

THE SOCIAL STATUS OF THE
ARCHONTES OF PHANARI IN THESSALY
(1342)

To prove their theory that there were free peasants in the Byzantine Empire as late as the XIV century some scholars have used the case of the *ἀρχοντες* of *Φανάρι* in Thessaly¹, together with other cases. In this brief paper we do not intend to examine whether this or the opposite theory of G. Ostrogorsky (claiming that all peasants became completely subjected and reached a paroikian status)² is correct. We are only going to find out whether the case-in-question really refers to peasants and therefore should be used to corroborate the theory of free peasantry. The case is as follows.

Michael Gabrielpoulos, despot of Thessaly, in a letter of 1342 addressed the archontes of his town Phanari with the words *ἀρχοντες τοπικοί μείζονές τε και μικροί, χρυσοβουλῆται και ἐξκουσσοῦτοι*³. These *μικροί* are thought by Charanis to have been small-holders, i. e. small free-peasants.

¹ P. Charanis, On the social structure and the economic organization of the Byzantine Empire in the XIII century and later. *Byzantinoslavica* 12 (1951) 118 f., 129.

² G. Ostrogorsky, Pour l'histoire de la féodalité byzantine (Brussels 1954) passim. *Eiusdem*, Quelques problèmes d'histoire de la paysannerie byzantine (Brussels 1956). The most vigorous opposition to Ostrogorsky's views came from the Greek byzantinist professor Dr. J. Karajannopoulos, especially in his well-documented review of Ostrogorsky's *Paysannerie* in *BZ* 50 (1957) 167-182. See also 'Ιωάννου Καραγιαννοπούλου, 'Η θεωρία τοῦ Α. Piganiol γιὰ τὴν jugatio-capitatio και οἱ νεώτερες ἀντιλήψεις γιὰ τὴν ἐξέλιξη τῶν κοινωνικῶν και οἰκονομικῶν θεσμῶν στὸ Βυζάντιο. 'Επιστημονικὴ 'Επιτηρίδα Φιλοσοφικῆς Σχολῆς Πανεπιστημίου Θεσσαλονίκης (Θεσσαλονίκη 1960) 19-46, esp. 43, footnotes 87-90, where other works of the same author are mentioned.

³ *M(iklosich) - M(üller)*, *Acta et Diplomata Graeca Medii Aevi* V, 260-1. The date of this letter was thought by the editors to be 1295; but it is now generally accepted to be 1342; see D. A. Zakythinos, *Processus de Féodalisation*, extract from *L'Hellénisme Contemporain* (Athens 1948) p. 7, ftn. no. 3.

This supposition overlooks the fundamental fact shown in their appellation as *ἀρχοντες... χρυσοβουλῆται καὶ ἐξκονουσαῖτοι, κοσμικοὶ καὶ κληρικοί*, which indicates that they were noble lay and clergy landowners. The terms *μείζονές τε καὶ μικροί* are here simply meant to denote a gradation of rank within the nobility¹. Non-noble peasants could in no case be addressed in such terms by a magnate, and in no case could they have such a status as that denoted by the terms *ἀρχοντες* etc., unless they had been promoted to the ranks of the nobility.

A close examination of the text is revealing. The clause *Ἐπει[δὴ ἀπαιτοῦ]οι παντὶ [σθένει οἱ ἀρ]χοντες Φαναριῶται*, if it is well corrected, points to a powerful social class, that could put a claim forward to their overlord. This was a practice quite different from that which the peasants normally followed. The clause *ἢ (<=ε!?) τινες ἐδρόσκονται στρατιῶται* denotes pronoiars, not small-soldiers or -holders². The clause *εἰς ὅσα κτήματα ἐκράτουν παρὰ τῶν Φαναριωτῶν διὰ προσιάγματος βασιλικοῦ* means that the Phanariotic lands had been granted by the Emperor to Michael Gabrielpoulos as a province, i. e. a big pronoia, of which he was the suzerain and to whom the *ἀρχοντες* were subjects. The *τοπικοί* mentioned later as obliged to work in the castle of Phanari and not anywhere else, are apparently a type of local gentry, who possessed lands³ in Doritza and elsewhere by imperial chrysobull and by a letter of the eparch. These lands were the monastery of Lykousadha and the Great Porta, as well as the possessions [of these monasteries], which were confirmed to them by Gabrielpoulos' letter. Of course we know that lesser laity and clergy could possess small monasteries⁴, and to these our *τοπικοί* might be compared. But the monasteries in question and their lands were not small⁵. Therefore the Phanariotes were nobles.

