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THE PROVINCE STRIKES BACK  
IMPERIAL DYNAMICS  
IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

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# Centre–Periphery Relations: Crete in the Eighteenth Century

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Crete, which had been ruled by Venice since the early thirteenth century, was conquered by the Ottoman army between 1645 and 1669. In fact, most of Crete was brought under Ottoman sovereignty during the first two years of the campaign against it, and only Candia (Ottoman Kandiye, today Heraklion), the biggest city on the island, held on until 1669, when its defenders were finally forced to capitulate.

The change of sovereignty meant that Crete passed from the control of an aristocratic, Catholic republic to that of a monarchic Muslim empire with no formal aristocracy.<sup>1</sup> It also meant that the island politically joined the rest of the Eastern Mediterranean, as the Ottoman Empire acquired the single most important territorial unit outside its authority. Apart from a new political structure and a new administrative (and élite) language, the Ottoman conquest brought along Islam, and, in consequence, a significant change in the profile of the island's population. It is believed that conversion rather than immigration was the major factor which contributed to the emergence of Muslim communities throughout the island;<sup>2</sup> under the new regime prospects for upward social mobility for the local population were greatly improved if one became a Muslim, and the desire to become tax-exempt through recruitment to the military corps became, as Molly Greene has convincingly argued in her seminal work about Ottoman Crete, a major motive for widespread conversion of indigenous Cretans to Islam.<sup>3</sup> Conversion may have been somewhat facilitated by the fact that Catholic Venice had long hindered the proper functioning of the Christian Orthodox Church, as it prevented its bishops from establishing themselves on the island, but, on the other hand, there is convincing evidence for the existence of strong Orthodox feeling in Crete during the Venetian period.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, Greene's argument that widespread conversion under the Ottomans should primarily be attributed to the confusion brought about by the lengthy war, along with clashes within the Orthodox community after the Ottoman conquest of Candia, sounds much more plausible.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, evidence from the Ottoman judicial registers (*sijil*) of Kandiye confirms that conversion to Islam was not restricted to the early decades of Ottoman rule, but continued until the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> It was perhaps the shallow understanding of Islam by the many converts and their descendants that made a state agent, the governor of Kandiye, issue two decrees around 1700 as a reminder that Muslims were obliged to observe the five daily prayers, and that Muslim women were not allowed to display their facial

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<sup>1</sup> For a review of the historical development of the Venetian view of the Ottoman Empire as the basis for discussing the emergence of the notion of despotic rule, see Valensi 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Peponakis 1997, 22, 37, 161; Andriotis 2006, 81–82.

<sup>3</sup> Greene 2000, 37–38, 41–44; cf. Valensi 2000, 30, 47 for reports of Venetian ambassadors according to which there were Venetian subjects who converted to Islam in the hope of a career in the Ottoman army or navy.

<sup>4</sup> Greene 2000, 175–178; Lassithiotakis 2004, 55, 58–60.

<sup>5</sup> Greene 2000, 40–41. Cf. Peponakis 1997, 38.

<sup>6</sup> Peponakis 1997, *passim*, esp. 37–39, 49–52, 65–67, 135–139; Andriotis 2006, 96–99.

features in public.<sup>7</sup> Such decrees (be they extra-ordinary or routine) may be considered in relation to the preponderance of Islamic principles in the organisation of the land regime in Crete, as will be discussed below, in the context of a more general strengthening of Islamic orthodoxy in the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the seventeenth century. In this regard, it is somewhat ironic that relatively extensive Islamisation, in principle a success, most likely meant imperfect Islamisation.

Crete's incorporation into the Ottoman realm manifests certain peculiarities. First of all, Crete is an island; not only was access to islands more difficult since they could only be accessed via the sea route,<sup>8</sup> but islands may be seen to form 'closed systems' with a strong local identity, in which local élites and officials can enjoy more independence from central state control than their counterparts in mainland territories.<sup>9</sup> Crete is a sizeable island which in no way constitutes a single or homogeneous administrative or social unit; given its size, the multitude of settlements, the diversity of its geography and the significant difficulties posed to accessing its rural interior,<sup>10</sup> it has been described – with only slight exaggeration – as a “miniature continent”, which, furthermore, fed a rather substantial population.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, Crete was conquered late in comparison with most Ottoman territories; therefore, it was organised according to the ideas and conditions of the time of its conquest and not as most Balkan and Anatolian provinces had been in the past. The major difference was that even though after the early successes of the Cretan campaign it seems that full implementation of the 'classic' *timar* (granting tax revenues to the provincial cavalry in return for military services) system was envisaged, two decades later, when the conquest of the island was completed, there was a change of heart. More specifically, the Treasury did not take over (practically) the whole of extra-urban land – as expected and practised for centuries – in order to distribute its fiscal revenues as *timars* to the provincial *sipahi* cavalry or farm them out as *mukataas* (tax district) but private ownership of the island's land with full proprietary rights was declared legal through invocation of the precepts of the holy law of Islam. Such a policy was in violation of the imperial *kanun* law, which in earlier centuries had been the guiding principle behind the management of land and its fiscal revenues in the Ottoman provinces.<sup>12</sup> As such, it was a major break with the past,

<sup>7</sup> Stavrinidis III, nos. 1537 (-), 1539 (1700); cf. Stavrinidis I, no. 90 (1658).

