

PAPERS AND MONOGRAPHS OF THE FINNISH INSTITUTE AT ATHENS VOL. XV

THESPROTIA EXPEDITION I
TOWARDS A REGIONAL HISTORY

edited
by Björn Forsén

HELSINKI 2009

© Suomen Ateenan-Instituutin säätiö (Foundation of the Finnish Institute at Athens),
Helsinki 2009

ISSN 1237-2684
ISBN 978-952-67211-0-1

Printed in Finland by Ekenäs Tryckeri.

Cover: The Early Hellenistic fortress Agios Donatos of Zervochori seen from the south.
Photo: Esko Tikkala.

Layout: Vesa Vahtikari

Contents

Preface		i
Björn Forsén	<i>An Interdisciplinary Odyssey into the Past</i>	1
Evangelos Tourloukis Ourania Palli	<i>The First Mesolithic Site of Thesprotia</i>	25
Antonia Tzortzatou Lila Fatsiou	<i>New Early Iron Age and Archaic Sites in Thesprotia</i>	39
Jeannette Forsén	<i>The ‘Dark Age’ in the Kokytos Valley – Not So Dark After All</i>	55
Mika Lavento Maria Lahtinen	<i>Geo-archaeological Investigations at Mavromandilia of Prodromi</i>	73
Irini Svana	<i>The Rural Sanctuary at Kyra Panagia</i>	89
Peter Funke	<i>Concilio Epirotarum habitato – Überlegungen zum Problem von Polyzentrismus und Zentralorten im antiken Epirus</i>	97
Γιάννης Πίκουλας	<i>Αναζητώντας αμαξιτούς οδούς στη Θεσπρωτία</i>	113
Mikko Suha	<i>The Fortification Walls of Agios Donatos</i>	119
Esko Tikkala	<i>The Frieze-Epistyle Blocks of Agios Donatos</i>	133
Markku Niskanen	<i>A Shift in Animal Species Used for Food from the Early Iron Age to the Roman Period</i>	145
Janne P. Ikäheimo	<i>Stamped Terra Sigillata from Agios Donatos</i>	155
William Bowden	<i>Thesprotia in the Context of Roman and Late Antique Epirus</i>	167
Erkki Sironen	<i>Some Notes on Inscriptions of Roman Date from Thesprotia</i>	185
Νίκη Βασιλικού	<i>Παλαιοχριστιανική βασιλική στην Κρυσταλλοπηγή Παραμυθιάς</i>	197
Asterios Aidonis Anestis Emmanouil	<i>The People of Doliani: An Approach to the Paleodemography of the Late Byzantine Cemetery</i>	207
Mika Hakkarainen	<i>Venetian Presence in Thesprotia</i>	223
Timo Sironen	<i>An Ottoman Sepulchral Stele from Paramythia</i>	239
Evangelia Balta Fehmi Yilmaz Filiz Yaşar	<i>Tsamouria – Nineteenth Century Ottoman Thesprotia</i>	245
List of Contributors		275

An Ottoman Sepulchral Stele from Paramythia

Timo Sironen

In August 2005 I was contacted by the Thesprotia Expedition: a sepulchral *stèle* of the Ottoman period, written in Arabic script, had been found and photographed (Fig. 1) in the small local collection of antiquities in Paramythia (*Philoproodos Omilos Paramythias*) and I was asked to give an interpretation of it, after having transcribed it.¹

Even though there once must have existed large numbers of Ottoman sepulchral stelai in what is modern Greece, few remain today. Ottoman sepulchral stelai have never received a similar scholarly interest as Greek, Latin or even Italic inscriptions, and only few Ottoman sepulchral stelai have been published so far.² Further work on surviving Ottoman sepulchral stelai from Rethymnon on Crete as well as from Rhodes, Macedonia and Thessaly is in progress, and thus it may hopefully not take too long until more Ottoman sepulchral stelai from Greece are published in detail.³

At a first glimpse I thought that my challenge was to interpret a seven-line document in Ottoman Turkish, usually bustling with loanwords from Persian. However, I was surprised on seeing that, apart from a couple of Turkish titles and personal names, it was almost entirely Arabic. This is not, I think, quite uncommon of a sepulchral inscription of any upper-class citizen of the Ottoman Empire in the beginning of the nineteenth