¹ Cf. G. Ostrogorsky, *Féodalité* 96-98, 125.

² Op. cit. 102; Charanis, *On the social structure* 101; *Al. N. Diomedes*, *Βυζαντινὰ Μελέται* A' (Athens 1951) 24-30.

³ E. Kirsten, *Die Byzantinische Stadt*, *Berichte zum XI. Internationalen Byzantinisten-Kongress* (München 1958) Text pp. 37, 42.

⁴ P. G. 152, 1223-4, Febr., Indict. XI; M. M. IV, 265-6 (sine anno). A. Guillou, *Les archives de Saint Jean Prodrome sur le mont de Ménécée* (Paris 1955) pp. 131-2, esp. p. 131, footnote 3 (1346).

⁵ That at least Lykousadha was a big monastery is made clear by the fact that it was a royal monastery, erected by Hypomone, the wife of the Sebastokrator John I Comnenus Angelus Ducas: *N. A. Bees*, *Frag.*

A further evidence in favour of our view is the fact that in his letter Gabrielopoulos granted by oath immunity from military service (*τζακωνική φύλαξις*) and from the taxes *ἀγκαρεία*, *ψωμοζήτεια*, *ὀλινοελαίου δόσις* to all the *ἀρχοντες* of Phanari, both lay nobles and clergymen. It is highly improbable that such a big and influential magnate could have taken an oath in favour of peasants, either freeholders or paroikoi at a time when «la diplomatie byzantine ne connaît de serments que dans les contrats privés et dans les traités internationaux»¹.

Moreover, though we know cases of privileges and immunities granted by an emperor or overlord to peasants², we know that such immunities were also granted to landowners and monasteries for their paroikoi, i. e. the lords' paroikoi were exempted from several obligations to the State and these obligations were transferred to the lord³. Therefore these immunities as such do not prove that the grantees were peasants.

Especially the exemption from military service points to the fact that its beneficiaries were pronoiars, who alone could receive such an immunity from a magnate. The peasants sometimes received military immunity from the imperial authorities through their magnates' or pronoiars' mediation⁴, but not, as far as I know, from the pronoiars or magnates themselves. But even if

ments d'un chrysobulle du Convent de Lycousada (Thessalie), *Mélanges offerts à Octave et Melpo Merlier*, III (Athens 1957) 479-486.

¹ A. V. Soloviev, *Les archontes de Thessalie au XIVe siècle* (Quelques traits de féodalisme dans l'organisation sociale byzantino-serbe), *Byzantinoslavica* 4 (1932) 172.

² E.g. M. - M. IV, pp. 3-4 (1228): to the peasants of the *προάστειον Βάρη*, near Smyrne, which belonged to the monastery of Lembos; cf. ib. p. 25 (1251) etc.

³ E.g. ib. 4 (1228); 25 (1251): *ἐξκουσσεύειν αὐτὰ καὶ οὐδὲ ἔχει ἡ μονὴ παροίκους καὶ ἐτέρους καὶ τῶ δημοσίῳ ἀνεπιγνώστους ἀπὸ πάσης καὶ παντοίας ἐπηγείας*. Many other such cases can be cited.

⁴ M. - M. IV, 4 (1228), 249 (sine anno), 252 (s.a.), 253 (s.a.), 256 (s.a.). That the paroikoi were recruited by pronoiars and led by them in battle is known from such texts as those mentioned above (in this footnote) and the following: M. - M. IV, 3, 4, 21; VI, 58; V, 6, 13, 20, etc.; cf. P. Charanis, *On the social structure* 131-2; *Ostrogorsky*, *Féodalité* 158; I. Ševčenko, *Nicolas Cabasilas' «Anti-zealot» Discourse*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 11 (1957) 159. See also Nik. Gregoras XII, 12: II, 16 (Bonn); Cantacuz. IV, 19: III, 130-134 (Bonn); Dem. Cydones *Monodia occisorum Thessalonicensium*, P.G. 109, 645.

granted immunities, the peasants were never called *ἀρχοντες χωροβολλῆται καὶ ἑκομισσῆται*.