<sup>8</sup> Pirates and corsairs were one factor which obstructed easy access to Crete. Also the Venetians held the islets of Gramvoussa until 1692, and Spinalonga and Souda until 1715, and hoped to re-conquer Crete as they did with the Morea in 1685.

<sup>9</sup> For islands under Ottoman rule, see Vatin and Veinstein 2004. See also Kolovos 2006, esp. 19-20.

<sup>10</sup> Crete is rather mountainous and overland routes were of very poor quality in the Ottoman period (Andriotis 2006, 29-30, 32-33; Bonneval and Dumas 2000, 245-306 [but it should be noted that Dumas did not always stick to the main road]).

<sup>11</sup> There are no reliable population data about Ottoman Crete prior to the nineteenth century, but it would be safe to assume that the island's population exceeded 150,000 people at the turn of the eighteenth century, while most foreigners who visited Crete later in that century estimated the number of inhabitants at (well) beyond 200,000 (Greene 2000, 52-54; Andriotis 2006, 76-96). The expression “miniature continent” is used by Greene after Fernand Braudel (Greene 2000, 19).

<sup>12</sup> For the texts of the 1650 and 1670 *kanunnames*, see Gülsoy 2004, 315-325; cf. Veinstein 2004, 93-94, 106. See also Gülsoy 2004, 298-310: in 1650 there were 54 *zeamets* and 995 *timars* on the island; after the conquest of Kandiye, the *sipahi timar* system was abandoned, and all *zeamets* and *timars* were given to army personnel stationed in the three major towns. For the 1670 (the exact date is not certain) *kanunname* and the land regime after the conquest of Kandiye, see Greene 2000, 25-29, 33-35; Stavrinidis I, nos. 396 (-), 398 (1669); Karantzikou and Photeinou 2003, entries nos. 247 (-), 249 (1669).

which, in Greene's view, served the interests of the conquering élite: "the oligarchy that conquered Crete – headed up by the famous Köprülü family – was careful to reserve the riches of the island for itself, rather than to parcel out the land to the sultan's soldiers".<sup>13</sup> Greene's interpretation focuses on the notion of a clash between sultanic authority and élite households in the seventeenth century, as well as on the need of the latter group to acquire a more stable base of wealth in the light of the gradual 'aristocratisation' of the Ottoman political establishment. Gilles Veinstein, on the other hand, associates the application of a land and tax regime more in conformity with the *sharia* in Crete with the personality and religious beliefs of Grand Vizier Köprülü Fazıl Ahmed Pasha.<sup>14</sup> However, the recognition of private property rights could also be treated as a sign of pragmatism on the part of the central Ottoman state, that is, as an acknowledgement of the limited usefulness of the *sipahi* system on an island such as Crete in the second half of the seventeenth century.<sup>15</sup> If we consider this political decision in the context of the peculiarity of island societies, we could claim that detaching land ownership, the major source of wealth, from the Sultan's control was fitting for an island, as it further emancipated it (and especially its élite) from restrictions imposed by external factors.<sup>16</sup> Besides, it should be noted here that the right to own rural private property served not only the interests of "the oligarchy that conquered Crete" and its descendants on or outside the island, but in the long run also those of indigenous families or groups (even if to a lesser degree), or of those who with time became localised.<sup>17</sup>

From an administrative point of view, Crete became a province (*eyalet*) consisting in the eighteenth century of three districts (*sancak*), further subdivided not into judicial-administrative units (*kaza*), as the normal administrative order would have required, but into sub-units (*nahiye*).<sup>18</sup> Officials with the rank of pasha were appointed governors in the three *sancaks* of Kandiye, which hierarchically enjoyed precedence over the other two, of Hanya (Chania) and Resmo (Rethymno).<sup>19</sup> The same three cities also served as the seats of judges (*kadı*), who appointed deputies (*naib*) in the *nahiyes*,<sup>20</sup> with the judge of Hanya being considered hierarchically superior to the other two and sometimes addressed as the *kadı* of Crete.<sup>21</sup> A chief financial official (*defterdar*) with jurisdiction over the whole

<sup>13</sup> Greene 2000, 7, 27-28; cf. Bierman 1991, 59-63.

<sup>14</sup> Veinstein 2004, 104.

<sup>15</sup> In this respect, it is worth noting, I think, that the *timar* system was applied in Kamenets, which was conquered in 1672 (Finkel 2005, 275); maybe this was because the danger of losing Kamenets to enemy attacks was much more real than the danger of losing Crete. See Faroqi 1984, 263-266, for the proliferation of private landownership in Kayseri in Anatolia.