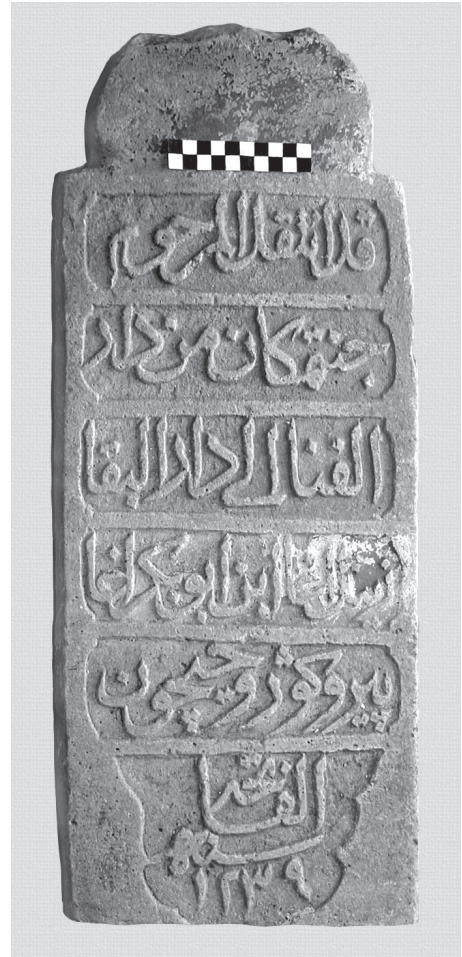


Fig.1.

¹ Not being an Ottomanist myself I gratefully acknowledge all the help and good advice that I have received while deciphering this inscription. Especially I want to thank Antonis Anastasopoulos, Evangelia Balta, Björn Forsén, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila and Georgios C. Liakopoulos. Needless to say I am myself fully responsible for any remaining mistakes.

² Dimitriadis 1983 (Thessaloniki), Chidioglou 1985 (Crete), Strohmeier 1992 (Aegean Islands), Balducci 1932 (Rhodes), Kiel 1990 and Kiel 1996 (Chalkis, Macedonia and Thrace), Petronotis 1999 (Tripolis) and Kiel 2006 (Pharsala).

³ The finds from Rethymnon have been studied by a research team of the Institute for Mediterranean Studies/ FO.R.T.H. led by Antonis Anastasopoulos, the ones from Rhodes by John Barnes, the ones from Central Macedonia and the Peloponnese by Georgios C. Liakopoulos and the ones from Thessaly (esp. Almyros) by Dimitris Loupis. The last decades have witnessed a general upsurge of interest in Ottoman remains in Greece. Recently it has even become *en vogue* in Athens to use Ottoman sepulchral stelai as ornamental objects in order to decorate small private courtyard gardens. Therefore such stelai are even smuggled from Albania in order to be sold in Athens.

century, not even in Paramythia, the seat of the kaza⁴ of Aydonat belonging to the vilayet of Yanya (Ioannina).⁵

The sepulchral stele itself is described in the inventory list of the collection of antiquities in Paramythia under the find number 19 as follows: “an almost totally conserved Ottoman sepulchral *stele* in marble, with the uppermost part missing, but with the lower part, including the text of seven lines, preserved. The provenance is Paramythia, from the collection of Spyros Mouselimis in 1944, donated by himself to the *Philoproodos Omilos Paramythias* in August 1963. The stele measures 63 cm in height, 25 cm in breadth and 4 cm in thickness. The condition of conservation is good.” I would like to add that the workmanship is fine.

