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**Mentalities and Behaviours of the Feudal Class of Corfu
during the Late Middle Ages**

Insecurity, a predominant feeling for medieval man, was one of the most important factors which led to the feudal organisation of the medieval society, where safety was ensured mainly by the solidarity between the *seigneur* and the *vassal*. These relations were codified in various behaviours of formal-ceremonial character as well as in the terminology of the feudal contracts, particularly the *hommage*. In these codifications one can see the mentalities which created them, with preponderant element, as far as the vassal is concerned, his quest for security.

This paper is intended to approach the evolution of certain behaviours of the feudal aristocracy of the Greek island of Corfu in relation with its particular insecurities during the Late Middle Ages, as in the case of the corfiot feudalism one can perceive an evolution and remodelling of the basic element of the feudal codification, the *hommage*, since by the late 14th century political circumstances moved forward the transformation of the personal bonds of dependence of the corfiot barons with their Italian overlords into collective ones.

After the Fourth Crusade (1204) the island of Corfu, in the north of the Ionian Sea, changed many hands. In 1206 it passed under Venetian control, until it was incorporated into the Greek state of Epiros (1215-1258). In 1258 the island became a domain of Manfred of Sicily, governed by his admiral, Filippo Chinardo¹. After they both died (1266), Garnerio Alamanno, a war-lord claiming to protect Chinardo's children, came to power and in 1272, when he died, Corfu became a dependency of the Angevins of Naples². In 1386, after Charles III of Naples was

1. S. Borsari, *Studi sulle colonie Veneziane in Romania nel XIII secolo*, Napoli 1966, pp. 27, 49-50; E. Lunzi, *Della condizione politica delle Isole Jonie sotto il dominio Veneto*, Venezia 1860, pp. 54-55 (hereafter: Lunzi, *Isole Jonie*).

2. RA 8. 135 (173) 1271-1272; Lunzi, *Isole Jonie*, pp. 57-60.

killed in Hungary, Venice occupied the island (1386-1797)³.

According to the mentalities of the times, during this period the island was considered by its lords as domain (*demanium*), which could be assigned as a dowry (1258)⁴, transferred as a pawn (1303, 1366) or even sold out (1350)⁵. The disposition of the inhabitants (*vassalli, homines, fideles*) was unimportant to the lord, therefore the populace of the island had to comply with his decisions. Particularly the ruling class of Corfu, owing its social predominance to the lords' grants of estates and privileges, acknowledged their right to dispose their domain as they wished. On the other hand, the practice of that right by the lord could eventually give birth to a lot of disquietness and insecurity for the local aristocracy. In Corfu circumstances advanced the evolution of that feeling of insecurity into a motive for political activities, which fostered that class, though for a short time, to assume an important role as far as the political fortunes of the island were concerned.

During the domination of the despots of Epiros the leading class of Corfu consisted mainly of privileged Greek landowners settled in the castle (*Καστρονιοί*) and its vicinity (*Εξωκαστρονιοί*)⁶. When the Greek despot of Epiros Michael II, military inferior to Manfred, had endowed the island as a dowry to his daughter Helen, wife of the king of Sicily, these groupings seem to have complied with the dynastic change of 1258 without any kind of objection⁷. And it is most probable that Manfred soon confirmed the privileges of the local aristocracy.

3. Lunzi, *Isole Jonie*, pp. 101-113; E. Leonard, *Les Angevins de Naples*, Paris 1954, p. 476.

4. S. Borsari, "La politica bizantina di Carlo I d'Angiò dal 1266 al 1271", *ASPN*, n.s. 35 (1955) 320, and n. 4.

5. Thiriet, *Sénat*, 1.72 (251) 30-1-1351; F. Thiriet, "Les interventions Vénitiennes dans les Îles Ioniennes au XIVe siècle", *Πρακτικά Τρίτου Πανιονίου Συνεδρίου*, 1, Athens 1967, pp. 379-384, (hereafter: Thiriet, "Interventions"); E. Leonard, *La jeunesse de Jeanne Ière, reine de Naples et comtesse de Provence*, 2, Paris 1932, pp. 300-301, n. 1, 4, 5 (hereafter: Leonard, *Jeunesse*); F. Thiriet, "Les chroniques vénitiens de la Marcienne et leur importance pour l'histoire de la Roumanie greco-vénitienne", *Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire* 66 (1954) 268-269 (hereafter: Thiriet, "Chroniques").

6. PLA, 1289-1300, Paris 1967, 78-83 (79) 29-4-1294.

7. D. J. Geanakoplos, "Greco-Latin Relations on the Eve of the Byzantine Restoration. The Battle of Pelagonia (1259)", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 7 (1953) 103-104; Romanos, 30; S. Borsari, "La politica bizantina di Carlo I d'Angiò dal 1266 al 1271", *op.cit.*, p. 320 and n. 4.

After Manfred's death (1266), the despot of Epiros trying to restore his authority on the island sent there some of his men, who killed Manfred's deputy, Phillippo Chinardo⁸. In that case the despot's efforts were supported by some members of the local aristocracy⁹. In assuming political and military action the corfiot aristocrats were strongly motivated by the feeling of insecurity about their future under Chinardo, after his lord's defeat by the Angevins at Benevento (1266), as well as by the fact that the struggle for the domination on the island was between a foreigner and their Greek benefactor, the despot of Epiros, from whom they expected to be recompensated with more grants and privileges in case of success. Furthermore, their behaviour could be considered justified on a legal basis, as the despot of Epiros had given out the island to Manfred as a dowry, and Manfred was now dead, while Chinardo was just a pretender.

However the despot's efforts to regain control over Corfu failed, as one of Chinardo's deputies, Garnerio Alamanno, with the military support of Charles I of Anjou (1266-1285), managed to retain the castles of Corfu. As an outcome of the despot's failure, the members of the local aristocracy which had cooperated with the despot, having been declared *proditores*, were dispossessed and driven away¹⁰. However, not all the Greek landowners had taken the despot's part, as in the next years a lot of Greeks with large estates are met with in Corfu. It is therefore clear that although the motivation for allegiance to the despot was strong, many Greek landowners remained neutral or even collaborated with the foreign troops¹¹.

Some time later, after a period of negotiations between Alamanno and Charles I d'Anjou, who was claiming the island¹², it was agreed that Corfu should be bestowed to the Angevin king by Aymo, Garnerio Ala

8. G. Pachymeres, *Συγγραφικαὶ Ἱστορίαι*, CB, I, Bonnae 1835, pp. 508-509.

9. P. Lemerle, "Trois actes du Despot d'Épire Michel II concernant Corfou, connus en traduction latine", *Ελληνικά* (1953) Παράρτημα, Προσφορά εις Στ. Κυριακίδη, pp. 405-426.

10. RA 1. 82 (224) 23-3-1267, 3. 129 (188) 29-1-1270, 19. 78 (127) 16-9-1277.

11. S. Asonitis, "Ο 'δεσπότης Ρωμανίας' Φίλιππος και οι διεκδικήσεις των Ταραντίνων κυρίων της Κέρκυρας επί των ηπειρωτικών κτήσεων των Ορσίνι (1318-1331)", *Βυζαντινά* 12 (1992) 148-150 (hereafter: Asonitis, "Δεσπότης").

