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**THE MIXED ELITE OF A BALKAN TOWN:  
KARAFERYE IN THE SECOND HALF  
OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

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Karaferye (Greek Veria), a town lying to the west of Salonica, belonged during the Ottoman period to the latter's *sancak*, and was the administrative centre of a *kaza*. If Western visitors of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are to be trusted, it was inhabited by about 8-10,000 people.<sup>1</sup> Its population consisted of Muslims, Christians and some Jews; on the other hand, most of the numerous villages of the region were Christian.

This paper will revolve around two issues. One is the difficulty in defining Karaferye's 'elite',<sup>2</sup> given that Ottoman registers and documents are almost the only sources that we possess about the town in the second half of the eighteenth century, as is the case for most of the Ottoman period prior to the nineteenth century. The second issue is whether the Muslim and Christian elites should be treated as a unified or two independent power groups. In other words, I would like to touch upon the question of to what extent religion was a critical factor in determining the character and alliances of the elite. I would like to link this second issue to the question of communal representation, since the elite was in various instances required by the state to formally represent the local population before Ottoman authorities, or to handle local affairs, such as taxation and security. In fact, provincial elites in the Ottoman Empire gained political legitimacy and secured their prestige and status by defending the interests of their district – obviously in conformity with how *they* perceived these interests – against 'threats', be they external or internal.

It is reasonable to assume that Karaferye's elite did not differ in its basic characteristics from the elites of other regions of the Ottoman Empire – especially those of the Balkans. The Muslim provincial elite of the eighteenth century is predominantly identified with the *ayan*, a widely used term whose content is at best rather broad: as Harold Bowen defined it several decades ago, "at first [it] denoted merely the most distinguished inhabitants of any district or town-quarter, [but eventually] the

1. Félix-Beaujour, *Tableau du commerce de la Grèce, formé d'après une année moyenne, depuis 1787 jusqu'en 1797*, vol. 1 (Paris 1800), 128; W. M. Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, vol. 3 (London 1835), 291.
2. For a discussion of the notion of the elite see the 'Introduction' to this volume.

term, often used as a singular, acquired a more precise significance, coming, in the eighteenth century, to be applied to those among such persons as then first exercised political influence and were accorded official status".<sup>3</sup> Halil İnalcık classifies the social groups from which the *ayan* emanated as i) the *ulema*, ii) current and former *kapıkulları*, iii) those who traded in precious goods, as well as wealthy persons and *mültezims* who were engaged in caravan trade, financial transactions and the purveying of provisions, and iv) leading guildsmen.<sup>4</sup> As for the preconditions for a provincial notable to attain to local leadership, the following were required according to Engin Akarlı's succinct codification: i) a sound financial basis, ii) a military force, iii) influence over and close ties with other notables, and iv) good contacts with more powerful figures in the area and in Istanbul.<sup>5</sup>

On the Christian side, there was a group of notables whose aspirations and attitude were quite similar to those of the *ayan*; this was the *kocabaşıs* of the Ottoman sources. If we consider the twin meaning of the term *ayan* as influential figures and the actual political leadership of a region,<sup>6</sup> then *kocabaşı* as used in Ottoman administrative jargon is nearer to the latter meaning. *Kocabaşıs* were the leaders or representatives of the Christian community of a given district. However, a variety of Greek terms used to describe this group (*proesti*, *prouchontes*, *archontes*, etc.) may be treated as almost identical with *ayan* in its two senses. For instance, in his study of the finances of the mountain village of Zagora in Thessaly, Socrates Petmezas distinguishes for methodological purposes between the common people and the *proesti*, i.e., those who signed at least once the annual account of the communal treasury, and further distinguishes between the *proesti* as a social group and the actual communal leaders (i.e., the communal council) of a given year.<sup>7</sup> Next to