The text is dated to *hijra/anno Hegirae* 1239, that is, to 1823-1824 of the Christian era, exactly to the most passionate years of Greek independence fighting, though particularly fierce further to the south of Epirus. My reading of the text, with **Arabic** in **bold** and *Ottoman Turkish* in *italics*, is the following:

Qad - intaqala l-marhûm
jannat-makân min dâr
al-fanâ ilâ dâr al-baqâ
Zaynal Aghâ Ibn Abû Bakr Aghâ

1. 5 *Pîrûnîû<z> rûhîjûn*

al-Fâtiha.

sana 1239

It is reasonable to give also a reading in the Ottoman Turkish way of spelling/transcription, because it is the real context of the stele. It is a question of taste, however, to name the language of the inscription, which is, in my opinion, partly in Arabic and partly in Ottoman Turkish (mostly the line 5). The words, especially the prepositions and the verb form, are lexically, and even more grammatically, pure Arabic, with the exception of lines 4 and 5:

kad intakale el-merhûm
cennetmekân min dâri'
l-fenâ <'> ilâ dâri'l-bekâ <'>
Zeynel Āgâ ibn-i Ebû Bekir Āgâ

1. 5 *Piroño rûhîyçûn*

el-fâtiha

sene 1239

In an English translation, with **Arabic** in **bold** and *Ottoman Turkish* in *italics*, this makes:

The deceased, who is destined to dwell in Paradise, has moved from the house of transience to the house of eternity. The Fatiha for the soul of Zeynel Agha son of Ebu Bekir Piroño. Year 1239 (= AD 1823-1824)

⁴ Kaza = ‘*Gerichtsbezirk*’ in German (an equivalent in English would be ‘court district’): Matuz 1994, 93.

⁵ Further about the kaza of Aydonat in the nineteenth century, see Balta, this volume.

The first three lines of the inscription are purely in Arabic. The word **al-marhûm**, signifying the deceased,⁶ is still used widely in the first lines of Arabic sepulchral inscriptions,⁷ whereas the word **jannat-makân**, *cennetmekân* in Ottoman Turkish, is an Arabic compound noun.

The fourth line introduces a Turkish title, *Aga*, meaning originally ‘leader’, ‘ruler’, ‘governor’⁸ and used as an honorary title of a local official in the Ottoman Empire. In fact, in the monograph of Vasilis Krapsitis on the history of Paramythia we have eight *agas* mentioned, all connected with the feudal family of Pronios in the first decades of the nineteenth century,⁹ but none of them can be identified exactly with the names that can be read on our *stele*.

In the fourth line we also have a sequence of four letters **ZTD<x>** of which the last, as it is broken, cannot be read and the word (or name) cannot be deciphered: **Zayd** would seem too short and **Zaynaddîn** too long, but Zeynel¹⁰ would fit in perfectly. I found it documented not only in Arabic,¹¹ but also in Turkish, in an Ottoman Turkish context in Yanya, only five years later than our stele.¹² **Abû Bakr**, Ebu Bekr in the Ottoman Turkish way of spelling, happens to be identical with the name of the Prophet Muhammad’s father-in-law and successor as the first caliph, and it is quite difficult to explain in this particular context, if we do not want to take it as a metaphor, as if it were a reference by a devoted Muslim to the concept of being an integral part of the global Muslim community, posterity in straight descent from the first caliph. In our case, however, this *Ebu Bekr Aga* (*Pronios*) is the biological father of the deceased *Zeynel Aga Pronios*.

The fifth line, in Ottoman Turkish, is by far the most difficult to read. The reading proposed by Antonis Anastasopoulos,¹³ *Pironioz*¹⁴ *rûhîyçün*, is brilliant and convincing, with the hypothesis of the Ottoman Turkish “*sagir kef*” for the letter *nûn*, even though I would emend the reading of the family name slightly: *Pîrônîô<z> rûhîyçün*. The stonecutter has been quite scrupulous in adding all the diacritical marks, such as the double and triple dots above and below the words. But on the other hand, he has forgotten

⁶ Wehr 1976, 332.

⁷ Cf. e.g. the parallel from Morocco, dating to 20 years ago, published by Allahwerdi and Hallenberg 1992, 73.

⁸ Cf. Matuz 1994. 81, 333.

⁹ Krapsitis 1991, 69-70, who also gives some references concerning the etymology of the name Pronios. The suggestion by Manthos Stateras that it would originate from the toponym *Pornios* is peculiar, apparently based on an *interpretatio Graeca*, and also indirectly refused by Mihalis Zisis. The name is, as documented below, purely Albanian.

¹⁰ I owe Antonis Anastasopoulos many thanks for this suggestion.