<sup>16</sup> Veinstein suggests that legal 'experiments' were easier on islands than in mainland provinces (Veinstein 2004, 104-106). In the Cyclades, which were much smaller than Crete and with not as much cultivable land, private ownership of all the land had been introduced since the sixteenth century (Kolovos 2006, 57, 61, 75-76).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Salzmann 2004, 98-100, for the inequality of opportunities for figures of the centre and those from the provinces.

<sup>18</sup> Gülsoy 2004, 225-227. There were 20 *nahiyes* on the island in 1650 and 1670. Eighteenth-century *sijil* entries also refer to *nahiyes*.

<sup>19</sup> Greene 2000, 22-23; Mantran 1986. Initially, the Ottomans retained the Venetian division of the island into four districts: Hanya, Resmo, Kandiye and Istiye (Gülsoy 2004, 223-227; Greene 2000, 46 n. 7).

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, Stavrinidis IV, no. 2364 (1746). *Naibs* made Ottoman justice more readily available to non-urban populations, but occasionally they were accused of abuses (Stavrinidis III, no. 1683 [1704]).

<sup>21</sup> Adıyeke and Adıyeke 2000, 447-448. According to the two authors "... the *kadı* of Chania was regarded as the hierarchical superior of the other Cretan *kadis*, an arrangement which has no parallel in other parts of the Ottoman Empire" (448).

of the island was established in Kandiye,<sup>22</sup> while janissary forces guaranteed security. Crete technically was a frontier region (*serhad*),<sup>23</sup> and its establishment as an *eyalet* certainly reflected its importance for the Ottomans.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, this development may be taken to underline Crete's distinctiveness in that it was a sizeable island,<sup>25</sup> which was to a certain extent a world apart from the rest of the Ottoman realm in having been Venetian territory for four and a half centuries, and thus a 'different old world' entering the Ottoman orbit at an advanced stage in the Empire's history. On the other hand, one may also speculate that the balance of power at the time of its conquest played a part in the establishment of the *eyalet* of Crete as a separate administrative unit.<sup>26</sup> If personal or familial elite aspirations and considerations influenced the land-regime arrangements in Crete, then the same factors could account for the overall administrative organisation of the island; in a way, Crete was a land of opportunities (even if modest ones) for ambitious Ottoman officials.

Istanbul's appointees in the island's top administrative and judicial posts constituted the most formal channel of communication between Crete and the imperial centre. A 'secondary' channel was created when episcopal authority was reinstated on the island, and a Christian Orthodox Metropolitan and bishops were appointed and placed under the authority of the Patriarch in Istanbul.<sup>27</sup> For the Ottoman state, prelates were farmers of church taxes and heads of the ecclesiastical hierarchy of their dioceses, and their appointment and authority were ratified by the issuing of a patent (*berat*) by the Sultan.<sup>28</sup> Actually, however, nuclei of political and economic power and domination were formed around them; for instance, in 1718 the Metropolitan and the bishops of the island were those who put forward the name of the candidate for secretary to the governor's council (*divan*), the office through which non-Muslims were represented in this body.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, bishops were privileged in that the fact that they held *berats* meant that they could count on the assistance of Ottoman officials whenever their authority was contested or the collection of their tax revenues was hindered by their flock or outsiders.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Tukin 1996, 88.

<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, TAH ('Turkish Archive of Heraklion', Vikelaia Municipal Library, Heraklion), *kadı sijil* no. 32/p. 32 (1781) and 32/80/entry no. 1 (1782).

<sup>24</sup> According to Tukin 1996, 87, Crete became a privileged province ("*imtiyazlı bir eyalet*").

<sup>25</sup> Size, revenue and resources, distance from the mainland, and historical circumstances were factors which influenced how an island was administered. For instance, Samos was granted to the grand admiral Kılıç Ali Pasha as his private holding (*mülk*) in 1584 and he endowed it (*vakıf*) to his mosque (Laiou 2002, 45); for the Cyclades under Ottoman rule, see Slot 1982 and Kolovos 2006, 34-85.

<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to note that in around 1670 Cyprus was brought under the authority of the Grand Admiral at the request of the island's elite (Anagnostopoulou 2002, 268-270), and a reasonable option would have been to do the same with Crete. Most Aegean islands belonged to the province (*eyalet*) of the Islands of the Mediterranean, also governed by the Grand Admiral; for evidence of the expansion of the authority of the Admiral and of the notion of the province of the Islands of the Mediterranean, especially in the eighteenth century, see Laiou 2002, 52-54 and Emecen 2002, 254-255. When conquered in 1715, the island of Tinos, which is much smaller than Crete and belongs to an insular complex, joined the rest of the Cyclades as part of this province.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Kolovos 2006, 17, for the Cyclades. For resistance to the authority of the Patriarch and the Metropolitan, see, for instance, Stavrinidis III, no. 1578 (1701).

<sup>28</sup> Stavrinidis III, nos. 1617-1619 (1702). Fiscal revenues from the Church were split between state authorities in Crete and Istanbul (Tomadakis 1960, 9).

<sup>29</sup> Stavrinidis IV, no. 1938 (1718). For more information on this office, see below.

<sup>30</sup> Stavrinidis III, no. 1564 (-).