3. H. Bowen, *EP*, s.v. 'A'yān' (the degree to which official status was accorded to the *ayan* is an issue of discussion). Halil İnalcık refers to the *ayan* as "provincial notables" and points out that "when seventeenth and eighteenth century Ottoman texts referred to ayan within the urban setting, they usually meant men of wealth": H. İnalcık, 'Centralization and Decentralization in Ottoman Administration', in T. Naff and R. Owen (eds), *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History* (Carbondale and Edwardsville – London and Amsterdam 1977), 27, 41.
4. *Ibid.*, 37-38.
5. E. D. Akarlı, 'Provincial Power Magnates in Ottoman Bilad al-Sham and Egypt, 1740-1840', in A. Temimi (ed.), *Proceedings of Second International Symposium of CERPAO-ACOS: La vie sociale dans les provinces arabes à l'époque ottomane* (Zaghuan 1988), 42-44.
6. I refer here not strictly to the distinction between the *ayan-ı vilâyet* and the 'official' *ayan* of a region, but also to the *ayan* being treated both as a social group and active political figures.
7. S. Petmezas, «Διαχείριση των Κοινοτικών Οικονομικών και Κοινωνική Κυριαρχία. Η Στρατηγική των Προυχόντων: Ζαγορά 1784-1822» [Management of Community Finances and Social Domination. The Strategy of Communal Leaders: Zagora 1784-1822], *Mnemon*, 13 (1991), 96, 100-01. See also the appointment of a *vekil* in the Peloponnese by the *prokriti* of his region, which resembles the appointment of the 'official' *ayan* of a district, in M. Pyliá, «Λειτουργίες και Αυτονομία των Κοινοτήτων

the *kocabasıs* stood the clergy, usually, but not always, as a separate category as far as the internal politics of the community was concerned; the local metropolitan was undoubtedly an elite figure, but even common priests often appear to have had a say in how the affairs of their town quarters and villages were run, their office rather than their personal qualities providing a good stepping-stone for acquiring influence and eventually authority.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the fact that even the term *ayan* carries both a specific and a non-specific meaning (if we wish to suppose that a region's elite was limited to this group), members of Ottoman provincial elite as subjects of historical research – especially when studied solely on the basis of *sicils* and other formal records – tend to be more or less identified with holders or claimants of political power and in general with those active in local politics. In other words, it is those who politically represented their communities, who were frequently present in formal public institutions such as the court of justice, or whose names appeared in petitions to the Porte either as petitioners or as troublemakers who are first and foremost treated as members of the elite. State decrees intensify the 'politicisation' of elites, because they attribute a pronounced political role to the *ayan*, who were, for instance, expected to distribute and collect taxes and provisions, guarantee public order and organise the security forces of their *kazas*, and recruit men in times of war; *ayan* are in many respects treated as the intermediaries *par excellence* between the state and its subjects in the provinces; in contrast to *kadis*, these intermediaries were not state functionaries but self-made individuals or families, products of Ottoman society. But what about other categories of the elite, such as the social, economic, or intellectual elites? Did they fully identify with the political elite or not?

Indeed, I think that there is a wide range of elite persons in Karaferye of whom we know very little. For instance, *tevzi defters* provide the names of landholders, and *tereke defters* allow us insights into the wealth, and occasionally the intellectual interests, of certain individuals.<sup>9</sup> But we are more often than not unable to follow their activities and strategies systematically, because many of these people did not leave any other mark on official records, and other types of sources are missing.

της Πελοποννήσου κατά τη Δεύτερη Τουρκοκρατία (1715-1821)» [Functions and Autonomy of Moreot Communities During the Second Phase of Ottoman Rule (1715-1821)], *Mnemon*, 23 (2001), 74. Cf. G. D. Kontogiorgis, *Κοινωνική Δυναμική και Πολιτική Αυτοδιοίκηση: Οι Ελληνικές Κοινότητες της Τουρκοκρατίας* [Social Dynamics and Political Self-Government: Greek Communities in the Ottoman Period] (Athens 1982), *passim*, and J. Strauss, 'Ottoman Rule Experienced and Remembered: Remarks on Some Local Greek Chronicles of the Tourkokratia', in F. Adanır and S. Faroqhi (eds), *The Ottomans and the Balkans: A Discussion of Historiography* (Leiden-Boston-Cologne 2002), 212-13 and n. 91.

8. Cf. Kontogiorgis, *Κοινωνική Δυναμική*, 277-95.

9. Book collections in *tereke defters* are indexes for the literacy and intellectual interests of the elite. Subscriptions for books (or the actual copying or writing of a book) are other such sources.

The *tevzi defters* in particular are the single most important source on landholding in eighteenth-century Karaferye. When compared with other *sicil* entries they provide information about the control exercised by the urban population, and more specifically the elite, on the hinterland. When examined in the long duration, they provide information on the stability or changes in the composition of the elite. However, there are serious technical limitations in their use; for instance, they simply provide names devoid of patronymics, which in several cases renders identification of the persons mentioned problematic, and do not specify the exact legal character of the relation between the landholder and the land.

