

## *Book Reviews*

Georgios A. Koumbas, *Ημερολόγιο (1871-1891). Έλληνες έμποροι στη Ρουμανία* [Diary (1871-1891). Greek merchants in Romania], Introduction-Anthology: Evrydiki Sifneos, Institute of Historical Research, Section of Neohellenic Research, Kalligrafos ed., 2013, pp. 504.

The years following the fall of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe have witnessed a significant increase in the studies devoted to the history of the Greek Diaspora in Southeastern Europe and the Russian Empire. The study of the Greek communities in Romania has benefited especially from this shift in the research. Of course the interest of Greek and Romanian historians for the Danubian Hellenism has been intense already since the 1960s, focusing, however, chiefly on the wide ranging and influential activity of Greeks, during the Phanariot era (18<sup>th</sup> century-1821), in the fields of education, philosophy, literature and drama. Historiographical trends have altered ever since. The publication of monographic studies and specialized articles in Greek and Romanian and the defense of doctoral dissertations at the Universities of Athens, Thessaloniki, Ioannina and Bucharest, testify to a new historical interest on the flourishing 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries commercial Greek “parokiai and their economic activities. The recent publication of a collective volume titled *Greeks in Romania in the Nineteenth Century*,<sup>1</sup> and the translation of Cornelia Papacostea-Danielopolu pioneering, though maybe not so comprehensive, synthesis,<sup>2</sup> reveal the

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<sup>1</sup> Gelina Harlaftis–Radu Păun (eds), *Greeks in Romania in the Nineteenth Century*, Alpha Bank Historical Archives, Athens 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Cornelia Papacostea-Danielopolu, *Οι ελληνικές κοινότητες στη Ρουμανία τον 19<sup>ο</sup> αιώνα* (Greek communities in Romania in 19<sup>th</sup> c.), Institute of Historical Research, National Hellenic Research Foundation, Athens 2010 (first edition:

gradual maturation of this historiographical endeavor. It should be, still, underlined, that despite the welcome exploration of the multifaceted and successful participation of Greek merchants and ship-owners in the commerce and navigation of the Lower Danube, there are many gaps in our knowledge. Thus, the book under review constitutes an important contribution, which also succeeds in enlarging our perspective by focusing on a rather neglected aspect of the Greek presence; the Greek land leaseholders (*arendași*).

The book consists of a lengthy introduction [p. 9-157] and of the diary's edition [p. 159-483]. Georgios A. Koumbas, the author of the diary, was an accountant, member of a prominent family from Mytilene, with a varied and rich commercial and communal activity both in the island and in Romania. His diary, which at times has the character of a memoir, is voluminous as it covers, albeit with many gaps, the period 1878-1891. The editor, Evrydiki Sifneos, has therefore, made an anthology of the entries that record Koumbas' impressions from his two trips to Romania (1878, 1879-1880), and from his stay at Calafat and Cetate, cities in Oltenia (southwestern Romania) and seats of his brothers firm and also from Răsipiți, the village where the Koumbas had leased land. Since Koumbas had travelled, after the death of two of his brothers, to Romania to proceed with the liquidation of the family firm's assets much information refers to accounting matters and to private affairs, in particular to the illness of Ioannis Koumbas, his last remaining brother in the Danube. The vast majority of the 82 entries date from the years 1878-1880, while only a handful of entries [76-82] date from 1891. The latter record mostly information for Georgios Koumbas' stay in Romania.

The introduction by Evrydiki Sifneos is subtitled "Merchants, tradition and modernity in the Danube (end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century)" and exceeds, both in range and analysis, the scope of a simple

foreword to the diary. It is divided into eight chapters, which address many different subjects related not only to the economic activity of the Koumbas brothers but also to their private life. It is in effect a monographic study that provides an insightful depiction of the Greek commercial Diaspora in Romania, during the critical juncture of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and its aftermath.

