

GLANCES AT THE GREEK ORTHODOX PRIESTS IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

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The history of the Greek Orthodox ecclesiastical administration lacks seamless continuity because its course has been frequently interrupted by events resulting from the enmity between the Roman Catholic and the Greek Orthodox churches. To begin with the head of the Orthodox Church, I note that in April of the year 1204, when the Latin soldiers of the Fourth Crusade captured Constantinople, the Ecumenical Patriarch was compelled to flee the city. A Latin clergyman, the Venetian Thomas Morosini, was nominated Patriarch of Constantinople and the Greek Orthodox patriarchal throne remained vacant for two years until it was restored in Nicaea, the capital-in-exile of the Byzantine state.¹ In 1450, when it became clear that the Greek Orthodox population rejected the Union of the Churches concluded in Florence (1439), the Ecumenical Patriarch Gregory III realised that he could not maintain his position in the Patriarchate any more, and abandoned the Byzantine capital.² Again the patriarchal throne remained vacant, this time for approximately three years, until January 1454, when Gennadios Scholarios was appointed by the Sultan Mehemmed II as the first patriarch under Ottoman rule.

Furthermore, the history of many metropolises, archbishoprics and bishoprics (*episkopai*), includes most important gaps, as the Latins did not allow the upper clergymen to reside in their sees. For instance, the Greek populations of Frankish Cyprus and Venetian Crete were deprived for approximately five centuries of high ecclesiastical authorities. On the other hand, in the old Byzantine territories, which passed under Turkish rule, the new masters, following the principles of Islam, respected the Greek Orthodox ecclesiastical hierarchy. However, some important cities, which had been prestigious metropolitan sees, became impoverished and were gradually deserted by their Christian populations. As

¹ A. J. Andrea, Innocent III and the Byzantine rite, in A. Laiou (ed.), *Urbs Capta, The Fourth Crusade and its consequences*, Paris 2005, pp. 118–119.

² D. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261–1453*, London 1972, pp. 390–393.

a consequence, they ceased to be eligible as sees of metropolitan clergymen. Caesarea, for example, the second see in the hierarchy of the Byzantine empire, lost its metropolitan status during the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. Clergymen bearing the title of the Metropolitan of Caesarea are mentioned in the sources but this was an empty title bestowed just to honour certain senior clergymen who, however, never settled in their see.³

In contrast to the fate of the Greek Orthodox upper clergy, that of the lower clergy—that is, of the parish (*enoria*) and village priests, the *papades*—was marked by continuity even when the regions where they were located passed from Byzantine to Roman Catholic or Muslim rule. Those priests went on saying mass every Sunday and on holidays in the small churches of villages and towns, which were left in the hands of the local population by the conquerors.⁴ As they were closer to the people, priests exercised a profound influence on the community and, as we are going to see, they usually were its representatives to the foreign authorities. Among the metropolitans and bishops there often appeared distinguished theologians and scholars who attracted the interest and respect of their contemporaries. By contrast, it seems that the priests had very limited education and were sometimes harshly criticised by their contemporaries for their ignorance.⁵

Recently our knowledge of the lower clergy has substantially deepened thanks to the publication of the memoirs of a priest, Papa-Synadinos, who lived in Serres during the first half of the seventeenth century. This text, fairly unique in its genre and composed in the first-person singular, constitutes a rich source of information on the everyday life of a parish priest in a sizeable Macedonian town and offers a clear picture of the clergy of that time in general.⁶ A research programme that

³ E. A. Zachariadou, *Ten Turkish Documents concerning the Great Church (1483–1567)*, Athens 1996 (in Greek), p. 143.

⁴ Unfortunately I was unable to consult the Ph.D. thesis of P. Akanthopoulos “Η ιστορία των ενοριών του Οικουμενικού Πατριαρχείου κατά την Τουρκοκρατία”, submitted to the Aristoteleian University of Thessalonica in 1984.