Bishops and the Metropolitan were only one aspect of an extensive network of tax farmers, which constituted the third formal channel of communication between Crete and the centre, since major tax farms were auctioned in Istanbul and chains of principal contractors in the capital and local sub-contractors on the island were formed.<sup>31</sup> The networks of tax farmers from Istanbul down to Crete, as well as the informal arrangements that led to their formation, are an aspect of centre-periphery relations which largely eludes us.<sup>32</sup> Ottoman sources suggest that certain taxes and market duties were auctioned locally through the *defterdar*,<sup>33</sup> while others were on offer in Istanbul or were held by persons from outside Crete;<sup>34</sup> however, even in the former case, the central authorities maintained and exercised their right to intervene when irregularities had been reported to them or when other issues arose.<sup>35</sup> It should further be noted here that taxation and market dues were not the only means through which the centre intervened in the economic and commercial life of Crete. Thus, for instance, from time to time state decrees were issued which imposed the dispatch of olive oil and soap from Crete to Istanbul for the needs of its population,<sup>36</sup> while the provision of Crete with cereals, in particular wheat, and issues related to the local market and handling of cereals were also a source of concern for the state authorities.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, another channel which connected Crete with Istanbul were those major endowments (*vakıf*) which had been established by high-ranking officials who participated in the conquest of Crete or were governors in the early Ottoman period, and were later administered by their descendants in Istanbul or elsewhere. For instance, when the people of Sphakia complained to the Porte in 1760 about abuses in the collection of the poll tax, their petition was forwarded to the government by Fatma Hatun, a princess of the house of Osman and a descendant of Gazi Hüseyin Pasha who was the head of the Ottoman military forces in Crete in the mid-seventeenth century and founded a large *vakıf* which included the region of Sphakia; Fatma was in the 1760s the administrator (*mütevelli*) of this endowment.<sup>38</sup>

Taxation, that is, surplus appropriation by the state and the ruling élite, was in Crete, as all over the Ottoman Empire, an issue about which the subjects of the Sultan quite often lodged complaints to the Porte.<sup>39</sup> On the basis of published Ottoman sources, one may infer that Cretan taxpayers rebelled mostly against the abuses of the tax collectors rather than about taxes as such. Furthermore, it seems that collective petitions about tax issues mostly came from non-Muslims, especially about the poll tax (*cizye*) that they were

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, Stavrinidis IV, no. 2458 (1750) (even though the *malikâne* [life-long tax farm] holder, Ragıb Mehmed Pasha, was at the time posted in Sayda, he should be counted as an Istanbul figure). The *malikâne* system was introduced in Crete in 1720 (Çizakça 1996, 171-174).

<sup>32</sup> On tax farming, see Salzmann 1993 and 2004, esp. chapter III; Greene 2000, 21-22.

<sup>33</sup> See, for instance, Stavrinidis I, no. 107 (1658); Stavrinidis II, no. 553 (1672); Karantzikou and Photeinou 2003, no. 753 (1750). Cf. Salzmann 1993, 404-405 and Salzmann 2004, 101.

<sup>34</sup> Triantafyllidou-Baladié 1988, 194; Salzmann 2004, 108-109 and n. 140, 122 n. 2; Cezar 1986, 44 n. 37.

<sup>35</sup> Stavrinidis II, no. 553 (1672); Stavrinidis V, no. 2840 (1765). Cf. Salzmann 2004, 156.

<sup>36</sup> Triantafyllidou-Baladié 1988, 145; Bonneval and Dumas 2000, 230-232; Stavrinidis V, no. 2814 (1764); TAH 32/47 (1781).

<sup>37</sup> Greene 2000, 74; Triantafyllidou-Baladié 1988, 172; Stavrinidis IV, no. 2241B (1735).

<sup>38</sup> Stavrinidis 1955, 293-298. Cf. Stavrinidis V, no. 2822 (1764), as well as Stavrinidis IV, nos. 2082 (1723) and 2128 (1724) for a mosque in Istanbul with property in Crete.

<sup>39</sup> For *sijil* entries concerning taxation, see, for instance, Stavrinidis III, nos. 1616 (-), 1632 (1703).



required to pay because of their religion.<sup>40</sup> If this impression proves to be accurate and we are not misguided by the sources which have become available to date, we may surmise, as scattered evidence from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century suggests,<sup>41</sup> that a possible reason for the general absence of tax-related grievances by Muslims is that many among them had managed one way or another to become tax-exempt, which is not out of line with developments in other Ottoman provinces;<sup>42</sup> in this respect, we should not forget that Crete was “the janissaries’ island”, as Greene calls it,<sup>43</sup> which means that numbers of Muslims could claim tax exemption because of their military status.

