

A REVOLT IN WESTERN MACEDONIA : 1444-1449

1. After the Turkish invasion in Macedonia, about the end of the fourteenth century, the Byzantine military system was replaced by the corresponding Turkish system. The district of Thessaloniki and of Macedonia in general was then divided into "hasses" (public lands which belonged to the Sultan, his children and other dignitaries of the state), into timars (small estates), and into ziamets (large estates) of the "sipahis." Thus in Turkish records of the middle of the 15th century which have been preserved, we see many well-known villages of Macedonia mentioned together with their feudal lords, whereas other villages have remained unknown either because they were destroyed or because it is impossible for us to identify them.¹

Among those feudal lords were some Greek and Slav military landowners (pronoïars) who, terrified by the oppressive power of the Turks, had offered no resistance and had preferred treason or to conclude treaties and submit, because their fiefs were recognised.² We find that under Sultan Murat II, some of their descendants in Kastoria, Nevrokopi, Serres and Veles, were won over to Islam, as for instance Mousa the son of Petko, Bayezid the son of Augustos, and Umur the son of Theodoros.³ The Christian sipahis (Hiristiyan Sipāhiler), the Voynuks (Voynuklar) and others in the Balkan peninsula⁴ were exempted from certain taxes.⁵ They were however compelled to follow the Sultan on his expeditions even though they hated him because of his harsh rule. "I have no doubt," wrote Brocquière in 1432, "that these (he

1. About the fiefs of the districts of Thessaloniki, Avret Hisar and Drama see *Fontes turcici Historiae Bulgariae*, Series XV-XVI, Serdicae 1966, V 13, p. 388-479.

2. See B.A. Cvetkova, New evidence concerning the Christian spahis of the Balkan peninsula in the time of the Turkish Empire (in Russian), "*Viz. Vremm.*" 23 (1958) 184-197.

3. H. Inalcik, Stefan Dušan 'dan Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda XV asırda Rumelide Hiristiyan Sipahiler ve menseleri, *Fuad Köprülü Armağanı* (İstanbul 1953) 218.

4. See Inalcik, Stefan Dušan' dan, *Fuad Köprülü Armağanı*, pp. 213-214.

5. See Inalcik, *loc. cit.*, pp. 228-229, 246-247.

speaks in general of these military forces made up of the different Christian races of the Balkan peninsula, Greeks, Bulgarians, Albanians, Vlachs and Dalmatians) would have turned their backs on the Sultan and done him great harm, had they seen the Christians and especially the French, advance against him with forces."⁶ Joh. Torzelo raises the number of these Christian sipahis to a total of fifty thousand.⁷

During the reign of Muhammed II Hasan Maniasis is mentioned as the feudal lord of the village Yianesevo (Metallikon) in the region of Avret Hisar (Yinaekokastron); he must have been an old Byzantine landowner as his surname "Maniasis" shows who later became a Muslim. And, whereas the surrounding villages as well as those of the district of Kilgis, were inhabited mainly by Muslims, in the above mentioned village the Christians were far more numerous, almost one Muslim to ten Christians.⁸ Perhaps this is the reason why Manasis kept his fief.

We also learn from contemporary Turkish records that a Palaeologus, brother of Mezih Pasha, one of the leading citizens of Serres, had the village Karlikovo in the region of Zichna as his fief.⁹

The Christian sipahis was a class of Christian soldiers, inhabitants of the public lands, who owed their existence to the forbearance of the Turkish rule. However, the slightest suspicion or sign of revolt was enough to cause loss of their properties. Thus their immediate economic interests bound them to the new political and social regime. The recognition and the use of Christian fief holders as auxiliary forces facilitated the spread and consolidation of the Turkish conquests.¹⁰ Otherwise a considerable proportion of the Turkish forces would have had to stay idle in the innumerable fortresses of the empire.¹¹

These Christian fief holders and their descendants speedily turned to Islam, whereas the old serfs of the Byzantine times became the well known, in Greek, *kolligi* (κολλίγοι) of the Turkish rule. The small villages of these "kolligi" became afterwards the well known *çiftliks* or estates. Here the kolligi

6. Bertrandon de la Brocquière, *Le Voyage d'Outremer* etc. In the Series *Mémoires de l'Institut National des Sciences et Arts*, Paris, Fructidor an XII, pp. 579-610.