⁵ J. Aalberts, *Ο ηθικός βίος των Κρητικών και ειδικά των κληρικών κατά το δεύτερο μισό του 15ου αιώνα και η συντέλεια του κόσμου*, *Acts of the Eighth International Cretological Congress, Byzantine and post-Byzantine Period*, B/1, Heraklion 2000, pp. 31–46.

⁶ P. Odorico, avec la collaboration de S. Asdrachas, T. Karanastassis, K. Kostis, S. Petmézas, *Conseils et Mémoires de Synadinos prêtre de Serrès en Macédoine (XVII^e siècle)*, Paris 1996; cf. the reviews of J. Straus and E. A. Zachariadou, in „*Turcica*“, 33 (2001), pp. 393–401.

we are carrying out in the Turkish archive of the Vikelaia Municipality Library of Heraklion has yielded much material on the same subject and century.⁷ More precisely, the Codex nr. 3 of the Vikelaia includes 726 documents issued by one of the first *kadis* of Crete; they were written between 1669–1673, that is, the years immediately after the complete conquest of the island by the Ottomans; many of these documents involve local priests. Drawing on this material I will attempt to sketch a broader picture of the lower clergy in the seventeenth century.

At the outset, we should remark that the historical background of Serres and Crete varied considerably. The town of Serres, conquered by the Ottomans in 1383, saw its ecclesiastical administration restored within less than ten years and from that time onwards it remained under the continued guidance of its metropolitans who ordained the priests. On the other hand, Crete re-entered the Greek Orthodox world after almost 450 years of Roman Catholic rule. When the Ottomans began the conquest of the island in 1645, they found there only *papades* because the Venetians, being Roman Catholics, did not accept higher clergymen in their domains. Especially as novices, these priests encountered difficulties because they had to move to fairly remote places such as the Ionian islands or the Morea or even to Turkish territories, where they could be ordained by a metropolitan or a bishop according to the regulations of the Greek Orthodox Church. Before they could set off they first had to take permission from the Venetian authorities. Then they had to confront the roughness of the Aegean sea and the pirates who infested it; one can take an idea of the hardships involved in these sea travels from and to Crete from the story of four priests in the ‘Miracles of Saint Phanourios’, a text composed on this island.⁸ With the arrival of the Ottomans this situation changed. Following a by then well-established political principle, they hastened to restore the Greek Orthodox Church in order to win the Cretan population over to their side and also to increase their prestige in the Greek Orthodox world. The Ottomans

⁷ On the archive of Creta see E. A. Zachariadou, *The Turkish Archive of the Vikelaia Municipality Library of Herakleion (Kandiye)*, in *Balkanlar ve İtalya'da şehir ve manastır arşivlerindeki türkçe belgeleri semineri (16–17 Kasım 2000)*, Ankara 2003, pp. 25–29.

⁸ M. Greene, *A Shared World, Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, Princeton 2000, pp. 175–176; M. Manoussakas, Βενετικά Έγγραφα Αναφερόμενα εις την Εκκλησιαστικήν Ιστορίαν της Κρήτης του 14ου–16ου αιώ-νος, in “*Δελτίον της Ιστορικής και Εθνολογικής Ηetaireias*” 15 (1961), pp. 177–179; cf. E. A. Zachariadou, Ιστορικά στοιχεία σ’ένα θαύμα του Αγίου Φανουρίου, in “*Archeion Pontou*”, 26 (1964), pp. 309–318.

did not even wait for the complete conquest of the island. After the occupation of Rethymnon, in 1646, a metropolitan was sent by the Ecumenical Patriarch to Crete, undoubtedly with the consent of the Sultan. This metropolitan was Neophytos Patellaros, a member of an old and rich family of Rethymnon and a relative of the Patriarch of Constantinople.⁹ The Ottomans took an additional measure, which aimed at winning the favour of the Greek Orthodox priests and monks of Crete by exempting them from the poll tax (*cizye*) for at least thirty years.¹⁰ With the surrender of Candia (Heraklion) in 1669, which meant the complete conquest of Crete, Patellaros became the metropolitan of the whole island, which, however, had been devastated by a war that had lasted almost twenty-five years; his duties were hampered by many difficulties.