As a result of its self-representation as a defender of the weak against the abuses of power-holders, the central government – or its local representatives, basically governors and judges – could prove a useful ally for tax-paying communities in their disputes with tax officials or creditors,<sup>44</sup> even though things were not always settled simply with the issuing of a decree in the taxpayers’ favour: the mechanisms required to enforce a decree were often lacking, the dispatch of special agents from the centre, charged with overseeing the restoration of order, could result in onerous payments for the local population who were required to meet their expenses, or a disgraced official could later return to power and seek vengeance upon his accusers. On the other hand, it is meaningful to reiterate here two observations which have been made as to other regions, but apply, I think, to eighteenth-century Crete as well: first, that the distant imperial centre often represented for the subjects a benign agent, the abode of justice, so to speak, as opposed to the local élite and local officials – who were mostly state appointees or associated with the Istanbul élite – of whose abuses and oppression taxpayers had first-hand experience; second, that part of the court business came, as seen in the *Kandiye sijils*, not from the town itself but from villages around it or further afield,<sup>45</sup> which suggests familiarisation of even the rural population with the workings of Ottoman institutions (the stationing of *naibs* in certain major villages must have contributed to this), and also acceptance of their usefulness in dispute resolution.

Taxation was also a factor that shaped the pattern of self-organisation of Cretan communities (at least among the Christians). It became habitual for the Christians of the various settlements, but also regions, to appoint representatives (*kethüda*) whose main task was to manage their financial affairs, mostly tax payments,<sup>46</sup> but who also represented their communities before state authorities if need be.<sup>47</sup> These representatives sometimes

<sup>40</sup> Stavrinidis 1955, 293-298, 305-311.

<sup>41</sup> Bonneval and Dumas 2000, 213; Peponakis 1997, 54.

<sup>42</sup> Raymond 1973-1974, 659-671; McGowan 1994, 665; Canbakal 2005, 47-48.

<sup>43</sup> Greene 2000, 33. Cf. Ivanova 2005, 240 for the case of Vidin, which was a frontier town, as Crete was a frontier province, and Inalcik 1977, 40 and n. 42.

<sup>44</sup> Stavrinidis III, nos. 1614 and 1646 (1703), 1642 (1704), 1655 (1703); Stavrinidis V, nos. 2735 (1761), 2775 (1762); cf. Stavrinidis V, no. 2840 (1765). Central-state decrees could also go against taxpayers: Stavrinidis IV, no. 2353 (1745); see also Salzmann 2004, 143-146.

<sup>45</sup> See, for instance, Stavrinidis III, no. 1587 (1703); Stavrinidis IV, no. 2273 (1739); Karantzikou and Photeinou 2003, no. 800 (1751).

<sup>46</sup> Stavrinidis III, nos. 1554 (1702), 1560 (1703), 1561 (1702), 1565 (1702), 1566 (-), 1567 (1702), 1572 (-), 1575 (-); Stavrinidis IV, nos. 1909 (1717), 2437 (1750); Greene 2000, 33. Cf. Stavrinidis V, no. 2788 (1762) for the city of Kandiye.

<sup>47</sup> See, for instance, Stavrinidis III, nos. 1588-1613 (1703); Stavrinidis IV, no. 2438 (1750).

were priests or bishops, which is an indication of the social role of the clergy.<sup>48</sup>

Incorporation of Crete into the Ottoman imperial fabric was not an easy task, and it took until the first third of the eighteenth century before things were stabilised. The war for Crete lasted for more than two decades, and then Ottoman sovereignty was contested for almost another half century by the Venetians, who hoped to regain control of the island. Furthermore, factionalism and power struggles at the top imperial level and the involvement of the Empire in a devastating war between 1684 and 1699 meant that the late seventeenth century was not an easy time for the Ottomans in general. Thus, Crete was not to experience very strict central control, as the Empire had started to enter a phase of so-called 'decentralisation'.<sup>49</sup>

Lack of or resistance to strict central control was multifaceted and manifested itself on various occasions. Its most meaningful expression, symbolically and practically, was, as already noted, the legalisation of private land ownership, which, although initiated by the central élite, also benefited the local Cretan élite, whether indigenous or 'imported'. Furthermore, Crete had its own treasury, which was independent of Istanbul. This arrangement apparently was in keeping with its frontier and island status and in principle made funds more readily available in emergencies, but, as a result, the central government was not, according to a sultanic decree of 1765, familiar with the details of the island population's fiscal obligations.<sup>50</sup> Other, lesser manifestations of challenge to the centre may include, for instance, a decree which the chief officer of the janissary corps in Istanbul issued in 1703. This decree granted the imperial janissaries of Kandiye their request that they be allowed to bequeath their estates to their children, contrary to 'classic' imperial order which forbade janissaries on active service to marry.<sup>51</sup> Such a concession was neither a novelty nor a Cretan peculiarity, but given the more general context, it is interesting to note the willingness of the centre to acknowledge social realities and the precedence of social stability in the provinces over imperial law and the Treasury.