12. RA 2. 5 (3) 27-1-1269, 6. 238 (127) 1270-1271, 8. 121 (56) 1271-1272.

mano's son, who was recompensated with a sum of money and feudal estates in the kingdom of Naples (1272)¹³.

Until 1272 the only secular associations of the populace of Corfu we know are the *Καστηνοί* (inhabitants of the castle) and *Εξωκαστηνοί* (settled outside the castle), their denominations suggesting that they were formed on a residential basis¹⁴. In a document of 1272 the term *Communitas Corphiensis* is mentioned for the first time to designate a representative body of the population of the whole island¹⁵. In all probability that collective body existed even before 1272. From the documents concerning the negotiations for the transfer of Corfu under the Angevin rule it is clear that the *Communitas Corphiensis* had no word in that matter¹⁶. Its job had formally to do with the domestic affairs of the island.

As an intercessor between the people and the administration, the *Communitas* formally expressed the requests either of the whole of the population of the island (*Universitas hominum insule*) or just of the inhabitants of the town (*Universitas civitatis*). In any case its most prominent members were constantly great landowners, as it is assumed from the texts of the delegations sent on behalf of the population of Corfu to Naples¹⁷. In 1283 a delegation consisting of "nuncios et ambassiatores insule Corfoi" Ioanni Syro, Leoni Theomato (Fiomacho), a landowner, and Demetrio Calebrulo, visited Naples asking for the confirmation of some privileges as well as appointment of a Greek notary in the island¹⁸. In 1294 the "homines universitatis civitatis Corfois, fideles" were requesting Charles II d'Anjou to confirm the ancient privileges of the in-

13. RA 8. 121 (59) 1271-1272, 128 (110) 1271-1272, 177 (446) 12-3-1272; C. Minieri-Riccio, *Della dominazione Angioina nel reame di Sicilia*, Napoli 1876, p. 6.

14. PLA, 78-83 (79) 29-4-1294.

15. G. del Giudice, "La famiglia di re Manfredi", ASPN 5 (1880) 313, 9-6-1272; Some time before Charles I had announced to the population of Corfu about the way he was going to govern their island: RA 9. 161 (217) 21-9-1272.

16. RA 2. 5 (3) 27-1-1269, 6. 238 (1270) 1270-1271, 8. 220 (51) 1271-1272, 8. 181 (458) 31-5-1272; C. Minieri-Riccio, *Della dominazione Angioina nel reame di Sicilia*, op.cit., 6,30.

17. On the preponderance of the aristocratic element in Corfu, revealed in the texts of the *ambascerie* to Venice since the end of the 15th century, see Karapidakis, *Civis fidelis*, p. 119; Yotopoulou, "Classi Sociali", p. 98.

18. RA 25. 35-39 (170) 11-3-1283.

habitants of the castle and its vicinity, as well as to settle some other matters concerning the urban population, especially the merchants. The names of those syndici are: “*judex Costa Scaliti* (a great landowner), *Costa Comatiano*, *Iohannes Comathiano*, *Nicolaus Fili*, *Iohannes Coroneus*, *Georgius Corvo et Michael Nomichopolos*, *notarius*”¹⁹.

While that delegation was still in Naples, the king officially informed the *Communitas Corphiensis* about the appointment of a new governor for the island. On 23 July 1294 Charles II, writing to “*universis hominibus eiusdem insule*”, was pronouncing them his decision to transfer the island of Corfu to his son, Philip I, prince of Tarent²⁰. In both cases the institutional character of the *Communitas* is obvious, the king of Naples recognising the right of the *Communitas* to communicate with him by means of delegations as well as to be officially informed about his decisions²¹.

The absence of evidence about the activities of the *Communitas Corphiensis* in the next years is due to the destruction of the *Registri Angioini* of Naples. In any case its role seems to be rather confined in the routine of domestic affairs and the election of some local officials among its members, such as the *syndici*, the *iudices annales*, the *catapani* and the *parastati della terra*²². As far as the personal interests of the landowners are concerned, the *Communitas* was not formally involved, since the barons of the island used to arrange their affairs according to the feudal tradition, by means of personal contacts with the court of Naples or Tarent. On the other hand, collective requests of the great landlords were submitted to their overlords by special representatives. Such is the case of 1367, when the feudal lord Iohannes Cavasilas was sent by his colleagues (*syndicus baronum et burgensium civitatis Corphoy*) to ask for the release of their foreign workers, who had been taken from their lands by the *curia* of Philip II of Tarent²³.

19. PLA 94 (91) 16-6-1294, 78-83 (79) 29-4-1294, 95 (92) 6-6-1294, 94 (91) 16-6-1294.

20. PLA 104 (104) 23-7-1294.

21. In 1272 Charles I had proclaimed to the population of Corfu his principles for the government of their island: RA 9. 161 (217) 21-9-1272.

22. S. Asonitis, “Οι Χρονικοί Κριτές (*iudices annuales*) στην Κέρκυρα κατά τον όψιμο μεσαιώνα”, *Βυζαντινά* 17 (1997) 467-478 (hereafter: Asonitis, “Κριτές”); Karapidakis, *Civis fidelis*, p. 59.

23. Other groupings, like the Orthodox clergy, were also entitled to send their special

As the feudal aristocracy had a leading role in the *Communitas Corphiensis*, it is worth dealing with the special status of that grouping, in relation with their attitudes towards their overlords. Even before the outset of the Angevin domination, Corfu had experienced western feudalism. The first feudal estates in Corfu were established during the years of Philipppo Chinardo (1258-1266). In the Angevin documentation all these estates are designated as *feudi antiqui*, although some of them, owned by Greeks, were possessed as hereditary possessions²⁴. In the following years the feudal system was to be expanded on most territories of the island.

From 1272 on, Charles I started to grant many of his knights *feudi novi* in Corfu, while he confirmed the *feudi antiqui* of the colleagues of Chinardo and the Greeks who had declared their allegiance to the throne of Naples. At the same time he defined in detail the formalities to be observed for the concession of feudal estates in Corfu, according to the feudal codifications of the West. The feudal lords were personally dependent on the sovereign. According to the feudal contract, the beneficiary had to declare his allegiance (*iuramentum vassallagii, ligium hommagium, sacramentum fidelitatis*) and his obligation to serve his lord (*debitum servitium*)²⁵.

Since 1294, when Corfu was conceded to Philip I of Tarent, the island remained under the rule of the Tarentine princes until 1373, when it was put again under the immediate control of the throne of Naples. During the rule of Philip I (1294-1331) many *feudi novi* were granted to French, Italian and Greek people. Powerful families from Italy, like the *De Hugoth, De Altavilla, De Tocco*, enjoyed their feudal possessions in Corfu as well as in Italy²⁶. It has to be taken for granted that Philip's active role in the politics of Western Greece, his campaigns in the region

envoys to the prince. See Romanos, 92-104, 121-125; Yotopoulou, "Classi Sociali", pp. 97-98.