After the fall of Constantinople the administration of the Byzantine emperor was officially replaced by that of the Ottoman sultan. Despite the presence of a supreme authority of a different faith, the Patriarchate was re-established and the structure of the ecclesiastical and monastic hierarchy of the Greek Orthodox Church survived almost unchanged with metropolitans, bishops and parish priests constituting the traditional network of its administration. The Sultan placed metropolitans, archbishops, bishops, ecclesiastical dignitaries and functionaries, priests, but also the abbots of monasteries, monks and nuns under the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch.

The Patriarch and the metropolitans, archbishops and bishops were elected by the Holy Synod but appointed by the sultan who granted them a special document, a *berat*; therefore, they constituted religious authorities recognised by the Ottoman state. The lower clergy, the *papades*, used to take on their duties without the intervention of the Holy Synod and without any official interference from the Ottoman administration. In fact, the Ottoman administration was not responsible for issuing documents that granted priests authority over their flocks. Priests answered only to the metropolitans or bishops of their districts, who ordained them and usually farmed out to them the local parish churches. Priests who possessed some capital, might be granted more than one parish church. For instance, the church authorities farmed out five churches in

⁹ T. Beneres, Νεόφυτος ο Πατελλάρος, Ο πρώτος μητροπολίτης της Κρήτης μετά την κατάκτησιν αυτής υπό των Τούρκων, in “*Epeteris Hetaireias Kretikon Spoudon*”, 1 (1938), pp. 2–14.

¹⁰ N. Adiyeké; N. Adiyeké; E. Balta, *The Poll Tax in the Years of Cretan War, Symbol of Submission and Mechanisms of Avoidance*, in “*Thesaurismata*”, 31 (2001), p. 343.

Serres to Papa-Synadinos for the sum of 6,000 *akçe*.¹¹ There were cases in which the notables of a town were so convinced that a particular person would be the right priest for them that they volunteered to pay the requisite sum of money to the bishop of their district who granted a parish to that particular priest.¹² If the metropolitan or the bishop of the district judged that the behaviour of a priest was not correct he could dismiss him. Only in case of a manifest scandal would the Holy Synod become involved in the affairs of individual priests.

However, the Ottoman administration did not completely ignore the *papades*: they are mentioned in the *berats* concerning patriarchal matters, metropolitans or bishops and in other Ottoman documents issued for the affairs of the Church. It was made clear that the *papades* were subordinates of the Patriarch, who commanded them usually through the metropolitan or bishop of a district. Also, it is noted that under certain circumstances the Patriarch inherited their movables; last but by no means least, they are mentioned because they were obliged to pay taxes to the Patriarch.¹³ It could be argued that, to the eyes of the Ottomans, priests constituted 'semi-official' ecclesiastical figures, comparable to the agents who operated on the fringes of the Ottoman institutional system, on behalf of but not under the direct and official control of the state. Such agents have been aptly described as 'semi-official figures' by Gilles Veinstein, who studied them in depth, especially the *naibs*, that is, agents chosen by the *kadıs* to act as deputies.¹⁴

Since Byzantine times, the profession of a priest had been largely hereditary and it remained so under Ottoman domination. The memoirs of Papa-Synadinos offer a very eloquent example illustrating this unofficial custom: the father of Papa-Synadinos, a priest himself, had five sons who all became also priests.¹⁵ In the 726 Cretan documents

¹¹ Odorico, *Mémoires de Synadinos*... cit., p. 90.

¹² M. Cazacu, Moines savants et popes ignorants dans le monde orthodoxe post-byzantin, in D. Iogna-Prat et G. Veinstein (eds.), *Histoires des Hommes de Dieu dans l'Islam et le Christianisme*, Paris 2003, pp. 152–153.

¹³ Zachariadou, *Ten Turkish Documents*... cit., pp. 158, 161, 171, 173, 175, 180, 181, 183.