Signs of resistance to central control may be detected among the island's Christians, too. As already noted, the Venetians did not allow Orthodox bishops to settle on the island. The appointment of a metropolitan in Kandiye provoked a long conflict with the Sinai monks, who saw him as an instrument of the Istanbul Patriarchate and, thus, as an outside challenge to their spiritual, political and economic authority over the faithful. More specifically, the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai had an uninterrupted centuries-old presence on Crete and the monks who represented its interests on the island prevented the Metropolitan in Kandiye from acquiring a church in which to officiate until 1735, while between 1715 and 1718 it was made possible by sultanic decree for the Cretan notables to replace the Istanbul Patriarchate in the selection of the Metropolitan. Even though by the 1730s the monks were made to accept the Metropolitan's precedence and the construction of a new cathedral, their long fight can be seen as another manifestation of

<sup>48</sup> See, for instance, Stavrinidis III, nos. 1561 (1702), 1574 (-), 1576 (-), 1592 (-), 1594 (-), 1599-1600 (1703), 1608 (1703); Stavrinidis IV, no. 2446 (1749); Stavrinidis V, no. 2586 (1755).

<sup>49</sup> For an influential paper centred on the notion of Ottoman 'decentralisation', see Inalcik 1977. Decentralisation is not tantamount to total lack of central control or chaos.

<sup>50</sup> Stavrinidis V, no. 2840 (1765); see also Cezar 1986, 331 and Salzmann 2004, 174-175 (Damascus is cited as another independent treasury in this document). Cf. the special tax status (*serbestiyet*) of some Aegean islands, which ideally guaranteed freedom from unauthorised exactions (Laiou 2002, 45; Emecen 2002, 257-258).

<sup>51</sup> Stavrinidis III, no. 1631 (1703); cf. Raymond 1973-1974, 671-677, 728-729.

a power game between Istanbul and the Cretan élites in which the former was represented by the Metropolitan and the latter by the Sinai monks. On the other hand, the full picture is undoubtedly much more complicated, even if we view this case strictly as a clash between centre and periphery – as we do here. In this respect, it is worth noting that the conflict started when the chief dragoman Panagiotakis Nikousios, that is, a representative of the centre, fell out with the first Metropolitan of the Ottoman era, Nikiphoros Patelaros, and decided to side with the Sinai monks. Patelaros was a native Cretan, thus a local element, but also a relative of the Patriarch and now his representative on Crete, while the monks, who were based on Crete and most likely were indigenous Christians, technically represented the interests of a non-Cretan institution on the island. Then, the clash was brought to an end in the 1730s under a metropolitan, who arrived from outside the island and was entrusted by the Patriarch with restoring canonical order, but was himself Cretan-born, thus representing some sort of a compromise, since Kandiye's Christian élite had long fought for indigenous metropolitans. Furthermore, the Kandiye church which the dragoman Nikousios had donated to the Sinai monks, and had been the original bone of contention, was from the start brought under the direct authority of their rival-to-be, the Patriarch (*stavropigiako*), and not of the Metropolitan of Crete as would have been expected, obviously because of this prelate's quarrel with Nikousios. Eventually, a compromise was reached here, too, as it was agreed that half of the church's revenue be given to the Metropolitan.<sup>52</sup>

The fact that a new church was allowed to be erected in 1735, in blatant violation of the precepts of the Islamic holy law on lands conquered from the infidels,<sup>53</sup> brings us to the issue of the attitude of the Ottomans towards their non-Muslim subjects in Crete, which often seemed to be one of inclusion. Thus we see that certain office-holders were non-Muslims; for instance, the chief architect (*mimarbaşı*) in Kandiye and his staff were sometimes Christian.<sup>54</sup> However, Ottoman willingness not to altogether exclude non-Muslims from the island's administrative hierarchy was primarily manifested in the creation of the office of the non-Muslim secretary to the council of the Kandiye governor (*kapu yazıcısı*). The secretary acted as an interpreter, but also played a part in tax collection (of the Christians' poll tax in particular) and the handling of various affairs which concerned the non-Muslim population of the island. He had three assistants in Kandiye, and representatives in Hanya and Resmo, and, according to a mid-eighteenth-century source, he held his office as a life-long tax farm (*malikâne*).<sup>55</sup> Nikolaos Stavriniadis, a pioneer in the study of Ottoman Crete, has correctly associated the appointment of a Christian secretary-interpreter in Crete with the proliferation of non-Muslim state interpreters both in the centre and in the provinces in the second half of the seventeenth century.<sup>56</sup> However,

<sup>52</sup> This discussion of the conflict is based on the account and analysis of Greene 2000, 175-194. Greene (2000, 200-201) treats the conflict as a persistence of the old Venetian regime in a new political environment, and suggests possible ties to Venice. See also Stavriniadis 1981, 400.

<sup>53</sup> It is interesting to note that, according to a *buyruldu* (governor's decree) of 1771, which stipulated the status of the Sphakia region, building new churches was forbidden, as such a practice violated the holy law of Islam (Laourdas 1947, 288). Rossitsa Gradeva has remarked that "it seems that political considerations were often a stronger argument than the legal framework" as far as Ottoman policy towards non-Muslim cult buildings was concerned (Gradeva 2006, 206).

<sup>54</sup> Stavriniadis III, no. 1678 (1704); Stavriniadis IV, nos. 1993 (1720), 2183 (1730), 2276 (1739).