Further the guard of fortresses and the expeditions from which the Phanariotes were exempted, were tasks with which only noblemen were normally entrusted in the later centuries. So the noblemen of Phanari were exempted from military expeditions and guard of fortresses far away from their town, but *they would perform such services in their own town*.

The clause of the letter dealing with the possibility of unloyalty and insubmission (*ἀπιστία καὶ ἀνυποταγή*) on the part of the *ἀρχοντες*, states that in such a case the accused should be judged in the presence of all the *ἀρχοντες* and he alone should be punished, not his parents or relatives or friends. This assembly of nobles has been compared by Professor Zakythinos to the «Parlement de Seigneurs qui avaient à juger leurs pairs»¹.

This «Parlement de Seigneurs» has nothing to do with the assembly of the *κρείττονες τῆς προνομίας* of Syrgaris (in 1251) and of other pronoiars. These *κρείττονες* were the «*maîtres de maisons*» who, *on the pronoiars' orders, judged differences in matters of sales and purchases of paroikian lands* in the presence of the notary and the priest of the pronoia². The «Parlement de Seigneurs» was a sovereign, ruling body, who judged their equals, while the assembly of the *κρείττονες τῆς προνομίας* appear clearly to act on the orders of the pronoiars in a very limited range of matters, i.e. transactions of paroikian lands, not matters of loyalty and insubmission.

Moreover, Gabrielopoulos' undertaking not to cede Phanari to other than his own heirs and in no case to impose a Frankish guard on it or to authorise Albanian colonisation, points to the suggestion that the people whom he was addressing were not peasants, but the noble masters of the town or burgus. These could, in some cases, be as numerous as 500³. Only toward noblemen could a magnate undertake such an obligation.

¹ Zakythinos, *Processus de féodalisation* (Athens 1948) p. 8.

² M. - M. IV, 80 - 84 (1251); ib. 12 (1235); ib. 128 (end of the XIII century); cf. Ostrogorsky, *Féodalité* 75 - 77; cf. also ib. 79, 80, 86, 238 for further gradations of the paroikian population, and D. Zakythinos, *Crise monétaire et crise économique à Byzance du XIII au XV siècle* (Athens 1948) 64 f.

³ E.g. the nobility of Melnik in 1242: Acropolites ch. 44 (Heisenberg); cf. E. Kirsten, *Die Byzantinische Stadt, Anmerkungen* Nr. 68, p. 29.

Therefore the ἀρχοντες of Phanari may not be identified with the πρωτόγεροι or προεστοί, who represented and guided the rural communities mainly in judicial and fiscal matters¹, or with the κρείττονες τῆς προνοίας, the prud'hommes². It strikes us that only the κρείττονες τῆς προνοίας, were members of the assembly of the pronoiā, while the «Parlement de Seigneurs» included apparently all the nobility of Phanari, as well as of all the other towns of the Empire³. The προεστοί and the κρείττονες were not nobles but πάροικοι of the higher financial level⁴. They were οἱ κρείττονες τῶν παροίκων, but not ἀρχοντες. They served as administrative functionaries for the ruling class, the nobles, but they were not an organic part of that class.

On the other hand the ἀρχοντες of Phanari, a small κάστρον or military town of Thessaly, were of course a rural gentry with less land power and influence than their overlord Gabrielopoulos. But there is not the slightest evidence that they belonged to the wider layers of the paroikian or free peasantry. Their dependence on Gabrielopoulos is confirmed by this letter of oath, which indicates the overlord's obligations and rights in an apparently feudalist-tinted way⁵. This type of dependence does not seem to have been that of a peasant on a lord, but that of a landed vassal on a suzerain.

A last point to be mentioned is that in the Byzantine Empire

¹ O. Tafrali, *Thessalonique au quatorzième siècle* (Paris 1913) 60.