¹⁴ G. Veinstein, *Sur les na'ib ottomans (XV^{ème}–XVI^{ème} siècles)*, in "Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam", 25 (2001), pp. 247–267; cf. idem, *Semiofficial Figures in the Ottoman Institutional System (15th–17th centuries)*, unpublished paper presented at a conference "In Honor of Professor Halil Inalcik: Methods and Sources in Ottoman Studies", April 29–May 2, 2004 Harvard University.

¹⁵ Odorico, *Mémoires de Synadinos*... cit., pp. 528–529; cf. Cazacu... cit., *Moines savants et popes ignorants*, pp. 156–158.

of the years 1670–1673 that we examined, approximately ninety priests are mentioned. Twenty of those were sons of priests. It is possible that there were more than those twenty—for instance, some may have omitted their father’s official title when giving his name; however, this is just a guess, and at any rate, the percentage—twenty out of ninety—is fairly impressive.

During the Byzantine period the state provided a regular revenue for the clergy, including the lower clergy,¹⁶ but under Latin or Ottoman domination the clergymen’s income derived directly from taxes paid by their faithful flock. The collection of those taxes was a privilege granted by the sultans, who apparently adopted the Byzantine tax regulation (the *kanonikon*),¹⁷ which was to be paid by the inhabitants, the priests and the monasteries of a district in order to cover the expenses of their metropolitan or bishop; these latter, in their turn, sent their contributions to the Ecumenical Patriarchate.¹⁸ The revenues of the priests derived directly from their flock: every Sunday, the churchgoers left their little contribution on the *diskos*, that is, on a tray taken around the church on which the members of the congregation placed their coins. An additional source of income were the honorary fees that they received from peasants or poor townspeople for performing the ceremony of a wedding, a funeral or a christening. Wealthy people invited the metropolitan or the bishop of their district to bless such ceremonies. Sometimes monks interfered and performed the religious ceremonies of the poor. This constituted a clash of interests between *papades* and monks and the former resented it.¹⁹ Interestingly, it seems that at least some priests wished to secure an additional source of potential revenue besides that deriving from their profession. Papa-Synadinos, for example, despite coming from the family of a priest and being destined for a career in the church, chose to learn the art of weaving at the age of fifteen while taking lessons also in classics and in ecclesiastical matters.²⁰

¹⁶ E. Sp. Papagianni, *Τα οικονομικά του έγγαμου κλήρου στο Βυζάντιο*, Athens 1986.

¹⁷ “Kanonikon” (E. M. Jeffreys ed.), in A. P. Kazhdan et alii (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 2, New York-Oxford 1991, p. 1102.

¹⁸ Zachariadou, *Ten Turkish Documents...* cit., pp. 99–107.

¹⁹ Chr. G. Patrineles, *Επιστολαί Ελλήνων λογίων προς τον Πάπαν Γρηγόριον ΙΓ’ (1572–1585) και τον καρδινάλιον Σιρλέτον (+1585)*, in “*Epeteris tou Mesaionikou Archeiou*” 17–18 (1967–1968), p. 83.

²⁰ Odorico, *Mémoires de Synadinos...* cit., pp. 74, 78.

On the whole, the economic situation of a priest, as reported by several passages of Papa-Synadinos, was satisfactory and sometimes excellent; such was the case of a certain Papa-Giorgis who had inherited from his father—also a priest—houses, vineyards, fields, cattle and an annual revenue of 300,000 *akçe*.²¹ The Cretan documents, which I have examined, do not report an equally satisfactory situation but this is certainly due to the catastrophic long war which had ravaged the island for twenty-five years. However, there are fairly frequent mentions of priests possessing land as well as of priests who earned some revenue from agriculture. The latter is not surprising, as most of the priests were peasants residing near the church of their village. More specifically, one can read about a priest who exchanged land in the countryside east of Candia with the daughter of another priest; he offered two houses and vineyards of three and a half *dönüm* and received a house and vineyards of the same dimensions. A convert, Haci Hüseyin Beg ibn Abdullah, who was the grandson of a priest, took to court another priest who illegally appropriated some land of his; the affair ended in a compromise and the priest gave 6,000 *akçe* to keep the land; this was a sum corresponding to the price of a modest house in Candia. In the village of Axenti a certain Constantine, son of papa-Yanni, paid 40 *guruş* to a convert to buy his vineyards and fields; two barrels of wine were included in the deal, perhaps because the convert decided to be a good Muslim and abstain from wine. In another village to the east of Candia a priest sold a big vineyard together with a wine press to a Christian for 4,000 *akçe*.²²