7. *Loc. cit.*, ed. Schefer, p. 265.

8. *Fontes*, 13, p. 393.

9. *Fontes*, 13, p. 477-479.

10. See a similar situation in Albania : H. Inalcik, *Timariotes Chrétiens en Albanie au XV^e siècle d'après un registre de timars ottomans*. *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs* 4 (1951), 122, 123, 124, 128.

11. H. Inalcik, *Ottoman Methods of Conquest*. *Studia Islamica* 2 (1954), 107, 114.

continued to cultivate the land with their animals and tools and to have their customary obligations towards the lords of the estates. These serfs, however, had to face the harsh and scornful attitude of those who had been converted to Islam. The result was that the inhabitants of Macedonia hated their conquerors, and hoped for their liberty. Military events in Central Europe and the projected Crusades without doubt must have caused great sympathy in their spirits. We well know that the Crusade of King Ladislav of Hungary, which ended in the battle of Varna (1444), had moved Southern Greece and had strongly encouraged the ruler of the Morea, Constantine Palaeologus and his brother-in law, Carlo II Tocco (1429-1448) to rise against the Turks and seek to take advantage of this opportunity.

At that time, Constantine marched beyond the Isthmus of Corinth and conquered Thebes and the whole of Boeotia, while the Vlachs of the Pinus region, under a sergeant, had started making incursions against the Yuruks of Thessaly.¹²

It is most probably that this unrest among the Christians had spread also to Northern Greece and that the inhabitants of the mountain ranges of Western Macedonia experienced revolt and freedom even in the small towns.

This period of revolt seems to have lasted for several years and was invigorated by the expedition of John Hunyadi, who reached Southern Serbia as far as Kosovo Polje (October 1448), where a decisive battle was fought and which resulted in the defeat of the crusaders. Thus these fermentations for freedom in Western and Central Macedonia did not lead to any definite result after the unfortunate end of the Christian expedition.

2. During this time of unrest, entire regions in Western Macedonia must have succeeded in shaking off the Turkish yoke, as certain facts would have us suppose. To this movement I think the following little notice in the Turkish records must be attributed; the feudal lord of the village Erikliou (Iraklio) Sahin, son of the priest, lost his fief in 1449 "because it was announced that the above mentioned lord did not join his military unit to keep guard and maintain order."¹³ What does this mean? Some disturbance must have occurred in that district and the Christian feudal lord did not take part in the efforts to restore order. Where did it happen? In the village Erikliou, about which the translator of the Turkish text Nicolas Popov says that it can be identified with the village Eraki of Veroia. But I don't know a village under this

12. See A. Vacalopoulos, *Historia tou Neou Hellinismou*, Thessaloniki 1961, vol. I, pp. 239-240 (in Greek).

13. *Fontes*, 13, p. 395.

name in Veroia. Mr. B. Demetriades¹⁴ suggests the village Erikli (now Irakleion) near Langada as the one most probably meant. Maybe for the same reason in 1451 the fief of Stanislave, a Slav fief holder, which is situated in another region, probably Doirane, is taken from him to be given to the Turk Abdel Aziz.

Another evidence, a more convincing one is given to us by an act of the *cadi* of Veroia Omer Nouroulah, dated July 12, 1599, and I certainly believe that it throws light upon events about which we had no definite knowledge till now. It is specifically mentioned in the above act of the *cadi* that Greek inhabitants of the quarter of St. Nicolas in Veroia with their notables complained to the *cadi* and maintained that Michael Charitopoulos and sixteen members of his patriarchal family refused to pay the established taxes to the Sultan. The Charitopoulos' clan justified this refusal to pay taxes on the basis of the *firman* by which they had obtained tax privileges for the many services which had been offered to the Turkish troops during the reconquest of Veroia in 852 (or 1448-1449) by one of the family ancestors, Ioannis Charitopoulos. The *cadi* dismissed the accusation of the notables and forbade them in the future to trouble Michael Charitopoulos or any member of his family for the payment of the Sultan's taxes.¹⁵

As we see, the *firman* refers to prerogatives granted to Ioannis Charitopoulos during the reconquest of Veroia (1448-1449). I do not believe that it can be a mistaken registration of the legal act in the codex of the *cadi*, as is the opinion of Mrs. Stathopoulou-Asdracha, who dates the capture of the city at "around 1430 in accordance with the procedure of the general attack on Thessaloniki and its surrounding areas."¹⁶ I think that the chronology is accurate and refers to a specific event, and is illuminated when considered in the light of the contemporary military events in the Balkans, as we have seen above.