24. RA 9. 160 (214) 8-9-1272.

25. RA 9. 160 (214) 8-9-1272, 23. 132 (189) 15-7-1280, 160 (237) 26-8-1280.

26. S. Asonitis, "Οι μεταβιβάσεις της κερχυραϊκής βαρωνίας του conte de Martina", *Δελτίον Εραλδικής και Γενεαλογικής Εταιρείας Ελλάδος* 9 (1992) 9-14 (hereafter: Asonitis, "Martina"); W. Miller, *The Latins in the Levant*, London 1908, p. 518; K. Hopf, *Geschichte Griechenlands vom Beginn des Mittelalters bis auf unsere Zeit*, 1, Leipzig 1867, pp. 417, 426-427 (hereafter: Hopf, *Geschichte*); A. Luttrell, "Guglielmo de Tocco, Captain of Corfu: 1330-1331", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 3 (1977) 45-53.

and his interest in *Romania* were generating in the minds of his vassals the feeling of a strong leadership, capable to ensure security and stability for them²⁷. During the years 1272-1331 not even the slightest thought of disaffection seems to have crossed the minds of the feudal lords of Corfu, as their ambitions were accomplished by the maintenance of their wealth and social prestige, both dependent on the will of their powerful masters.

However, circumstances changed since the middle of the 14th century. The troubles in the kingdom of Naples during the early years of the reign of the young queen Joanna I (1343-1381) permitted the Neapolitan aristocracy to degrade the authority of the throne, while the humiliating Hungarian invasions (1348-1350) advanced the scepticism of the feudal class of the kingdom about their queen's abilities to safeguard their prosperity²⁸.

These changes in the kingdom of Naples had certainly an impact on the minds of the corfiot barons, as they generated feelings of insecurity about their future. Considering the circumstances, a sensible solution to their problem was to come to terms with Venice, as the desire of the Serenissima to take over Corfu had been apparent long before²⁹. In fact, it was the expectation of security under the Venetian domination which motivated at that time some members of the leading class of Corfu to start talking about politics with the Venetians.

In April 1348, after the invasion of the Hungarian king Louis I the Great (1342-1382) in the kingdom of Naples, the relations between him and Venice were at a critical point³⁰. It was at that moment that the Venetian Senate decided that, if a war with Hungary was to start, “...*multum esset utile ... habere in nostra custodia locum et castrum Corphu*,

27. Asonitis, “Δεσπότης”, pp. 123-143.

28. G. M. Monti, *Studi di Storia Angioina* (Estr. dalla Rivista Storica, Fasc. III, 1931), II. Roberto d'Angiò e la crisi del Regno di Sicilia, Pinerolo 1931, pp. 3-22; R. Trifone, *Feudi e demani. Eversione della feudalità nelle provincie Napoletane*, Milano 1909, pp. 15-20, 25-26; Leonard, *Angevins*, pp. 346-365; Leonard, *Jeunesse*, 1. 600-623, 2. 1-244.

29. F. Thiriet, “Les interventions vénitiennes dans les îles Ioniennes au XIVe siècle”, *Πρακτικά Γ' Πανιωνίου Συνεδρίου*, 1, Αθήναι 1967, pp. 378-379 (hereafter: Thiriet, “Interventions”).

30. Leonard, *Angevins*, p. 350; Leonard, *Jeunesse*, 1. 553-581; B. Krekić, “Le rôle de Dubrovnik (Raguse) dans la navigation des mers Vénitiennes au XIVe siècle”, *Travaux et Mémoires* 8 (1981) 247-254, esp. 250; B. Krekić, *Dubrovnik (Raguse) et le Levant au Moyen Age*, Paris 1961, pp. 35-36.

dummodo hoc fiat caute...”. The officials of the Venetian fleet received instructions, so that with their proper actions “...*insula et castrum Corphu se submittant nostro dominio, faciendo et procurando ipsi caute ... ut possint habere et consequi nostram intentionem ... et si non posset vel possent habere locum et insulam libere, sint contenti accipere castrum in nostra custodia, salvis iuribus quorumcumque*”. It is obvious that the last words of this text refer to a sort warranty asked by some people of Corfu, as an indispensable condition to cooperate for the success of the Venetian plan. It is also apparent that the phrase “*salvis iuribus quorumcumque*” does not refer to the rank and file of Corfu, but to those who had “*iura*”, principally the feudal lords of the island. Certainly not all of them. For some members of the local aristocracy possessing feudal estates in Italy it would be dangerous to relate themselves with a disaffection. The persons related with the Venetian plans were in all probability in possession of exclusively corfiot estates. In any case, the collective body of the Corfiots, the *Communitas*, had nothing to do with these contacts.

The next part of the document is illuminative of the intentions of Venice as well as of the concerns of her corfiot associates. The instructions of the Venetian Senate to the admiral of the Gulf were that, if before he had accomplished his commission “...*tangerentur ei aliqua verba per illos de Corphu in dicto facto, committatur ei quod dicat et respondeat verba amoris et benivolencie, hortando eos ad conservationem suam in quantum poterit*”³¹. It is evident that Venice, facing the incident of a failure of her plan, was intending to encourage the pro-Venetian group to endure on their purpose, until more favourable circumstances could permit the fulfillment of her plans in the future.

The plans of Venice about Corfu were not accomplished by that time, neither by the cooperation of the pro-Venetian group, nor by the special *nuncius* sent to Naples by the Senate with the commission to persuade Joanna I to concede the island to Venice³². However, it is most probable that the facts of 1348 induced more members of the corfiot aristocracy to think about their future under a different lord, therefore encouraging the expansion of the pro-Venetian group in Corfu.

31. Listine, 3. 76-77 (CXIII) 13-4-1348.

32. Thiriet, *Sénat*, 1. 64 (216) 8-11-1348; Leonard, *Jeunesse*, 2. 159.

After his invasion in the kingdom of Naples Louis the Great had seized and sent to Hungary some Neapolitan magnates, among them Robert, prince of Tarent and lord of Corfu (1331-1363)³³. The captivity of their prince must have affected the mood and the thoughts of the corfiot feudal lords, by showing them the vulnerability of their overlord, and consequently, how precarious their status was. There is no doubt that the mood of uncertainty of the Corfiot barons was intensified, when they heard that the court of Tarent and Robert himself, anxious to find the money for his redemption, had started negotiations with Venice, offering as an interchange his possessions in the Ionian sea, Corfu, Bouthroton, Cephalenia and Zante³⁴.

Only at the last moment the realisation of that agreement was prevented, after the mediation of the Pope, who urged Louis of Hungary to release the prince without any ransom³⁵. However, as the negotiations could not be held in secret, the Venetian Senate having already elected the new authorities for Corfu and the other places³⁶, it is certain that the divulgence of the intentions of the prince had a significant impact to the conception of bonds of vassalage some corfiot feudal lords had with him, putting at stake the solidity of their *hommage*.

The worries and the insecurities of the corfiot feudal class were not appeased in the following years, as in 1366 they learned that Philip II of Tarent (1364-1373) was discussing the possibility of offering Corfu and Bouthroton to Venice as a pawn for a loan he needed³⁷. Although in the end such an agreement was not concluded, these negotiations could not be kept in secret from the corfiot feudal lords, who were getting more

33. M. Camera, *Elucubrazioni storico-diplomatiche su Giovanna I, regina di Napoli*, 1, Salerno 1890, p. 106; Leonard, *Jeunesse*, 2. 199-200.

34. Leonard, *Jeunesse*, 2. 300-301, n. 1, 4, 5; Thiriet, "Chroniques", pp. 268-269; Commemoriali, 2. 4, 188 (370) 30-1-1351; Thiriet, *Sénat*, 1. 72 (251) 30-1-1351; Thiriet, "Interventions", p. 384.