The first chapter of the introduction [p. 11-22] deals with Georgios Koumbas' diary, its originality and its importance as a source, against the background of the contemporary literature on Greek Diaspora. It provides information for its author and his personality and it delineates the separate parts of the diary. The second chapter [p. 22-35] presents succinctly the theoretical discussion concerning the nature of the diary and its differences and similarities with the memoir.

Georgios Koumbas occupies a central position in the third chapter [p. 36-59]. His life and personality is considered in the context of the gradual rise of the Greek bourgeois strata in the island of Lesbos, during the Tanzimat period. Special emphasis is placed on the traits of his economic thought and practice, as they colored his judgment of people and events. The fourth chapter [p.60-88] discusses the contribution of the social and entrepreneurial networks, which were formed among the Greeks of Romania, to the organization and promotion of the commerce in the region. The study focuses on the case of the "Mytileniote network" in Calafat and other Danubian cities, their family bonds and economic cooperation, mainly in the fields of river navigation, export trade and banking. Interesting comparisons with other major networks of the Danubian region, the Ionian and the Epirote, amplify and enrich the presentation. The author also addresses the way the Greek merchants responded to the 1877-1878 Eastern Crisis. The fifth chapter [p. 89-116] deals with the activity of the Greeks of Romania in managing and leasing large estates. The Koumbas brothers' firm and their extensive implication into agriculture constitutes a revealing case, as it highlights the often difficult relationship of the leaseholders

with the local peasants, its complicated legal status and also their modernizing efforts.

A shift of focus is noticed in the sixth chapter of the introduction [p. 117-134], where the author offers the reader an insight to Koumbas Brothers' everyday life. The most interesting part is the description and analysis of the contents of their library, which successfully reconstitutes in a way the Brothers' intellectual profile. In the following chapter [pp. 135-152] the author focuses on a very important, though rather understudied, aspect of the life in the Danubian region, the various diseases (malaria, smallpox, syphilis), that thrived there. Koumbas' diary could be regarded as an invaluable source of information on the methods used by Greeks in the area, to cope with infections and the unsanitary environment. The last, very brief, chapter [p. 153-157] narrates George's disagreement with his brother's investment choices.

The book, which is handsomely produced, concludes with an index of names, and localities and it is graced with 29 old photographs, mainly of the Koumbas' family members, carte-postales of Calafat, Brăila and București, letters and paintings. Moreover, two useful maps of the Koumbas' travels are provided.

The diary of Georgios A. Koumbas is a rare and valuable source for the study of the Greeks in Romania. The majority of the few interesting memoirs written or narrated by Greeks from Brăila and Constanța date from the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> For the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the so called "golden era" of the Greek Diaspora in the Lower Danube, our knowledge is, for the most part, a product of "intermediation", based on the testimonies of "outsiders", such as the English consular officials. This very fact accentuates the intrinsic value of the diary, which besides being a mine of information, uniquely sheds light on the inner workings of a family firm in the Danube.

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<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Antigoni S. Fokas, *Τα παιδικά μου χρόνια στην Βραίλα της Ρουμανίας* (My childhood in Braila, Romania), Gutenberg, Athens 2005.

Another factor which adds significantly to the value of this edition is its origin. Despite the fact that the number of the Greeks, who had settled in the region of Oltenia, was considerable and, most importantly, their economic activity in the fields of grain trade and agriculture far reaching and at times pioneering, our knowledge is still relatively poor. Greek merchants and leaseholders, such as the Koumbas brothers, played a fundamental role in the commercialization of the agricultural production and in its connection with the export ports of Brăila and Galați, a role which has been long overlooked by social and economic historians. Due to their leading position, the Greek settlements of the Lower Danube have been until today the favorable subject of research. Analysis lacks in depth, however, without the exploration of their links with the Greek communities in the hinterland.

Apart from the originality of the source, the importance of the richly informative and interesting introduction should be stressed. The author has succeeded in presenting and analyzing, on the basis of the diary, other sources and the relevant bibliography, the structure and functioning of an important Greek commercial house on the Romanian Danube, underscoring concurrently the extent and significance of its involvement in large scale agriculture. Indeed, despite the acknowledged significance of the numerous, in particular in the Wallachian plain, Greek leaseholders, few studies have been written so far and therefore historians tend to ignore the parameters of their activity. The Greek economic activity in Romania cannot, however, be properly perceived without the study of this aspect. Last, but not least, the exploration of aspects of the everyday life of the Koumbas brothers in the Danube is a welcome innovation of the introduction, since it allows us to extend beyond the sometimes “abstract” facts of trade or agriculture.