Merchants also often go undetected. Dimitraki Bekella, a *beratlı* merchant of Karaferye, is a characteristic case. Surviving *sicil* and *ahkâm defterleri* entries as well as letters written by and to him demonstrate that he was a wealthy and cultured merchant whose strategy aimed at defending his status and wealth against threats coming from his co-religionists (because of his tax exemption), Muslim officials (because of his wealth) and business partners (because of financial disputes).<sup>10</sup> Bekella is, I think, a good example of elite individuals who are hardly visible to the modern scholar; even though they were important and active members of local society, they did not leave very many marks on the *sicils*. The same often applies to *mahalle* imams, too. They certainly played a part in local life, but this is not always evident, and it is often not easy to decide whether they should be counted among the elite (İnalçık refers to them as those who “headed city quarters”;<sup>11</sup> the stress is again on the political role of the elite).

Bekella’s case is typical also in that often in Karaferye all that we have about a person is either indications or scattered information concerning his activities; it is like putting together the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, but never managing to see the full picture, because some central pieces are missing. There are no local histories of Karaferye and no biographical dictionaries of its distinguished personalities which would allow us to draw a clearer picture of the profile of the local elite. Thus, we know, for instance, of a local bully, Kara Ahmed, who is interesting in that he was one of those persons who swayed between legality and illegality, but always ended up being among the leading figures of the region. We also know of Rüşdi Ali Efendi, a retired *kadı* and the ‘official’ *ayan* of Karaferye for a number of years, another person whose activities were not always legal, as he was accused of forming *çiflik*s and refusing to pay his dues to the legitimate landholder, or of collaborating with outlaws. However, we cannot follow their entire careers; we only can glue some – relatively few – of pieces together.<sup>12</sup>

10. Bekella’s case is analysed in A. Anastasopoulos, ‘Building Alliances: A Christian Merchant in Eighteenth-Century Karaferye’, forthcoming in *Oriente Moderno*.

11. İnalçık, ‘Centralization and Decentralization’, 38.

12. On Kara Ahmed and Rüşdi Ali Efendi, see A. Anastasopoulos, ‘Imperial Institutions and Local Communities: Ottoman Karaferye, 1758-1774’, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1999, 85-86 and *passim*.

Three *sicil* entries of 1759 are of particular interest in our quest for the elite of Karaferye, because – like the *tevzi defters* – they contain the names of several of its inhabitants. These documents were compiled when the town population was required to undertake a number of pledges (*nezr*) towards the state.<sup>13</sup>

The first entry contained the names of 93 persons; each of the 23 listed *mahalles* of Karaferye was represented by four persons, apart from one which was represented by five. The second entry included the names of 340 persons representing 28 *mahalles*; the representation pattern was very irregular, as it fluctuated between five and twenty-four persons per *mahalle*. The third entry contained the names of 160 inhabitants of 12 Muslim neighbourhoods of the town; distribution was again irregular, but not identical to that of the second entry.

Most of the Muslims in these three entries bore a title such as *ağa*, *efendi*, *beşe*, *çelebi*, or *bey*; several were *seyyids* or *hacıs*; in some cases the profession (*berber*, *yazıcı*, *vaiz*, *müezzin*, *hatib*) or the status (*sipahi*, *ceribaşı*, *molla*, *kethüda*, *serdar*) of the person was also indicated; in several cases, an imam was among the neighbourhood representatives.<sup>14</sup> There were also several who bore a family name of the type so-and-sozade, which is a clear indication of a *de facto* aristocratisation of Ottoman society. It seems that there was also some sense of hierarchy as the name of Rüşdi Ali Efendi, the ‘official’ *ayan*, was listed first in his *mahalle* preceded by a formula of praise, an honour which was reserved for him and only two other persons among the dozens listed in the three *sicil* entries;<sup>15</sup> moreover, two of the entries started the listing of the neighbourhoods with Rüşdi Ali’s *mahalle*.<sup>16</sup>

