. 3. The epitaph of the Spirtas family.

Αντιστοίχως	εξυμνήσθη 25. Μαΐου 1901.	Μόνη	Μόνη
Γράμματα	εξυμνήσθη ... Νεάνθη		Νεάνθη
Αντιστοίχως	εξυμνήσθη	Γεωργία	Γεωργία
Αντιστοίχως	εξυμνήσθη	Γεωργία	Γεωργία
Αντιστοίχως	εξυμνήσθη 1885	Αντιστοίχως	Αντιστοίχως
Αντιστοίχως	εξυμνήσθη 1909	Αντιστοίχως	Αντιστοίχως
Αντιστοίχως	εξυμνήσθη 1913	Αντιστοίχως	Αντιστοίχως
Αντιστοίχως	εξυμνήσθη 1915	Αντιστοίχως	Αντιστοίχως
Αντιστοίχως	εξυμνήσθη 1915	Αντιστοίχως	Αντιστοίχως

According to the evidence contained in the epitaph, the date of the arrival of the Spirtas family in Zemun should be the year 1739¹. This chronological evidence is of special interest since it helps to correct the mistaken view, which was held hitherto, regarding the time when the Spirtas family first settled in Zemun. The distinguished Greek financier Andreas Andreadis, the only person who has dealt with the subject, expressed the view that the first member of the Spirtas family came to Zemun at the close of the 18th Century². But the irrefutable evidence deriving from this epitaph contradicts this claim, which falls short by many decades of the actual date when the first Spirtas' settled in the town, that is to say, 1739.

The same epitaph states that the Spirtas family disappeared in 1909 with the death of George Pavlou von Spirtas, the last in the male line of the family. This information coincides fully with that supplied by the «Book of the Commemorated Dead» to which reference has already been made (p. 1, fn. 2). This book helps determine the actual month of George Pavlou von Spirtas' death. In accordance with its information, this last in the male line of the Spirtas family died in the month of April, 1909³.

Extant historical evidence regarding Sophia, wife of George Pavlou von Spirtas is very slight. The information provided, therefore, by the epitaph, which states that the Spirtas family tomb was built by this woman is of importance.

On the remainder of Sophia Spirtas' life, supplementary information is provided by the «Book of the Commemorated Dead». According to this book, Sophia was to live another six years after the death of her husband, George, that is, until 1915⁴.

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1. For the convenience of the scholar, I record here the relevant part of the epitaph: «Monument of the members of the Greek family of Spirtas 1739-1909».

2. A. M. Andreadis, «Γ. Σπίρτας», *Μακεδονικὸν Ἡμερολόγιον Παμμακεδονικοῦ Συλλόγου Ἀθηνῶν* 4 (1911), 33.

3. «Γεωργίου ἐκ Σπίρτα ἐκ Ζέμωνος. Αἰωνία σου ἡ μνήμη. Ἐτελεύτησε Ἀπριλίου 1909». See *Βιβλίον τῶν μνημονεομένων τεθνηκότων*, folio 33^r (my pagination).

4. «Σοφίας Συμβίου τοῦ Γεωργίου ἐκ Σπήρτα ἐκ Ζέμωνος. Αἰωνία σου ἡ μνήμη. Ἐτελεύτησε [sic] 1915». See *Βιβλίον τῶν μνημονεομένων τεθνηκότων*, folio 33^r (my pagination).