The book contains a few oversights that could be corrected in a second edition. Thus Carol of Romania in 1878 was not a “regent” but a prince [p. 33], while not Tulcea but Galați was the seat of the European Danube Commission [p. 192, n. 361]. Moreover, terms of

Romanian origin could also be included and explained in a glossary. Furthermore, a comparison of the activity of the Greek leaseholders with the other major group of large leaseholders, the Jews, who resided mainly in Moldavia, would have been both interesting and challenging. Nonetheless, this is a desideratum that could be addressed in another study.

Notwithstanding these reservations, we are dealing with a very interesting, informative and thought provoking book, which contributes to the enriching of our understanding of the Greek economic activity in Romania and more broadly in the Diaspora. Both the edition of the diary and the introduction successfully fulfill their aims and the book as a whole is indispensable for anyone interested in the history of the Greek Diaspora in Romania and the functioning of Greek commercial networks in general.

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Giannis N. Glavinas, *Οι μουσουλμανικοί πληθυσμοί στην Ελλάδα (1912-1923). Από την ενσωμάτωση στην ανταλλαγή* [Muslim Populations in Greece (1912-1923). From Incorporation to Exchange], Ant. Stamoulis Publications, Thessaloniki 2013, pp. 463.

The study of dr. Glavinas aims at filling a gap existing in Greek historiography concerning the very existence, the incorporation, and the conditions of living of certain populations living in the European lands of the Ottoman Empire that were included into the Greek state after the Balkan Wars (1912-13), the most important and yet numerous among them being the Muslim populations of Epirus, Macedonia, and Thrace, the so-called 'New Lands'. With the exception of the Muslims of Western Thrace and the regions of Epirus, all the other Muslim populations were finally compelled to desert Greek territory after the Greek-Turkish War in Asia Minor and the Treaty for the Exchange of Populations signed in January 1923.

The history of the Muslims in Greece during the period from the Balkan Wars until 1923 was for decades 'ignored' by Greek researchers, since the size of the Asia Minor tragedy and the efforts of rehabilitation and incorporation of Greek refugees into the Greek state overshadowed other aspects of the humanitarian disaster of those years. Fortunately things change and nowadays the exchangeable Muslims of Greece find their place in the scholarly interests of young Greek historians.

Given the fact that political conditions in the Balkans altered radically in the first decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century and new states emerged or others expanded their territories, the former balance between indigenous populations, between Muslim masters and Christian subjects overturned and new realities emerged in the region. Consequently, the challenge that was set for the present study was to survey the interactions that resulted from: the relations between the Muslim populations and the new Greek administration on the one hand, as well as between the Muslim and the Christian population, indigenous or refugee, on the other. The main question the research was to answer referred to the way the former heterodox 'ruler', synonymous to Hellenism's enemy, was treated by the Greek central and local administration institutions, by the indigenous Christians, former 'reya', and, finally, by the Christian refugees of Asia Minor, victims of the persecutions by the Young Turk or Kemal's army. Moreover, what is investigated is the extent to which these relations were influenced by the political events of a period full of alterations and tensions, of several war conflicts (Balkan Wars, World War I and Asia Minor War), the political dispute during the National Schism, and the pursuits of the Greek foreign policy.

The structure that was opted for the study reflects the objectives that it sought to fulfill. The book is divided in four Sections. In the first, as a kind of introduction, the geographical allocation and the numeric data of the Muslim population in the Greek districts of Macedonia, Epirus, Thrace, Northern Aegean Islands, Crete, and Thessaly (regardless that the latter was incorporated in Greece in 1881) are presented. Simultaneously, the Muslims' continuous immigration to the Ottoman Empire is thoroughly reported, while

there is also an attempt to define the reasons that led to this phenomenon.