13. Karaferye Sicil (hereafter KS) vol. 81/p. 224, KS 81/373-74, KS 81/391 (compiled between January and June 1759); the *sicils* of Karaferye are kept at the Imathia branch of the General State Archives of Greece in Veria. To put these pledges in context, see A. Anastasopoulos, ‘Lighting the Flame of Disorder: *Ayan* Infighting and State Intervention in Ottoman Karaferye, 1758-59’, *IJTS*, 8/1 & 2 (2002), 73-88 (unfortunately printed with certain mistakes). The people of Karaferye were rendered liable to the payment of fines in the event of their tolerating the return of outlaws to their district. On *nezr*, see S. Faroqhi, ‘Introduction’, in her *Coping with the State: Political Conflict and Crime in the Ottoman Empire 1550-1720* (Istanbul 1995), xix-xx, xxi-xxii, as well as her ‘Räuber, Rebellen und Obrigkeit im osmanischen Anatolien’ reprinted in the same volume (pp. 163-78).

14. In 5 out of 11 Muslim neighbourhoods in KS 81/224, and in 7 and 8 out of 12 neighbourhoods in KS 81/373-74 and KS 81/391, respectively; if we count mosque personnel, such as *müezzins*, *hatibs*, *vaizes* and *kayyims*, and not only imams, the figures rise to 6, 11 and 10, respectively.

15. In fact it is only he and another person who are honoured with a *fahrül*... type of title, the third person being a *müfti* whose name is preceded by the title of respect *faziletlü* (uncertain reading). Unlike the other person, Rüşdi Ali’s name is preceded by the formula of praise both times that it appears in these lists. Cf. I. Tamdoğan-Abel, ‘Individus et pouvoir dans une ville ottomane au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle’, in M. Anastasiadou and B. Heyberger (eds), *Figures anonymes, figures d’élite: pour une anatomie de l’Homo ottomanicus* (Istanbul 1999), 12.

16. In one of these two entries, Rüşdi Ali’s name is nevertheless absent.

Things look quite different on the Christian side. Here the scribe recorded merely personal and fathers' names without any other details, except for indicating three priests (*papa*), two *acis*, a Pilâvçı and a Bekçioğlu in the first entry.<sup>17</sup> Still, there are some cracks to the wall of uniformity that the two entries project, thanks to the information that we possess from other entries and sources. For instance, the name Kritopuli, which appears either as a first or as a paternal name in three *mahalles* is in fact a well-known family name of Karaferye. The Kritopoulos family had gained tax exemption by sultanic decree in the fifteenth century and some of them continued to live in the same town quarter as in the sixteenth century. We know from another *sicil* entry that one of the eighteenth-century Kritopouloses was a merchant (*bazirgân*), but not much else about them really.<sup>18</sup> Probably Dimitraki veled-i Manol of the entries was Dimitraki Bekella, who was mentioned above, but this is not clearly indicated anywhere. Dimitraki's father was indeed called Manol; the oration delivered on the occasion of his death is highly formulaic, but gives us an idea of what a member of the elite took pride in: landholding, wealth, slaves (possibly meaning servants), but also good repute, glory, nobility, and an extensive family.<sup>19</sup> Would it be different for Muslim or Jewish notables?

Presumably the names included in these three entries were the names of the representatives and not of the whole of the male town population, unless Karaferye's inhabitants were really much fewer in number than Western observers estimated a few decades later. But why were there only four representatives per town quarter in the first entry and many more in the next two? Were they the governing body – so to speak – of each quarter in the first case and a more representative group of the political, social and economic elite in the other two?<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, can all these

17. The limited number of priests among the representatives (they appear to be altogether absent from the second entry, unless a “Timotyō v. Dimo” of the Ayandon neighbourhood is the same person as “papa Timotyō” in the first entry) is somewhat surprising; according to an entry dated 1 September 1670, thirteen priests were among the thirty-seven representatives of the town's *zimmi* population (I. K. Vasdravellis [ed.], *Ιστορικά Αρχεία Μακεδονίας: Β'. Αρχείον Βεροίας - Ναούσης 1598-1886* [Historical Archives of Macedonia. II: Archive of Veria-Naoussa 1598-1886] [Thessaloniki 1954], 53 [no. 65]). See also E. Gara, ‘In Search of Communities in Seventeenth Century Ottoman Sources: The Case of the Kara Ferye District’, *Turcica*, 30 (1998), 143-44, 145, 153-54.
18. On the Kritopouloses, see A. Anastasopoulos, «Χατζηκατβίας, Χαριτόπουλος, Κριτόπουλος: Στα Ίχνη μιας Παράδοσης για την Οθωμανική Άλωση της Βέροιας» [Chatzekatvias, Charitopoulos, Kritopoulos: Following the Traces of a Tradition about the Ottoman Conquest of Veria], in T. Kioussopoulou (ed.), *1453: Η Άλωση της Κωνσταντινούπολης και η Μετάβαση από τους Μεσαιωνικούς στους Νεώτερους Χρόνους* [1453: The Fall of Constantinople and the Transition from the Middle Ages to Modern Times] (Irakleion 2005), 211-25, where other relevant bibliography is cited.
19. For the text of the funeral oration, composed by a professional orator, see D. Vikelas, *Η Ζωή μου* [My Life] (Athens 1908), 9-10.
20. The guilds are a social factor which is missing from the three lists, as representation by *mahalles* conceals their possible influence on local society; see, for instance, Anastasopoulos, ‘Lighting the Flame of Disorder’, 84-85 for the distinction between guilds and