35. Leonard, *Jeunesse*, 2. 27, 305.

36. Thiriet, *Sénat*, 1. 72 (251) 30-1-1351; *Historie Venete dal principio della città fino al'anno 1382*, scritte dal Magistro ser Giovanni Giacompo Caroldo, Secretario dell'illustrissimo Consiglio dei Dieci, Bibliotheca Marciana, Classe VII Italiana, cod. 127 (coll. 8034), liber VII, f. 268r (cited hereafter: Caroldo).

37. AAV 1. 184 (203) 6-12-1366; Thiriet, *Sénat*, 1. 113 (440) 9-12-1366; A. Luttrell, "Vonitza in Epiros and its lords: 1306-1377", *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici* 1 (11) (1964) 131-141, esp. 139; Caroldo, Liber VII, f. 433v-434r; Thiriet, "Chroniques", p. 269; Thiriet, "Interventions", p. 384.

and more aware of the fact that their overlords were neither sensitive about the interests of their vassals, nor eager to respect their obligations towards them. The terms of the feudal contracts were unilaterally discredited.

Some years later the bonds of vassalage, seriously ventured by the apparent indifference of the princes of Tarent about their vassals' interests, were to undergo another stroke. When the childless Philip II of Tarent died in 1373, he left his possessions to his nephew, Jacques de Baux. The latter, after a revolt of his father against the throne, was exiled from the kingdom of Naples³⁸. These facts divided the corfiot feudal lords, some of them supporting the queen of Naples, the others remaining faithful to the House of Tarent. It is most probable that armed conflicts took place on the island between the two parties. Finally the supporters of the throne prevailed and the island was put under the immediate control of the queen, whose defenders were granted feudal possessions on the island³⁹.

Ten years later, when Joanna I of Naples was dethroned by Charles III (1381), the supporters of the House of Tarent, still numerous in Corfu, helped Jacques de Baux to take control of the island. However, after his conflict with Charles III, a part of the local feudal lords faithful to the new king attacked his garrisons and forced them out of the island (1382)⁴⁰.

The intention of the princes of Tarent to give out Corfu to Venice must have disturbed some of the barons of the island, till then steadfastly loyal to their overlords. Surely the bonds of vassalage had been loosened, yet not broken, as there was no alternative for them. Certainly Venice wished to dominate on the island, but there were other priorities in her policies. After 1351 the pro-Venetian party must have been rather frustrated. Nevertheless, the submissive, almost servile attitude of the feudal lords of Corfu towards their overlords, was gradually transformed into a

38. A. Crassullo, *Annales de rebus Tarentinis* (Fragmentum), ed. A. Pellicia in *Raccolta di varie croniche*, vol. 5, Napoli 1782, 113 (hereafter: Crassullo).

39. HAC, Βενετική Διοίκηση, File 454/10, f. 1-5; M. Nturu-Eliopulu, *Η ανδραγατική κυριαρχία στη Ρωμανία επί Καρόλου Α' (1266-1285)*, Athens 1987, pp. 191-195 (hereafter: Nturu, *Ρωμανία*); Hopf, *Geschichte* 2. 33 and 2. 45; MM. 3. 245-247, 21-9-1374.

40. S. Asonitis, "Jacques de Baux, lord of Corfu: 1381-1382", *Balkan Studies* 28/2 (1987) 230 (hereafter: Asonitis, "Baux").

demanding one, after the events of 1348-1366. If the lord's decrees were harmful to their interests, they reacted with the purpose to make him change his mind. Such is the case of 1367, when the feudal lords succeeded in making Philip II of Tarent recall his decree, by which he had taken from them the foreign labourers working in their feudal estates⁴¹. Furthermore, the events of 1373 and 1381-1382 had proved that the allegiance of the feudal class of Corfu was a very important factor in the political game for the acquisition of the island.

However, it was a dangerous game for the corfiot feudal lords. In case of success, the risky ones, having made the right choice, could expect a rich recompense. Such was the case of the barons Iohannes Cavasilas, Benedictus de Sancto Mauricio, Guglielmo de Altavilla, Filippo de Costanzo and Matteo de Luser, who in 1373 were recompensed by the queen for their allegiance⁴². On the contrary, an unsuccessful choice was usually followed by the loss of their estates or even their lives. Such was the case of Guglio de Altavilla some years later.

On the other hand it was not easy for the barons of Corfu to decide if the claims laid on the island by the conflicting Italian magnates were justified. Between 1370 and 1382 the island changed hands five times, all the claimants evoking either institutional or hereditary rights to support their claims. The circumstances faced by the corfiot feudal lords by the end of the 14th century led them to a situation, in which the dependant didn't know unquestionably who his legitimate overlord was. That confusion was to be culminated in the next few years.

In 1382 an upheaval of the supporters of Charles III, mainly feudal lords, had driven out of Corfu the garrisons of Jacques de Baux⁴³. The concerned quest for dependence on an effective authority, which would re-establish confidence and long term perspectives for the leading class of Corfu, is revealed in the reaction of the corfiot representatives, who visited Naples on 1382 to declare their devotion to their new lord, Charles III. The corfiot delegation, elected by the council of the *Comunitas Corphiensis*, consisted of *Iohannes Pechi*, and *Georgius Parastumti*, the first three of them leading feudal lords. In September 1382

41. Romanos, 121-125; Hopf, *Geschichte* 2. 33.

42. ASV, Misti, R. 40, f. 81r; HAC, Βενετική Διοίκηση, File 454/10, f. 1-5; Nturu, *Ρωμανία*, *op.cit.*; Hopf, *Geschichte* 2. 33, 45; MM, *op.cit.*

43. Asonitis, "Baux", p. 230.

they were presented before the king and they declared their loyalty to the throne, while they submitted some requests on behalf of the *Communitas Corphiensis*⁴⁴.

At first sight the corfiot delegation of 1382 was no different from the ones formally sent in the past on the occasion of a hereditary change of ruler. However, that delegation was rather different in character. It was performing not simply a traditional act, but a political one, as it was sent to express the choice the Corfiots had made between two conflicting claimants of the island, the king of Naples and the prince of Tarent.

The political character of that delegation is also evidenced by the attitude of the corfiot representatives on a basic political issue; As soon as the king, in their presence, disclosed his plan to endow the island as a dowry to Jacques de Baux's wife, Agnese, the corfiot delegation reacted in such a way, that the king was compelled to commit himself that Corfu should remain the throne's domain, never to be given out to any magnate⁴⁵. That commitment, indicating the fact that the king recognised the representatives of the *Communitas Corphiensis* the right to express their disposition on a fundamental political issue, was happening for the first time. It is therefore clear that the dispute of the throne of Naples with the House of Tarent over Corfu had de facto bestowed the *Communitas Corphiensis* an institutional role, with almost decisive opinion on the issue of the legitimacy of the sovereignty of Charles III on the island as well as on the status their island should have in the political structure of the kingdom of Naples.

However, as that amplification of the role of the *Communitas* was rather accidental, the corfiot representatives do not seem to have thought of taking full advantage of it, in order to obtain extensive franchises for their community. The feudal mentalities prevailed and they left Naples satisfied with the confirmation of some personal privileges by the king⁴⁶.