<sup>55</sup> Greene 2000, 194-195; Stavriniadis 1981, 398. See, also, Stavriniadis IV, nos. 2184 (1731), 2444-2447 (1749); Stavriniadis V, nos. 2721 (1761), 2803 (1764), 2812 (1764), 2818 (1764).

<sup>56</sup> Stavriniadis 1981, 397.

the fact that Bonakis, one of the early-eighteenth-century secretaries, maintained, with the consent of the religious and secular leadership of the Christian community, his post even after he had converted to Islam may suggest not only the blurring of religious identities in Ottoman Crete, but also the association of the office of secretary more with local élite interests than with a particular religious community.<sup>57</sup>

As far as the presence of non-Muslims on the governor's council is concerned, a similar, but more extensive, phenomenon may be observed in the eighteenth-century Morea. There the governor's council included not only a Christian dragoman, who among other things played a part in tax collection, but also two or three Christian notables as representatives of the Christian communities of the peninsula; in what may be the splitting of the single Cretan office into two, the Moreot dragoman was, according to Greek sources, assisted by the secretary of the Morea, head of the dragoman's bureau and in charge of financial affairs.<sup>58</sup> The Morea is in fact a province that shared certain common traits with Crete. Even though not an island, the Morea was connected with mainland Greece by a narrow stretch of land, and the Ottomans recognised this geographical peculiarity by rendering it, like Crete, an *eyalet* in its own right; furthermore, the Morea had a large non-Muslim population and a rather strong Christian élite, and was a region which in the eighteenth century was re-conquered from the Venetians, who held it between 1685 and 1715. As in Crete, the presence of Christians on the governor's council may be treated as a manifestation of the desire of the Ottoman authorities not to alienate their non-Muslim subjects where sizeable non-Muslim populations lived, and a sign of their willingness to incorporate the Christian élite into the governing élite, and thus use it as a sort of cushion between state institutions and the common subjects.<sup>59</sup>

Following the transitional first half-century of Ottoman rule on Crete, the island became, in Greene's words, "more tightly integrated into the Ottoman Empire in the course of the eighteenth century".<sup>60</sup> Occasional hiccups, such as janissary revolts,<sup>61</sup> did occur from time to time, but they were not of the sort that would put Ottoman sovereignty at risk, even though, according to certain reports, the janissaries were a constant source of trouble and oppression in the second half of the eighteenth century, and the Istanbul-appointed governors were unable to bring them under control.<sup>62</sup> Even the Daskaloyiannis revolt, carried out by Christians in the south-western region of Sphakia in 1770, really was in itself a hiccup, though it is significant because it signalled the first serious, albeit isolated, armed challenge to Ottoman authority as such on the island

<sup>57</sup> For Bonakis, see Stavrinidis 1981, 401; Greene 2000, 197; Stavrinidis IV, nos. 1938 (1718), 2010 (1720). In Greene 2000, 203-205 can be found the author's interpretation of fluid religious identities.

<sup>58</sup> Kyrkini-Koutoula 1996, 176-177.

<sup>59</sup> For the Morea, see Kyrkini-Koutoula 1996, 124-180. Kyrkini-Koutoula (1996, 174) notes that the Morea dragoman was not necessarily a local person.

<sup>60</sup> Greene 2000, 193.

<sup>61</sup> Peponakis 1997, 45; Stavrinidis V, nos. 2767, 2770-2774, 2778, 2780 (1762). The 1762 *sijil* entries refer to what appears to have been a very serious janissary mutiny in Kandiye because of a considerable delay in the payment of their wages. It seems to have seriously upset city life for a while, but Ottoman sources indicate that it did not take long for order to be restored.

<sup>62</sup> Peponakis 1997, 53-67; Andriotis 2006, 36; cf. Bonneval and Dumas 2000, 213-214 (but see a contradictory comment on p. 217). Peponakis claims that one result of extensive oppression, especially by janissaries, was larger numbers of converts to Islam from the 1790s onwards (Peponakis 1997, 65-67). For the weakening of the authority of provincial governors in other provinces, see Marcus 1989, 86-94 (Aleppo); McGowan 1994, 663-664 and Zens 2002, 94-103 (Belgrade); Raymond 1973-1974, 8-16 (Cairo).

from within (even though with Russian encouragement).<sup>63</sup> Having argued above that Cretan taxpayers rebelled mostly against the abuses of tax collectors rather than against the Ottoman regime as such, we should note that the first manifestation of the Sphakia rebellion was, according to an Ottoman imperial decree, the refusal of the local Christian population to pay the poll tax and the expulsion of the tax collector.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, Daskaloyiannis was a wealthy Christian merchant, who reportedly dressed in Western clothes, was in contact with Western culture, and was fluent in Italian and Russian;<sup>65</sup> in other words, he may be classified not so much as a member of the traditional élite in whose structures he had in fact served prior to 1770,<sup>66</sup> but rather as belonging to a new Western-orientated mercantile class which in the long run played an important part in the ‘national awakening’ of the Christian Balkan peoples and the preparation of the national movements and/or revolutions against Ottoman rule in the nineteenth century. In Daskaloyiannis’ revolt, Crete meets the Morea again, as in both places Russian-instigated revolts headed by members of the indigenous non-Muslim élites broke out in 1770 with little success.<sup>67</sup> One of the side-effects of the revolt – and an indication of the adaptability of Ottoman administration when circumstances required – was the unification of the three *sancaks* of the island under one chief governor based in Kandiye,<sup>68</sup> apparently in order to better meet a possible Russian military challenge.