The second Section deals with the diverse aspects of the relations the Greek administration had with the Muslim population living in the country. Specifically, the legal status of the Muslim minority in the Greek territory is presented, as this was shaped by the international treaties, while at the same time it is examined to which extent the conditions imposed for minority protection by the Treaty of Sevres were implemented by the Greek state. The second chapter of this Section is dedicated to the policies adopted by the Greek governments towards the Muslim land property and especially towards the Muslim landowners, a long-existing problem that didn't find a proper solution at least until 1923. What is analyzed next is the electoral behavior of the Muslim voters, the dynamics of this certain electoral body along with its role within the framework of the National Schism, as well as the activity of the Muslim deputies in the Greek parliament. The following chapter deals with the issues related to the education of the Muslims, especially examining the extent to which the Muslim element was integrated into the state policies of language and, consequently, national assimilation. The image of the Muslim population represented as being contended by the Greek administration had an exceptional role in the Greek propaganda apparatus, which was created to support the national claims; this constitutes the subject of the following chapter. The Section concludes with an assessment of the way the institutions of the Greek central and local administration conceived the position of the Greek Muslim subjects in the financial, political, and social life of the country, the perception they had of them, as well as the political practices that were considered as appropriate towards the Muslim population of the Greek territory.

The third Section treats the very important and most interesting issue of the relations of the Muslims with the 'other', namely the indigenous Christian residents of the northern parts of the country and the refugees that started arriving in the Greek state from various parts of the Ottoman Empire just after the beginning of the Balkan Wars. The factors that invoked tension in the relations of



the population groups are evaluated, tension that in several cases led to local conflicts and mistrust. Nevertheless, the coexistence of the Muslims with the indigenous or the refugee Christian neighbor was characterized not only by tensions, but also by harmonious collaboration and mutual understanding, despite the war conditions, the religious fanaticism and the nationalistic exaltation that the region experienced during the period 1912-1923.

The last Section constitutes an attempt to recompose the social life of the Muslims in Greece during this specific period, by presenting their professional activities as well as the organization and function of the Muslim communities as institutions that express collective identity. The subject of this last Section, although it does not comply completely with the main aspirations of the study, traces in a most broad way the Muslim presence within the borders of the Greek state in the period 1912-1923.

The author concludes that a mixture of several factors influenced and occasionally mutated the relations between the Muslim community and the central Greek administration: the international diplomatic environment, the status of the Greek-Turkish relations, the Greek objectives and national claims, the internal problems, and even personal decisions and obsessions of the political protagonists or the bureaucrats of the Greek authorities. On the one hand, the persecutions of the Greek populations in Asia Minor and Thrace since 1914, the need for housing the refugees and the tensions between Athens and Istanbul had their effects upon the state policy towards Muslim populations and, especially, the Muslim landowners. On the other hand, the Muslims of the 'New Lands' constituted an essential factor of the local economy, a populace of future obedient and hardworking Greek citizens. As a result, the Greek state never adopted a policy of massive persecutions against them, though local administration servants were not so loyal to central government's directions. The Exchange of Populations definitely changed the image and the conditions that were formed during that last decade.

The study comprises an important Annex with maps, pictures, and several figures that organize in a most helpful way numeric,

geographical, demographic and other data concerning the existence and the residence of Muslims in Greece until 1923. The vast majority of them, as well as all the other information that the study provides to the reader come from an impressive number of Greek and international archival resources where the author conducted his research, mostly in Greece: the General Archives of the State, the Historical Archive of the Greek Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Historical Archives of Macedonia (Thessaloniki) and Epirus (Ioannina), private collections in the Gennadius Library, the Army History Directorate, the Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive, the US National Archives (in microfilm series in Athens) and many others. Special reference needs to be made to the collection of the Prime Minister's Archive (1917-1928), which the author was the first scholar to study ever. The historical informations of the Greek archives were enriched with documents and Muslim refugees' memories that the author collected through the relevant Turkish bibliography.

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