The king's commitment only vaguely served to appease the long enduring distress of the corfiot aristocracy. They knew that his throne was

44. N. Barone, "Notizie storiche tratte dai registri di cancelleria di re Carlo III di Durazzo", ASPN 12, 26-27, 16-9-1382 (hereafter: Barone, "Notizie").

45. Asonitis, "Baux", p. 232.

46. ASV Misti, R. 40, f. 80v; Barone, "Notizie", 26-27; Thiriet, *Sénat* 1, 176 (729) 16-9-1282, 184 (766).

not secure, as Louis d'Anjou was claiming the inheritance of Joanna I. Furthermore, as the Venetian consul in Corfu was trying to heat up the pro-Venetian group of the corfiot leading class, the quest for a change was by that time growing among the members of the feudal class.

As Charles III had always an adverse mood towards the Venetians⁴⁷, it is at first sight paradoxical that the efforts of Venice to take over Corfu by means of negotiations were intensified after he ascended the throne of Naples. However, as after the treaty of Turin (1381) Venice had to withdraw from the Dalmatian coast north of Corfu, while Genoese fleets were restricted out of the Adriatic sea⁴⁸, Corfu, well situated at the mouth of Adriatic sea, was an important strategic point for both rival Italian republics. Considering the good relations between the new king of Naples and Genoa, the concern of Venice for a blockage of her Gulf is completely justified. And it was in all probability for this reason that the Senate decided then to start negotiations with the king of Naples, while the Venetian consul in Corfu should consolidate and expand the pro-Venetian group in Corfu⁴⁹.

Even before the garrisons of Jacques de Baux were driven out of Corfu, in May 1382, the pro-Venetian group of the leading class of Corfu had suggested to Venice that the island should be put under the Venetian jurisdiction in a peaceful way. The Venetian consul Iohannes Panem-sacho was then committed by the Senate to congratulate *"...illis nobilibus et bonis hominibus de Corphu de laudabili et optima dispositione eorum ad honorem et statum nostri dominii, dando eis ad intelligendum quod tanta fidelitas et bona dispositio eorum numquam cadet a memoria nostra nec nostrorum et quod semper erunt recommissi in gratiam nostri dominii tamquam filii legitimi nostri Communis et sic ipsi videbunt per effectum"*⁵⁰.

From this text it is obvious that Venice, aware of the insecurities of the feudal class, was taking advantage of their agitation with the purpose

47. Leonard, *Angevins*, p. 460; *Cronaca Zorzi Dolfin. Codex Marcianus*, Classe VII italiana, cod. 794 (coll. 8503), f. 260r.

48. G. F. Tafel - G. M. Thomas, *Der Doge Andreas Dandolo*, München 1856, p. 156; AAV 15. 69-70 (3612) 12-3-1434.

49. Caroldo, f. 629v-630r; Lunzi, *Isole Jonie*, p. 87, n. 1; Thiriet, *Sénat* 1. 153 (625) 19-5-1382; Thiriet, "Chroniques", p. 269.

50. Lunzi, *Isole Jonie*, p. 89, n. 1, 19-5-1382.

to extend her influence in Corfu, by offering them some rather vague promises about their status under her dominion. It is significant to notice that at the same time the Venetian consul was ordered to examine minutely the demands of the feudal lords of Corfu from Venice and to compare them with their privileges under the Angevin domination.

Some time after the visit of the corfiot delegation to Naples, Venice sent a special ambassador to Charles III to discuss the possibilities of an agreement for the concession of the island to the Venetians. From the first moment the king showed his disfavour about the idea and, perceiving the resolution of Venice to insist on the issue, he thought it expedient to offer the island to the Genoese. It is most probable that the Corfiots were informed about the king's intentions, which were discussed in the Venetian Senate⁵¹.

In May 1383, when the Venetians learned that a Genoese fleet was heading for the Ionian sea, the incident for Corfu to be handed out to the Genoese seemed to be imminent. By the end of May the issue was discussed many times in the Senate with the purpose to deal with the Genoese challenge. The corfiot barons had already suggested to take control of the island themselves with the assistance of Venice. So the Senate decided that the captain of the Gulf and some other officials, heading then to *Romania*, bringing arms for the revolt, should stop at Corfu and have secret contacts with the Venetian Consul as well as with the "*nobiles de Corphu, qui sunt principales in tractatu*". However, a part of the corfiot barons had expressed some reservedness, due to the perseverance of Venice to come to terms with the king of Naples by means of negotiations, generating thus the fear that the Venetian control on the island could be only temporary. So the Senate decided that, in the case the local barons would express their skepticism by saying "*vos accipistis nos pro dando nos aliis vel recusarent pro hoc puncto*", the Venetian officials should not give them the arms they had for them, the operation should be cancelled, but the Corfiots should be encouraged to resist in the case the

51. Lunzi, *Isole Jonie*, p. 89, n. 1; Thiriet, *Sénat* 1. 155 (634) 19-11-1382; *Diplomatarij*, 184-185, 9-11-1382; R. J. Loenertz, "Hospitaliers et Navarais en Grèce (1376-1383). Regestes et documents, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 23 (1957) 319-360, esp. 347 (hereafter: Loenertz, "Hospitaliers"); F. Thiriet, "Agriculteurs et agriculture à Corfou au XVème siècle", *Kerkyraika Chronika* 23 (1980) 315-328, esp. 316.

Genoese would disembark on the island⁵².

Although these contacts had taken place secretly, the plot was revealed and Charles III sent his officials to Corfu to conduct an investigation. At least three barons, among them Guglio de Altavilla, were found guilty of high treason. They were decapitated and their estates were confiscated. Some others were exiled and lost their possessions by a king's decree⁵³.

These measures may have suspended the activities of the pro-Venetian group of barons for a while, but they were not enough to fully restore the loyalty of the feudal class to the king. On the contrary, the punishment of leading members of the feudal class seems to have enhanced the mood for disaffection. That feeling may also have been intensified by some justifiable skepticism about the legality of the king's authority, shared not only by the barons still devoted to the house of Tarent, but also by the ones loyal to the heir of the assassinated queen Joanna I, Louis d'Anjou. The latter, having been recognised by the pope Clement VII, had by that time occupied the principality of Tarent⁵⁴ bringing forth to expectations for a change of dominion on Corfu. Some time later Charles III was excommunicated by Urban VI, the pope who had crowned him⁵⁵.

Charles' III assassination in Hungary on 24 February 1386 permitted all the concealed concerns, anxieties and expectations of the corfiot feudal class to come to broad light. Their loyalty to the throne was then proved to be only fallacious. At the news of Charles' death, most of the local barons hastened to declare their support to Venice, some of them with the expectation of the confirmation of their privileges by the Sere-nissima, while others were awaiting their reestablishment on their feudal estates, confiscated during the last years of the rule of Naples. Only a few among them were for a short time favourable to other alternatives, the domination of Genoa or Padova, as a war lord from that city, Giacomo

52. Lunzi, *Isole Jonie*, p. 92, n. 1, 20-5-1383.

53. ASV, Misti, Reg. 40, f. 62v; Hopf, *Geschichte* 2. 45.

54. Leonard, *Angevins*, p. 472; Loenertz, "Hospitaliers", pp. 348-349; A. Valente, "Margherita di Durazzo, vicaria di Carlo III e tutrice di re Ladislao", ASPN n.s. 1 (1915) 462; Crassullo, p. 114.