Another case worth mentioning is that concerning a higher clergyman: in the summer of 1671 an exchange took place in the town of Hierapetra between its bishop and the *sancakbeyi* of Resmo (Rethymnon). The latter gave to the bishop one field and two orchards worth 501 *guruş* and received a house in exchange. The house given by the bishop was apparently, as its price suggests, of palatial standards: in the same year a house sold in Candia for 550 *guruş* consisted of two floors with eight rooms in the ground floor and five in the first one plus a reception room (*divanhane*), three yards, three gardens, one kitchen and five wells.²³

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

²² E. Karantzikou; P. Foteinou, *Ιεροδικείο Ηρακλείου, Τρίτος Κώδικας (1669/73–1750–67)*, E. A. Zachariadou (ed.), Heraklion 2003, (hereafter: Code 3), no. 152, no. 133 and cf. no. 151, no. 359, no. 485.

²³ Code 3, nos 1 and 147.

I will now examine the place that the priests occupied within the framework of the Greek Orthodox society. While Crete was still under Venetian rule many a voice was heard pointing out the avariciousness and corruption of priests. The writings of Papa-Synadinos show that he was deeply disappointed with his contemporaries. In his days, two priests were converted to Islam. A third one abandoned his wife to live with his mistress; as expected, he was dismissed from his church. Another one was apparently a lazy drunkard, who, having ran into debt, one day simply disappeared from Serres; soon afterwards his wife married her apprentice before the *kadi*. Another priest was suspected of committing adultery; his indignant flock beat him up severely.²⁴

Despite all the reports mentioned above, the *papades* enjoyed social prestige, as is shown by the fact that they were the usual representatives of the Christian village communities to the authorities, and in some cases even had the title of the head of the village community, the *kethüda*.²⁵ Papa-Synadinos proudly describes the activities of his priest father, who repeatedly went to Constantinople to bring to the authorities' attention the grievances of the members of his parish, who were crushed by taxes and debts.²⁶ The priests appeared as leaders of the community in the *sharia* court, especially when the matter was serious. For instance, in November 1671 the inhabitants of certain villages were compelled to take out loans from the *Defterdar* of Crete, Mehmed Efendi, in order to pay their poll tax. The pattern was certainly not new. Persons who had some capital, whether Muslims or *zimmis*, offered loans, or—if they had enough power—obliged the peasants to borrow from them for their expenses. This often meant that pending debts eventually became a permanent condition of everyday life for many peasants.²⁷ In the case of the *Defterdar* Mehmed Efendi one village borrowed 920 *aslan guruş*, another one 500, two villages together 1,500, another only 150, and all the villages of the *nahiye* of Lasithi together the sum of 3,100 *guruş*; finally a village refused to borrow any money and the inhabitants asserted that they would be able to pay their poll tax on the fixed date according to

²⁴ Aalberts, *Ο ηθικός βίος των Κρητικών*... cit., footnote 5; Odorico, *Mémoires de Synadinos*... cit., pp. 18, 90, 136, 138, 160, 180.

²⁵ Code 3, no 581.

²⁶ Odorico, *Mémoires de Synadinos*... cit., p. 120.