The fact that the Turkish month in which Veroia fell is not mentioned in the record deprives us of a further piece of evidence, but without doubt this event must be placed chronologically probably after the defeat of the Hungarians at Kossovo Polje on 19th October 1448, when the inhabitants of Macedonia lost their hopes for freedom. Then the Turkish troops attacked

14. See *Balkan Studies* 8 (1967), 211.

15. I. K. Vasdravellis, *Historika Archeia Makedonias; B. Archeion Veroias-Naoussis* (1598-1886), Thessaloniki 1954, pp. 1-2 (in Greek).

16. K. Stathopoulou-Asdracha, *Hoi tourkikes katalipseis tis Veroias, Epitheorisis Technis*, 20/122 (1965), 153 (in Greek).

Veroia and occupied it with the aid of Ioannis Charitopoulos and other members of his family.

In another register half a century later, in a copy of a firman of 12th September 1648, the Charitopouloi renewed their prerogatives. There again it is mentioned that "in the capture of Veroia they offered great aid and services in many ways."¹⁷ It is not clear exactly what kind of services these were; Ioannis Charitopoulos, perhaps an old Byzantine pronoiar,¹⁸ that is a Christian sipahi or sergeant in free Veroia, hastened to facilitate the entrance of the Turkish troops of Sultan Murad II into the city.

Should this movement of the inhabitants of Veroia be connected with the plans of Constantine Palaeologus and his contacts with the Northern Greeks? For lack of evidence the problem remains unsolved.

After the occupation of Veroia, Sultan Murad II hastened to repay Charitopoulos and the other members of his family whether close or distant, by exempting them from the payment of the Sultan's taxes, as they paid 1049 aspers a year.¹⁹

It seems that by the expression "the Sultan's taxes" the special taxes (avarizi divaniye ve tekâlifi örfiye) are meant as is elsewhere specifically mentioned in this firman of 1671.²⁰ Of course, it was not possible for the Charitopoulos' family to be exempted from the tributary tax or the "haradj." As we have seen from the edition of the firman, the Charitopoulos' family renewed these prerogatives in 1648, when certain "disorderly" individuals, evidently the same Christian inhabitants of the quarter of St. Nicholas, were trying to blackmail them and extort money from them as it is recorded²¹ or, better still, it seems that other Greeks were trying to make them share the common burdens of the community.

Probably to these events which took place in Western Greece and Macedonia between 1444-1448 one more incident must be added mentioned only by P. Aravantinos and placed in 1458; that is, the still independent inhabitants of Aitolia — and by that he surely means the unsubdued inhabitants of the Agrafa area and Pindus in general — after coming out of the borders of their country they overplowed Thessaly, burnt some villages and advan-

17. Vasdravellis, *loc. cit.*, p. 33.

18. See Stathopoulou-Asdracha, *loc. cit.*, p. 153-154.

19. Vasdravellis, *loc. cit.*, p. 33.

20. Vasdravellis, *loc. cit.*, p. 57. See legal act of August 18, 1681, pp. 77-78.

21. Vasdravellis, *loc. cit.*, pp. 32-33. See new annoyances in 1671, pp. 57-58 and in 1681, pp. 77-78.

ced plundering the area up to Serres of Macedonia, from where they returned to their countries with the loot.²²

I do not know from where Aravantinos took this information and for this reason I pass it on with great reservation. The date is not exact. Perhaps there is a mistake as far as the dating is concerned because this incident cannot have happened in 1458, at a time when Muhammed II marched against the Greeks of the Peloponnese for the first time, but rather ten years earlier, in 1448, when the Christians had perhaps risen again when they were informed of Hunyadi's successful campaign up to Kosovo Polje.

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22. P. Aravantinos (P.A.P.), *Chronographia tis Ipeirou*, Athens 1856, vol. I, p. 176 (in Greek).