55. *Cronicon Siculum incerti auctoris ab anno 340 ad annum 1396*, ed. J. de Blasiis. Società Napoletana di Storia Patria. Monumenti storici, ser. I, Cronache, Napoli 1887, p. 55.

Scrovegno, had already assumed control of the castle of Corfu⁵⁶.

However, as soon as the Venetian fleet appeared in the waters of Corfu, all that fluctuation disappeared. Buthroton was given out to the Venetian captain of the Golf, Iohannes Miani, by its *castellanus* Riccardo de Altavilla, a corfiot baron⁵⁷, while the *castellanus Porte Ferri* (Iron Gate) of the town of Corfu Henrico Marchesano offered the Venetians an easy access to the castles inside the town⁵⁸. Pietro Capece, then *portulanus civitatis Corphoy*, facilitated the Venetians to anchor their ships and fought side by side with them against the Genoese holding the castle of Angelokastron⁵⁹.

All these barons and officials, realizing how important their allegiance to the Venetians was at that moment, when Venice's enemies were still on the island, hastened to obtain the confirmation of their estates and privileges from the Venetian officials. In May 1386, while Scrovegno's garrison was still holding the old castle of the town, the Venetian captain of the Golf with the *provveditore* Marino Maripetro proceeded to the investiture of the barons Antonello and Castellino de Hugoth⁶⁰. Some officials of the former regime, specifically Henrico Marchesano and Petro Capece, retained their offices⁶¹.

In 1272, when Corfu had been taken by the Angevins, only two persons were involved in the deal, Aymo Alamanno and the representative of king of Naples. In 1386 things were different; In the deal for the transition of Corfu from the Angevin to the Venetian dominion two collective bodies, the *Commune Venetiarum* and the *Communitas Corphiensis*, were involved. As Margaret of Naples, regent of the adolescent Ladislaus of Naples, was not expected to deal with Venice the concession of Corfu, the acquisition of the island by the Venetians could not be justifiable in terms of international law. After the Neapolitan officials were gone, the unique institution on the island with a certain political validity, recognised by the Angevin kings, was the *Communitas Corphiensis*. And it was on the will and decision of that collective body, steered by the feudal

56. Lunzi, *Isole Jonie*, pp. 101-103; Karapidakis, *Civis fidelis*, pp. 47-49.

57. AAV 3. 400 (1044) 1403; Romanos, p. 113.

58. ASV, Misti, Reg. 41, f. 62r.

59. Asonitis, "Capece", p. 68; ASV, Misti, Reg. 40, f. 62r, 22-1-1387.

60. ASV, Misti, Reg. 42, f. 45r, 16-2-1391.

61. ASV, Misti, Reg. 40, f. 62r, 22-1-1387.

class of the island, that Venice endorsed, in the form of a contract, her rights on Corfu, at least until a final settlement with the throne of Naples could be arranged⁶². However, that political elevation of the *Communitas Corphiensis* was rather incidental and ephemeral. In fact, the contract of 1386 was the first and the last official political act of the *Communitas Corphiensis*.

On the other hand, the collective character of the *Communitas Corphiensis* was providing Venice the possibility for the abolishment of the system of personal bonds between the feudal lords of the island with their sovereign, by establishing collective relations between the *Dominante* and her subjects of Corfu. With the contract of 1386 between the *Communitas Corphiensis* and the *Commune Venetiarum* an end was put to the old practices, where the personal contracts between individuals, lord and vassal, prevailed. The vassal's *hommage* of the Angevin period, correlating personally the overlord with his subject, was to be replaced by a collective *hommage*, in which the doge of Venice was just the representative of the *Commune Venetiarum*⁶³. However, the feudal class of Corfu was not prepared to conceive and comply with that fundamental innovation.

After the Venetians had assumed full control of the island, a Corfiot delegation consisting of six people, four of them being local barons (*Petrus Capece, Riccardo de Altavilla, Johannes Alexii Cavasula and Nicolaus Trachanioti*) was sent by the Council of the *Communitas Corphiensis* to Venice with the purpose to offer formally the island to the doge and present some requests of the Corfiot people about their future as subjects of the *Serenissima*⁶⁴.

If the sequence of those requests is indicative of their importance, it is not fortuitous the fact that the first chapter of the *Bolla d'Oro* granted by the doge in 1387 to the Corfiots is meeting with the predominant

62. AAV 3. 282 (922) 8-12-1401, 322 (973) 3-8-1402, 326 (976) 10-8-1402, 327-331 (977-978-811-832) 16-8-1402, 18-6-1402, 344-346 (999) 30-11-1402; Diplomatarium, 2. 263-268, 18-6-1402, 275-279, 16-8-1402, 279-280, 16-8-1402, 280-283, 16-8-1402; Thiriet, *Sénat* 2. 34-35 (1091) 30-1-1403; Listine, 4. 469-470 (DCXXIX) 8-8-1402; Karapidakis, *Civis fidelis*, pp. 50-56.

63. Karapidakis, *Civis fidelis*, p. 51.

64. AAV 2. 24 (310) 28-5-1386, 37 (321) 8-1-1387; Commemoriali, 7. 3. 178 (220), 178-179 (221); Lunzi, *Isole Jonie*, pp. 105-106; Diplomatarium, 2. 199-204; Karapidakis, *Civis fidelis*, p. 52.

problem of the feudal class, its concern for political security and protection, by affirming them “...*Primum, quod universos et singulos homines civitatis et insule Corphiensis cum tota insula, terris, castris et locis dicte civitati et insule pertinentibus, habebit, tenebit, reget et gubernabit perpetuo sub dominio et protectione sua, ipsosque proteget et defensabit. Ac ipsam civitatem et insulam, castra et loca eius, nulli umquam domino, communitati, magnati vel principi orbis terre donabit, alienabit, vendet vel permutabit, aliqua ratione vel causa, titulo sive modo*”⁶⁵. The last part of this chapter seems to be a reproduction of the pledge of Charles III to the corfiot delegation of 1382. The insecurities of the last decades as well as the abominable experiences of the recent years were ostracized with the last phrase of the first chapter⁶⁶. Closely related to that chapter were the requests submitted by the *Communitas* referring to the confirmation of the ancient privileges of the feudal class⁶⁷.

The corfiot delegation sent to Venice was accompanied by a large group of persons bringing documents containing the ancient privileges of their families to be confirmed by the Venetian authorities. Some of them were also provided with certificates issued by the first Venetian *provveditore* in Corfu, Marino Maripetro, attesting their allegiance to Venice. They were all asking for some kind of remuneration⁶⁸. Thus, as far as the privileges are concerned, the corfiot delegation of 1386-1387, although it was supposed to operate on the collective level, was equally engaged on personal requests. It was quite normal for the members of a society familiar with personal privileges to try to obtain some personal privilege, irrelevant or even adverse to the collective expectations.

Even the elected members of the corfiot delegation were of the same mentality. After all, analogous procedures had taken place in Naples in 1382. However, the circumstances were now quite different. In the official document issued by the doge, the petition for the confirmation of all the ancient privileges of the leading class of Corfu was not satisfied. The doge promised to confirm only the legally possessed estates of the Corfiots, thus enhancing the importance of legality as far as their possessions were concerned, overturning the prevalent conception of the leading

65. AAV 2. 37 (321) 8-1-1387.

66. Karapidakis, *Civis fidelis*, p. 54.

67. Karapidakis, *Civis fidelis*, p. 57.

68. ASV, Misti, Reg. 40, f. 62v, 22-1-1387.

class of Corfu about the preponderance of the personal privileges⁶⁹.