²⁷ G. B. Dertilis, *Réseaux de crédit et stratégies du capital*, in *Banquiers, Usuriers et Paysans*, Paris 1988, pp. 33–41.

the regulation. Special documents were written and in all of them two or three priests were among those who signed for the loans.²⁸

Another serious matter for a village community was the subtraction of one of its members who was added to the members of another village community; this was bad for the calculation of the *maktu*. In two cases—always in the years 1669–1673—several inhabitants of Cretan villages went to court to claim as a one of ‘their own’ a person who had been registered by mistake among the inhabitants of another village. In those two cases the representatives of the village included one or two priests.²⁹

There were some negative reactions among the people against the clergy, also against local priests, which mainly resulted from the taxes or contributions that the clergy extracted. Occasionally, the people did not hesitate to ask for the protection of the *kadı* against those who extorted excessive duties from them, as it happened, e.g., in Nicosia in 1594.³⁰ There are mentions that some among the faithful in Crete did not respect their priests, but instead quarrelled with them and even appeared in the *Sharia* court against them. A notable case is that of a Christian widow who lived in a village and took a priest to court because he had appropriated a field that belonged to her son. She won the case by presenting three witnesses who deserve some comment. One was Mehmed *beşe*, son of Osman, apparently a Turk; the other was a certain Yannis *veled* of Marko and the third was a convert, a certain Osman *beşe*, son of Abdullah. The widow had chosen witnesses from all three categories of the inhabitants of the island. In another village a certain Constantinos took a certain Papa-Nikolo to court accusing him of appropriating a church. Papa-Nicolo proved that he had bought the church, thanks to the testimony of Mehmed ibn Abdullah and Yusuf *beşe* ibn Abdullah and of two Christians. Another Christian woman, who took a priest to court because he appropriated a field of hers, failed to win her case because the accused was able to present two Christian witnesses—one of them a *papas*—who testified before the *kadı* that the field really did belong to the priest.³¹ There are more documents that describe such cases and

²⁸ Code 3, nos 256, 522, 528, 529, 530, 581.

²⁹ Code 3, nos 67 and 290.

³⁰ Zachariadou, *Ten Turkish Documents...* cit., p. 101; R. C. Jennings, *Christians and Muslims in Ottoman Cyprus and the Mediterranean World, 1571–1640*, New York, London 1993, p. 76.

³¹ Code 3, nos 8, no. 439 no. 470.

I shall mention one more because in that case the accused is not just a priest but the metropolitan of Crete, Neophytos Patellaros, whom I have already mentioned. Fatime, the daughter of a certain Nikolo, and, as her name betrays, a convert to Islam, turned against this metropolitan because he appropriated two vineyards belonging to her. Fatime regained her two fields thanks to the testimony of a convert and of a Christian who supported her against the metropolitan.³² We must not think that the *kadı* favoured Fatime to encourage a recent convert in her person. In another case another convert who claimed a house belonging to a Christian as his own was dismissed by the judge.³³

It goes without saying that the religious and moral duty of every priest was to convince his flock that adherence to the Christian faith and pursuit of the salvation of the soul should be the top preoccupations of everyone. Still, this duty had to be performed without fanaticism, which could irritate the Muslim authorities. It was well understood that there were limits to the activities of the clergy in general. In a village of Cyprus, on a Sunday of the year 1636 the *papades* prevented a woman from entering her local church because her husband was Muslim; however, cases similar to that are rare.³⁴ The Greek Orthodox clergy was tolerant with respect to mixed marriages.

Papa-Synadinos includes in his memoirs the narrative of an episode from his life, which reveals a different kind of limit to a priest's power. He once decided to cover with frescoes the walls of one of his churches, namely that of St Paraskevi. One of the frescoes represented the last judgement and Papa-Synadinos thought that in this he had an excellent opportunity to teach the benefits of morality to his flock and to instruct them how to avoid divine punishment. Therefore he had some figures painted of people who after their death were sent to the fires of the hell: the miller who used to steal the flour; the wine merchant who used to cheat in measuring; the tailor and the weaver who tricked their customers, and so on. Some members of the congregation took these scenes as a personal insult and reacted so violently that Papa-Synadinos decided to have the presumably provocative figures of those sinners white washed.³⁵ In this case the limits to a priest's zeal were determined by a handful of shopkeepers and craftsmen of Serres.

³² Code 3, no. 445.

³³ Code 3, no. 566.

³⁴ Jennings, *Christians and Muslims in Ottoman Cyprus*... cit., p. 142.

³⁵ Odorico, *Mémoires de Synadinos*... cit., pp. 44, 296–300.