people justifiably be treated as members of the elite by modern scholars? We cannot answer any of these questions with certainty, but it is a fact that these people were set apart from the rest of the community and this presupposes a process of selection. Even if not an elite in the proper sense, instances such as these pledges provided them with the opportunity to come forward as the leading figures of the place.

If we now turn to the issue of religion, Muslims and Christians appear on the basis of these entries to form two completely separate groups, since *mahalles* are listed as either Muslim or Christian; no mixed neighbourhoods are cited. In the absence of deeds of property sales from this period, it is difficult to say if it was really so, but it appears more likely that the *mahalles* of these entries were technical rather than real-life units.<sup>21</sup> In other words, they may have been so adjusted as to conform to the precepts of the state's Islamic ideology about segregation along religious lines rather than to reality.<sup>22</sup>

In the third of the lists referred to above, only the Muslim inhabitants of Karaferye take the pledge. What was the reason behind only one part of the town population taking a pledge? Perhaps it was because half of the people against whom

merchants: merchants (*bazirgân*) were individuals and members of the elite; guilds (*esnaf*) were collectivities, even though some of their members may have been wealthy. Cf. H. İnalçık, 'Capital Formation in the Ottoman Empire', *The Journal of Economic History*, 29 (1969), 104-06.

21. Evidence from seventeenth-century Karaferye, Kandiye, Kayseri and Ankara, as well as from eighteenth-century Aleppo suggests that no rigid segregation upon confessional lines was applied in Ottoman neighbourhoods, despite the fact that these may officially have been labelled as Muslim or non-Muslim: E. Gara, 'Kara Ferye 1500-1650: Menschen, Lokalgesellschaft und Verwaltung in einer osmanischen Provinz', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Vienna, 2000, 33-34; E. Karantzikou, «Η Οικιστική Μορφή της Πόλης του Χάνδακα κατά την Περίοδο της Τουρκοκρατίας» [Settlement Pattern in the Town of Kandiye under Ottoman Rule], *Kretologika Grammata*, 17 (2001), 116; S. Faroqhi, *Men of Modest Substance: House Owners and House Property in Seventeenth-Century Ankara and Kayseri* (Cambridge 1987), 154-58; A. Marcus, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity: Aleppo in the Eighteenth Century* (New York 1989), 317-18. On the other hand, Gara and Faroqhi refer to one late sixteenth and one mid seventeenth-century instance when it was required that Christian residents move out of 'Muslim' neighbourhoods (Gara, 'Kara Ferye', 34; Faroqhi, *Men of Modest Substance*, 241 n. 19). Certain aspects of the *mahalles* as administrative units, as well as their relation to other divisions such as parishes, are discussed in M. Tsikaloudaki, «Μορφές Διοίκησης και Διαχείρισης του Αστικού Χώρου στην Οθωμανική Αυτοκρατορία: Το Παράδειγμα της Χριστιανικής Κοινότητας της Φιλιππούπολης (18ος - αρχές 19ου αι.)» [Forms of Administration and Management of the Urban Space in the Ottoman Empire: The Example of the Christian Community of Philippopolis (Eighteenth-Early Nineteenth Centuries)], *Mnemon*, 22 (2000), 9-30; for Christian *hanes* in Muslim *mahalles*, see *ibid.*, 23-25.
22. It is interesting to note that the Orthodox Church and Christian literati were also in favour of segregation between Muslims and Christians lest Christians should become assimilated or convert to Islam: R. Gradeva, 'Turks and Bulgarians, Fourteenth to Eighteenth Centuries', in her *Rumeli under the Ottomans, 15th-18th Centuries: Institutions and Communities* (Istanbul 2004), 207-11.

the pledge was taken were janissaries,<sup>23</sup> but, in any case, this differentiation between Muslims and non-Muslims is again an indication of a society which is either deeply divided or depicted so in formal documents in accordance with bureaucratic and religious requirements.