In any case, as a lot of personal requests had been accumulated in the Venetian offices, the Senate proclaimed that the petitioners should apply to the *provisores* of Corfu, who were authorized to examine their titles and decide about each case. Only in case of misjudgement the petitioner could appeal to Venice. It is also important to note that the Senate had intimately ordered the *provisores* of Corfu that they should have in mind that Charles III had edited a “...*privilegium, revocans et annullans omnes provisiones predictas, quod studeant reperire*”⁷⁰. It is therefore obvious that from the first moment of her dominion in Corfu Venice, aware of the disposition of the local aristocracy to take advantage of the circumstances, decided to prevent any attempt of the leading class of Corfu to enlarge their personal privileges.

That procedure was to be followed even for the most important members of the corfiot delegation, as well as the most powerful barons of the island. The *provisores*, having examined the documents presented to them, finally confirmed the feudal annual commission of Iohannes Alexii Cavasula and Carluccio di Sancto Mauricio⁷¹. Some others, although less important persons, having fought bravely for Venice, were also recompenced⁷².

The case of Petro Capece from Sorrento, near Naples, who had served as *Capitaneus Corphiensis* under the Angevin rule, is characteristic of the mentalities of members of the corfiot aristocracy as far as their relations with the new masters of the island are concerned, as well as of the way these mentalities were faced by Venice.

After his service as captain of Corfu was over (1371) Capece remained in the island⁷³ and in 1382 he was granted the office of *magister portulanus civitatis ad vitam*, with an annual salary of 60 ducats⁷⁴. In 1386 Capece, having fought side by side with the Venetians, was allowed by the admiral of the Gulf to keep his office for the time being⁷⁵.

69. Karapidakis, *Civis fidelis*, pp. 57-58.

70. ASV, Misti, Reg. 40, f. 62v, 22-1-1387.

71. ASV, Misti, Reg. 40, f. 80v-81r, 9-5-1387.

72. ASV, Misti, Reg. 40, f. 62v, 22-1-1386.

73. Asonitis, “Capece”, pp. 63-68.

74. ASV, Misti, Reg. 40, f. 62r, 22-1-1387.

75. ASV, Misti, Reg. 40, f. 62r, 22-1-1387.

Some time later Capece, elected by the *Communitas Corphiensis* as a member of the corfiot delegation sent to the doge, was in Venice. There he tried to assure his predominant position in the corfiot society. Having been informed that the Senate had decided to appoint someone formally at the office of *admiratus* or *portulanus civitatis Corphoy*, Capece “*sponte renuntiaverit in manibus dominii officium predictum*”, but at the same time he asked for his formal appointment, a request supported by the references he was provided by *provisor* Marino Maripetro. In the next few days the Senate decided to appoint Capece at the office of *portulanus* of Corfu, as a recognition of his services to Venice⁷⁶.

However, that appointment, placing Capece in rank of the ordinary local officials of Corfu, was not enough for him. His aristocratic mentality⁷⁷ urged him to try to acquire a preponderant social standing under the new regime. As a member of the corfiot delegation he had been informed that the Senate needed about 4.000 ducats for the reconstruction of the bastions of Corfu and for the digging of a protective channel along the walls. Capece, considering the case as an opportunity to move forward special and personal relations with the *Dominante*, volunteered to pay that money from his own. By making his offer he emphasized that “... *non dixerat hoc de scientia sociorum suorum, nec de scientia Communitatis Corphu, sed sic a se ...*”. It is evident that his offer was accordant to the feudal mentality of the old Neapolitan aristocrat, relating the personal service with the expectation of some kind of remuneration.

However, as things had changed, Capece's proposal was discussed in the Venetian Senate and although he was “*homo potens et copiosus amicis in partibus illis et propinquis*”⁷⁸, his offer was rejected, “*quod non esset nec fieret hoc cum contentatione Corphiensium, ymo posset oriri magna murmuratio*”⁷⁹. The different mentalities of the old Neapolitan aristocrat and the citizens of Venice are apparent. The members of the Senate politely remarked that by refusing his offer they were trying to avoid any justified complaints for favouritism against Venice by the

76. ASV, Misti, Reg. 40, f. 62r, 22-1-1387, and 81v.

77. N. Karapidakis, *Η Κέρκυρα και οι Βενετοί: Ανάγνωση και δυναμική του αστικού χώρου, Κέρκυρα: Ιστορία, αστική ζωή και αρχιτεκτονική (14ος-19ος αι.)*, Επιμέλεια Ennio Concina - Αλίκη Νικηφόρου-Testone, Corfu 1994, p. 45.

78. Asonitis, “Capece”, pp. 67-69.

79. ASV, Misti, Reg. 40, f. 79r.

people of Corfu. The fact is that they were not willing to allow the persistence of the feudal practices personally relating the subject with his master in their new colony.

The rejection of his proposal did not discourage Capece. Although it should have been clear to him that things had changed, he insisted on playing his aristocratic role in Corfu. Some years later he built the monumental convent of *Annunciata*, inaugurated with a pompous ceremony. As his office of *portulanus* offered least accomplishment to his ambition, he decided to exchange it with the *baronia Caracalo*, a change closer to his aristocratic mentality, as he, a Neapolitan *miles*, had to keep a horse in the service of the *Serenissima*. Some time later he put the convent of *Annunciata* under the jurisdiction of the *baiulus* of Corfu, while he was given another barony.

In spite of all these activities, the highest office Capece managed to receive from Venice *per gratiam* was that of *Castellanus Parge* (1411), a castle on the coast in Epiros, dependent on Corfu. Although it seemed to be a special treatment for Capece, it was not, as that office was regularly conferred to the members of *Communitas Corphiensis*. Two years later his appointment, although it had been *in vitam*, was revoked⁸⁰.

The case of Capece is characteristic of the mentalities of the feudal class of Corfu, struggling to retain its social standing by means of personal relations with the lords of the island. On the other hand Venice's attitude towards him reveals a policy intending to put an end to the traditional practices dictated by feudal mentalities, but cautious enough, so that Venice could avoid any perilous alienation of the local aristocracy.

The case of Capece is not unique. Other feudal families followed similar behaviours. In 1398 the convent of *Annunciata* was endowed lands by the baron Carluccio de Sancto Mauricio⁸¹, while in 1405 the feudal lord of the little island of Paxos, Floramonte de Sancto Ippolito, erected the chapel of St. George in the vicinity of *Annunciata*, adding also a house to the convent's possessions⁸². These examples were later followed by other members of the local aristocracy, like Luisia de Altavilla and Arsenio de Hugoth⁸³.