Since the history of Ottoman Crete, as we know it today, is largely the history of seventeenth-century conquest and organisation of the new province and nineteenth-century ethnic and sectarian violence, with the notable exception of relatively few studies which focus on the period in-between, our knowledge of eighteenth-century Cretan centre-periphery relations virtually ends with the Daskaloyiannis affair.

Undoubtedly, what we would like to know about the eighteenth century in Ottoman Crete greatly outweighs what we know. Thus, instead of a conclusion, I would like to briefly recount an incident which took place in Crete in June 2006: a police helicopter located an illegal cannabis plantation near a village in the Mylopotamos region, to the west of the city of Heraklion. However, when a ground police force tried to approach the village, they were met – as the official police press release reads – with “barrage of fire from local inhabitants with firearms; bullets came from several directions and the surrounding hills”.<sup>69</sup> The police were forced to retreat, and apparently the cannabis plantation remained intact. This incident is without a doubt an extreme case, an exception, but the people of this same village had not long before persuaded the Greek government to pass a special law which, contrary to general regulations about local government, made it a municipality in its own right.<sup>70</sup> As a matter of fact, this particular village is not the only example of a rural community that nurtures ambivalent feelings towards state involvement in its life, and Crete has been described as an island that “regards itself as

<sup>63</sup> For a brief account of the Daskaloyiannis incident, see Greene 2000, 206-209.

<sup>64</sup> Laourdas 1947, 277.

<sup>65</sup> Mango 1954, 45. Daskaloyiannis’ full name was Ioannis Vlachos.

<sup>66</sup> Daskaloyiannis was the *kethüda* of Sphakia in 1765, and was required to settle tax issues (Sfyroeras 1985).

<sup>67</sup> Laourdas 1947, passim; Sfyroeras 1985.

<sup>68</sup> Tukin 1996, 87; Bonneval and Dumas 2000, 213.

<sup>69</sup> *Ελευθεροτυπία* newspaper, 15 June 2006 (also available on the internet: [www.enet.gr](http://www.enet.gr)). In spring 2006 a police officer described the mountainous Mylopotamos villages as beyond the reach of police forces (*άβυσσος*) ([www.cretetv.gr/news/print.php?ArtID=20447](http://www.cretetv.gr/news/print.php?ArtID=20447)) (webpage visited on 18 February 2007).

<sup>70</sup> *Ελευθεροτυπία* newspaper, 21 February 2006 (also available on the internet: [www.enet.gr](http://www.enet.gr)).



an idiosyncratic and proudly independent part of the national entity [Greece], distinct from it, physically separated from it, but yet endowed with qualities that have made Crete the birthplace of many national leaders in politics, war, and the arts”.<sup>71</sup> Even though it would be far-fetched and possibly misleading to argue in favour of the relevance of this contemporary mentality to the establishment of Ottoman authority on Crete given what we know (or do not know) about it and the limits of pre-modern or early modern state authority in general, I would venture to suggest that the Ottoman state, at a time with no helicopters but with firearms, chose to restrict its direct presence to the main urban centres and more easily accessible districts. This happened, I would think, not out of fear of active resistance (as there is no evidence of any real challenge to Ottoman rule), but because of financial considerations and logistics related at least to a certain extent to the fact that Crete was both rather mountainous and an island, which raised accessibility issues.<sup>72</sup> Instead, it preferred to govern Crete through the incorporation of local (and localised) élites (without totally excluding the non-Muslim ones), which is not very different from what happened all over the Empire in the eighteenth century.<sup>73</sup> This originally facilitated the acceptance of its authority by the local population, whether it remained Christian or turned Muslim, and then saved the state from the considerable cost that controlling the whole of the island more strictly would have required.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Herzfeld 1985, 6. For the ambiguous relation of a mountainous Cretan village with the state and national politics, see *ibid.*, 19–33, 92–122. I would like to thank Aris Tsaniropoulos for bringing this book to my attention.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Slot 1982, 250. For a document of 1779 explaining that the Church had found it difficult to control the district of Sphakia “because of the inaccessibility of the place and the roughness of its people”, see Detorakis 1988, 440.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Salzmann 2004, 20–21, 25–26, but also 127–138, which makes us wonder if the central government was flexible or weak in administering distant provinces. See also Greene 2000, 55.

<sup>74</sup> According to a 1717 state decree, “the income of Crete ... does not cover her expenses” (Greene 2000, 136); it should be taken into account that at the time the Ottomans were at war, so the expenses must have been, as Greene notes, “directly linked to the cost of defending the island”. For comments on the low productivity and market value of Cretan agriculture and its produce, see Andriotis 2006, 33, 41.

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