If we were presented with these two interpretations, I think that the scale would tilt in favour of the latter. The fact that, as stated above, *zimmi* names in the aforementioned entries were devoid of any title does point in this direction: apparently the reason for this was that this was how *zimmis* should be referred to according to the principles of an Islamic state such as the Ottoman Empire.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Greek, and also Ottoman, sources amply testify to the fact that prominent Christians at least bore family names and adorned their names with markers which declared their superiority over common *zimmis* (*aci*, *kyr*, *-aki*).<sup>25</sup> What other reason could there be for not citing such distinguishing signs?

On the other hand, it would be an over-simplification to dismiss this bias against non-Muslims as a mere administrative practice with no impact on society whatsoever. It is, in this regard, not insignificant that a late eighteenth-century foreign observer, such as Beaujour, did not treat the population of contemporaneous Salonica as a single entity but as being composed of three separate communities, formed along religious lines, each with its own leadership and internal institutions.<sup>26</sup> Thus, it appears that religion was not a negligible social factor, and religious segregation as practised by the state was not without an impact on the organisation of society.

But would this then mean that Muslim and non-Muslim members of the elite were two (or more) different entities devoid of any common interests and attitudes? Quite to the contrary, there are several indications from Karaferye and elsewhere in the Balkans that this was not so. Muslim and non-Muslim elite figures co-operated in business ventures ranging from trade to tax farming, amassed land through legal and illegal means, extended credit to the weaker members of society, rendering them dependent on them, shared similar luxury tastes, clothing and lifestyle, hired the services of or collaborated with mercenaries and outlaws.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, there

23. And all of them were Muslims, but this applies to the other two entries, too.

24. Cf. Tamdoğan-Abel's comment about oppressive *ayan* in her 'Individus et pouvoir', 13.

25. See, for instance, N. K. Giannoulis, *Κώδικας Τρίκκης* [Church Register of Trikala] (Athens 1980), *passim*, and KS 81/870/entry no. 1 (13 November 1758).

26. Félix-Beaujour, *Tableau du commerce de la Grèce*, 1: 48-49. Obviously Beaujour was not the only one who proceeded to such a differentiation; on the contrary, it was very common in works of the Ottoman period from Evliya Çelebi to western travel journals to geographical works.

27. See, for instance, Vasdravellis (ed.), *Ιστορικά Αρχεία Μακεδονίας: Β'*, 160-61 (no. 183), 171-72 (no. 191), 173-74 (no. 194); also S. I. Asdrachas, «Πραγματικότητες από τον Ελληνικό ΙΗ' Αιώνα» [Realities from the Greek Eighteenth Century], in *Σταθμοί προς τη Νέα Ελληνική Κοινωνία* [Milestones Towards Modern Greek Society] (Athens 1965), 25-33, and B. McGowan, 'The Age of the *Ayans*, 1699-1812', in H. İnalcık with



were considerable differences too: *ayan* could aspire to obtaining state appointments; Christian notables could not. *Ayan* were among the addressees of state decrees; Christian notables very rarely were, even in regions where they represented a large section of the population. *Ayan* could invest extensively in tax-farming; Christian notables apparently could only farm minor sources of revenue.<sup>28</sup> In other words, *ayan* were in a privileged position when compared with their Christian counterparts in the context of Ottoman institutions. Therefore, the two groups of notables could well have been unequal in terms of career prospects, but very similar to each other in terms of profile, values, and everyday life.<sup>29</sup>

So, can we down-play or bypass the role of the Ottoman state when we talk of provincial elites, and thus obtain a picture closer to everyday reality? I believe that the answer is clearly no. No matter how weak the central government or its local representatives were in the eighteenth century, the state had provided the framework within which provincial society functioned, and was a force to be reckoned with when it came to a region such as Karaferye and to *ayan* who were nothing like the Buşatlıs, Osman Pasvanoğlu, or Ali Paşa of Yanya in terms of resources and might. I think that the relation between the local elite and the state is very basic to understanding the balance of power in the region. The Muslim and non-Muslim elites operated within the Ottoman context, and this was what made them who they were.<sup>30</sup> The state may have occasionally or chronically found it difficult to impose order and effectively control its provinces, but nobody could simply do as they wished.