80. Asonitis, "Capece", pp. 68-81.

81. HAC, Ενετοκρατία, File Nr. 109, Doc. Nr. 4, 3-6-1398.

82. HAC, Ενετοκρατία, File Nr. 109, Doc. Nr. 15, 2-1-1405, and 5, 25-1-1405.

83. HAC, Ενετοκρατία, File Nr. 109, Doc. Nr. 6, 26-11-1405; Asonitis, "Martina",

All these activities show that after the first years of her domination in Corfu Venice was not openly adverse to the efforts of the members of the feudal class intending to demonstrate their social superiority. Furthermore, Venice did not hesitate to take advantage of their relations with important personalities of Western Greece. In 1449 the feudal lord of Paxos, Adam de Sancto Ippolito, was repeatedly sent to the count of Cephallenia and duke of Leukas Leonardo Tocco, with the purpose to persuade him to give out his islands to Venice⁸⁴, while some time later Adam was sent to Strovili, a castle on the mainland facing the town of Corfu, with the purpose to persuade its Albanian lord, Simon Zenevisi, to drive out the Aragonese garrison settled there⁸⁵.

After 1386 the requests of the population of the island were officially submitted to Venice by delegations elected by the *Communitas*, which was also conferred the jurisdiction to designate the persons which should be appointed to the local offices reserved for the Corfiots. It was therefore natural that the feudal class of Corfu, trying to keep its supremacy in the local society, struggled to control that body and keep it closed to the members of other social groups, such as the bourgeois, the immigrants from Romania, the Albanians⁸⁶. Any effort of immigrants to have a place in the Council of the *Communitas* was usually opposed by the old members on the basis of criteria like the origin (*gente estranea*) as well as of the social status (*assay vile et da puocho*) of the candidates⁸⁷. On the contrary, the gates of the feudal class of Corfu and the *Communitas* were wide open to the members of the Venetian aristocracy, like Vito Dalmario, Pietro de Dondis, Antonio Arimondo, Hieronymus Bragadin⁸⁸, who were adding to the antiquated Neapolitan aristocracy of Corfu something from the aristocratic spirit of Venice.

From then on the requests of the corfiot aristocracy had a collective character, covering the larger part of the documents known under the

pp. 32-36; Romanos, 326-328.

84. AAV 20. 122-124 (5482) 8-7-1449.

85. AAV 23. 59-61 (6347) (6348), 62 (6349).

86. Yotopoulou, "Classi Sociali", p. 101.

87. Yotopoulou, "Classi Sociali", p. 101; Karapidakis, *Civis fidelis*, pp. 95, 98, 110.

88. G. Soulis, "The Gypsies in the Byzantine Empire and the Balkans in the Late Middle Ages", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 15 (1961) 143-165, esp. 165; Asonitis, "Martina", pp. 10-36; Karapidakis, *Civis fidelis*, p. 119.

name *ambasciate* of the *Communitas Corphiensis*⁸⁹. In the 15th century, as the middle class of Corfu was rapidly getting rich, its members started to claim a place in the council of the *Communitas*, giving rise to a new feeling of collective insecurity to the members of the old feudal class, the latter getting more and more concerned about their preponderance in the local society⁹⁰. That concern was justifiable, as the control of the Council of the *Communitas* was securing for the members of the corfiot aristocracy the privilege to band with the Venetian officers, to participate as judges in the law court, to be elected for the local offices, to enjoy the profits from contracts with the local authorities, to rent the state's land⁹¹. The membership in the Council of the *Communitas*, mentioned in the sources of the next century as "*citadinanza del Consiglio*", was considered even in the 18th century so important, that it is mentioned in a document as "*pupilla degl'occhi nostri*"⁹², while even until the end of the 18th century the claim of the middle class to create a body of their own, disconnecting them from the lower classes, was considered by the aristocracy as a revolutionary innovation incompatible with the traditional order⁹³.

In conclusion, in the 13th and early 14th centuries, as far as its relations with the sovereign are concerned, the feudal class of Corfu followed to some extent in its behaviours and mentalities the patterns of its counterpart of Southern Italy. By the middle of the 14th century, a growing feeling of insecurity among its members, due to the policies of the masters of the island, stimulated them to start thinking politics. As their *hommage* was getting more and more futile, the *Communitas Corphiensis*, an aristocratic body with a role in the domestic affairs of the island, became an institution with political authority for a short time. In 1386 that institution was considered appropriate to legalize the Venetian occupation by signing a contract of collective *hommage* between the population of the island and the *Commune Venetiarum*. By that contract the old feudal personal bonds of vassalage were substituted by collective ones. From then on, as the old mentalities and behaviours of the

89. Yotopoulou, "Classi Sociali", p. 98.

90. Yotopoulou, "Classi Sociali", pp. 101-102.

91. Asonitis, "Κριτής", *op.cit.*; Karapidakis, *Civis fidelis*, p. 59.

92. Yotopoulou, "Classi Sociali", p. 101, n. 10.

93. Yotopoulou, "Classi Sociali", p. 105.

feudal lords of the island were reservedly discouraged by Venice, the feudal class of Corfu was bound to contest with the emerging bourgeois class, in order to keep under its control the council of the *Communitas*, which was the source of the preponderance of its members in the local society.

Abbreviations

AAV	J. Valentini, <i>Acta Albaniae Veneta saeculorum XIV et XV</i> , vol. I-XXV, Palermo - Rom - München, 1967-1976.
ASPN	<i>Archivio Storico per le Provincie Napoletane</i> .
Asonitis, "Capece"	S. Asonitis, "Petrus Capece, capitaneus Corphiensis (1367), castellanus Parge (1411)", <i>Πρακτικά Θ' Πανελληνίου Ιστορικού Συνεδρίου</i> , Thessaloniki 1988, pp. 61-81.
ASV	<i>Archivio di Stato di Venezia</i> .
<i>Diplomatarium</i>	G. M. Thomas, <i>Diplomatarium Veneto-Levantinum</i> , 1-2, Venezia 1876.
HAC	<i>Historical Archive of Corfu</i> .
Karapidakis, <i>Civis fidelis</i>	N. Karapidakis, <i>Civis fidelis: l'avènement et l'affirmation de la citoyenneté corfiote (XVIème - XVIIème siècles)</i> , [Studien zur Geschichte Südosteuropas 8], Frankfurt am Main 1992.
Listine	S. Liubic, Documents sur les relations des Slaves méridionaux avec la République de Venise. Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum Meridionalium, I-X, Zagreb 1876-1891.
MM	F. Miklosich - J. Müller, <i>Acta et Diplomata medii aevi, sacra et profana</i> , I-VI, Vindobonae 1860-1890.
PLA	C. Perrat - J. Longnon, <i>Actes relatifs à la Principauté de Morée, 1289-1300</i> , Paris 1967.
Commemoriali	R. Predelli, I libri Commemoriali della republica di Venezia. Regesti, 1-8, Venezia 1876-1914.
RA	R. Filangieri, I registri della cancelleria angioina, I-XXXVII, Napoli 1950-1987.
Romanos	I. Romanos, "Ιστορικά έργα", <i>Kerkyraika Chronika</i> 7 (1959).
Thiriet, <i>Sénat</i>	F. Thiriet, <i>Regestes des délibérations du Sénat de Venise concernant la Roumanie</i> , 1-2, Paris 1958-1959.

- Yotopoulou, "Classi sociali" E. Yotopoulou, "Alcune considerazioni sulle classi sociali corfiote e sulla politica veneta nei loro confronti in base a quanto risulta dalle fonti e in modo particolare dai testi delle ambasciate. Levante Veneziano", a cura di Massimo Constantini - Alikì Nikiforou, *Quaderni di Cheiron* 2 (1996) 97-122.