² Ostrogorsky, *Féodalité* 75-77.

³ Tafrali, *op. cit.* 75-76; cf. Cantac. III, 2: II, 20-25 (Bonn); III, 3: II, 25-30; III, 23: II, 139-142 (1341-2); E. Kirsten *op. cit.* Text p. 39; Anmerkungen III, No. 38; D. Cydonès, *Correspondance*, éd. R. - J. Loenertz, *Studi e Testi* 186 (Città del Vaticano 1956), vol. I, epist. 7 (1345, aestate vel-autumno, Berrhoiae), Τῷ βασιλεὶ Καντακουζηνῷ, in *Thraciam*, p. 32. Especially see Cantac. III, 94: II, 575; R. - J. Loenertz, *Note sur une lettre de Démétrius Cydonès à Jean Cantacuzène*, BZ 44 (1951) 407; D. Cydonès *Correspondance*, éd. Loenertz I, epist. No. 7, p. 34: ἀποκρίνασα μὲν τὴν βουλὴν, ἀποκρίνασα δὲ τῶν πολιτῶν τόσους καὶ τόσους (ἢ Θεσσαλονίκη): therefore all the nobles were the βουλὴ; cf. also *ib.* epist. 76, p. 109, which seems to be dated between 1345 and 1349 (in the present writer's opinion); see also epist. 99, pp. 136-7. ll. 26-27: ἡ βουλὴ τότε φυγῆς ὑμῶν διεμήσαντο. The nobles of Adrinople, who in 1341 called a people's assembly, assumed the functions of a βουλὴ: Cantac. III, 28: II, 176-7. Of course other cases indicate a distinction between Senate and the nobility in general: Gregoras XI, 2: I, 531 (1335); IX, 2: I, 397-403; IX, 3: I, 403-7.

⁴ Ostrogorsky, *Féodalité* 77; cf. 79, 80, 86, 238; cf. footnote 14 above.

⁵ Zakythinis, *op. cit.* pp. 7-8.

non-noble peasants or other low-class people could be promoted or promote themselves up to the ranks of the ruling-class¹. There is no other reason why we should exclude such a possibility in this case except that it is difficult to suppose that so many noble landowners at the same time and in the same place were of low birth. However, once they had been, if they had been promoted, they ceased to belong to the peasantry and became a section, though the lower one, of the ruling class. This ruling class in the *καστρα* were the varied landed nobility, who replaced in administration and social eminence the older town demos or bourgeois middle classes in the later centuries according to the general pattern of evolution of the Byzantine towns².

Therefore the *ἀρχοντες* of *Φανάρι* should not be cited as evidence of the survival of the free peasantry in the later centuries of Byzantine history, because they were a section of the ruling class. This in no way proves that no free peasantry survived in those centuries, but for this survival other evidence must be used³. It should be emphasised, though, that a number of free peasants survived. Still this does not essentially modify the fundamental fact that the general process of evolution of the Byzantine rural population was leading towards the paroikian status of more or less complete subjection to the various types of landed nobility.

The study of the indermediary gradations of the population between the ruling noble class and the wider peasant and urban classes has not yet been sufficiently promoted and is a field that should attract scholars for scrutinizing and careful research.

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¹ E.g. Vassilis Vlatteros Vestiarites, a pronoiar of the early XIII century, who was related by blood to the paroikoi Gounaropouloi; therefore he too was of paroikian birth: *Ostrogorsky*, *Féodalité* 65-69. We know many other examples of low-class people who attained the status of pronoiar or landowner or highrank state official, such as Alexius Apokaukus, John Kalekas, Michael Tagaris, Theodore Muzalon, John Vatatzis. We have the intention to publish a separate work about them and their role in Byzantine politics.

² *E. Kirsten*, op. cit. (Text) pp. 38-39; *Anmerkungen* III, No. 25, p. 27; Nos. 42-43, p. 28.

³ Ample evidence for this has been admirably used by *J. Karajanopoulos* in his review of *Ostrogorsky's Paysannerie*, *BZ* 50 (1957) 167-182; cf. footnote 2 above.