D. Quataert (eds), *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge 1994), 669. Compare with the twin processes of “localization” and “Ottomanization” described for the Arab provinces by E. R. Toledano, ‘The Emergence of Ottoman-Local Elites (1700-1900): A Framework for Research’, in I. Pappé and M. Ma’oz (eds), *Middle Eastern Politics and Ideas: A History from Within* (London and New York 1997), 154-55.

28. S. I. Asdrachas *et alii*, *Ελληνική Οικονομική Ιστορία ΙΕ'-ΙΘ' Αιώνας* [Greek Economic History, Fifteenth-Nineteenth Centuries], vol. 1 (Athens 2003), 327; see also Petmezas, «Διαχείριση των Κοινοτικών Οικονομικών», 85-86, and Pylia, «Λειτουργίες και Αυτονομία», 79-80.
29. See Gara, ‘In Search of Communities’, 156-60 for instances of co-operation but also signs of friction between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities of Karaferye in the seventeenth century, and McGowan, ‘The Age of the *Ayans*’, 665 for a massive tax exemption granted to the Muslims of Bosnia. Cf. Strauss, ‘Ottoman Rule Experienced and Remembered’, 207-08, 214.
30. On fiscal and other mechanisms which promoted the identification of the provincial elites with the Ottoman state in the eighteenth century, see A. Salzmann, ‘An Ancien Régime Revisited: “Privatization” and Political Economy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Empire’, *Politics and Society*, 21 (1993), 393-423, and Toledano, ‘The Emergence of Ottoman-Local Elites’, 155-57. Identification of the Christian notables with the Ottoman state appears as an accusation against them in polemical works, such as *Ελληνική Νομαρχία* [Greek Polity] (Athens 1980), 97-98, and K. T. Dimaras (ed.), *Ρωσσοαγγλόγαλλος* [The Russian, the Englishman and the Frenchman] (Athens 1990), 20-21; both originally appeared in the first decade of the nineteenth century.

For instance, when local antagonisms break out, we learn about them thanks to petitions submitted to the Porte and state decrees issued in response to them; prior to the nineteenth century, the state was involved in such crises usually not because it spied on developments through agents of its own, but because it had been invited to do so by that local side that realised that the battle was being lost. Thus, most major intra-elite clashes ended up as affairs in which the state played an active part, because the members of a certain faction chose or were forced by circumstances to have recourse to it. When doing so, the elites needed to respect and adapt to the rules of sultanic justice and invoke the name of the people, even though the outcome of their conflict might hardly matter as far as the conditions of life of the common people were concerned. Therefore, in many cases those who petitioned against a member of the elite or an elite group were not their real opponents, but the unidentifiable 'population' of the region, even though the petition had really been written and submitted by a limited number of elite individuals. This seems to be what the Metropolitan of Salonica referred to when he accused the merchant Bekella of having masked himself as the community in making false allegations against the local metropolitan.<sup>31</sup>

Elite clashes provide the researcher with a welcome opportunity to study networks, alliances, strategies and occasionally (especially when confiscations were ordered) the resources of the elite. If within certain bounds, crises could be beneficial to elites, too. For one thing, they could come forward as the political leadership of their community and increase their influence and political power. Besides, on the economic level, disorder provided some with an opportunity to tighten their grip over indebted villagers and to encroach upon more land. Of course, one needed to always be cautious and on the alert. The line between success and banishment was a thin one. But then again, we should not forget that if someone possessed, as Akarlı suggests, a sound financial basis, a military force, influence over and close ties with other notables, and good contacts with more powerful figures in the area and in Istanbul, plus a modicum of negotiating skills, i.e., if he was a decent, self-respecting *ayan* in the turbulent Balkans of the second half of the eighteenth century, he had a good chance of renegotiating his status with state agents and his elite rivals, and returning to grace.

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31. M. A. Kalinderis, *Ta Avτά Έγγραφα της Δημοτικής Βιβλιοθήκης Κοζάνης 1676-1808* [The Unbound Documents of the Municipal Library of Kozani 1676-1808] (Thessaloniki 1951), 30. Cf. Pyliá, «Λειτουργίες και Αυτονομία», 73.