¹¹ Salahuddin 1999, 228: *Zayn-ul ‘Âbidîn*, ‘ornament of the worshippers (of Allah)’.

¹² See www.ihvan-forum.com/showthread.php?t=7365, an Yanyan *imam* in 1244 A.H., called *Zeynel Abidin*.

¹³ Anastasopoulos, pers. comm. October 2007.

¹⁴ Anastasopoulos is right in stating that Turks do not pronounce two consecutive consonants in the beginning of a word, so the “i” which is inserted between “P” and “r” could be their way of spelling the family name. I would suggest that someone enumerated the letters of this particular name to the stonecutter and had a document in Greek, so he started with “*pîr*” and “*rhô*” and thus might have created confusion; furthermore, *Prônios* is pronounced with a bit longer *o*, as it has the accent. Liakopoulos, in his letter of April 11 th 2009, gives valid arguments for “the transcription of the family name as *Piroño*, instead of *Pironio* or *Pîrônîô*: in any case the Ottoman form would have been *Piroñyo*, without marking the long vowels, as this is not an Arabic or Persian word; however, since there is clearly no sign of a *ye* between the *kef-i nuni* and the *vav* of the last syllable, I have the feeling that *Piroño* constitutes the best possible transcription.”

the final *zayn* in the Albanian family name, not only being unfamiliar with a transcription of it, but also because of the similar form of the following letter, *râ*’.

The name Pronios is purely Albanian, although in a Greek “costume”. According to Stuart Mann’s *Historical Albanian-English Dictionary*, *pronar/pronjar* means ‘landowner’, and ‘landlord’, *pronë* is ‘property’, especially ‘landed property’, ‘farm’, *pronj-si* is ‘landownership’ and *pronj-os* is a verb with an unknown meaning, but certainly connected with the preceding word.¹⁵ According to a more recent dictionary, *pronar* is ‘proprietor’, ‘owner’, *pronë* ‘property’, *pronësi* ‘ownership’, *pronëso* ‘to gain possession of’ and *pronjëz*, a diminutive, a ‘small piece of property’.¹⁶ Thus, if we wished to translate the family name *Pronios*, it would be something like “Mr. Farm-Possession-Gainer”, or “Mr. Provisioner” perfectly feudal in its context. The Proniates were rich feudal lords in Paramythia already in the Byzantine period.¹⁷ Krapsitis gives a description of the estate of a Proniatis, *Metelis Pronios*, possibly of the younger generation, living in 1834, only 10 years after the burial of our *Zeynel Aga Pronios*.¹⁸ Theoretically this *Metelis Pronios* could thus have been a son of *Zeynel Aga*.

The sixth and seventh lines are put in the same space and they would bring the reader or by-passer to the present, demanding the reciting of the first sura of the **Qur’an**, the **Sura** of the Opening, **Al-Fâtiha**, to the memory of the deceased. The last word and the numbers are for indicating the year of the passing away, nowadays normally in modernized and Arabic numbers which run *dextrorsum*.

When the relatives of Zeynel Aga Pronios, son of Ebu Bekr Aga, back in 1823-1824 erected the sepulchral stele, which has survived until our days, they did it in a predominantly Muslim and Albanian city. Although the kaza of Aydonat as a whole had an absolute majority of Greek population of the Christian religion – in 1872-1873 there were e.g. 8,000 Christians and 3,900 Muslims, with 22 mosques, 212 churches and 8 monasteries in the district – this was not the case for the city of Paramythia. We have no numerical data for the early nineteenth century, but in 1890 the city had 2,006 inhabitants, of whom 1,134 were Muslim. Aravantinos in 1856 describes the city as having a mixed population, with the majority being Albanians (180 Muslim households as compared to 98 Christian ones). Just in the city itself, there were eight mosques.¹⁹ No traces of the Muslim/Albanian past remain today except for our sepulchral stele of Zeynel Aga Pronios, son of Ebu Bekr Aga Pronios.

¹⁵ Mann, 1984, 404.

¹⁶ Newmark 1998, 696. Liakopoulos, in his letter of April 11 th 2009, would like to add, even though admitting that my etymology of Πρόνιος is correct (a well attested Albanian surname, *Pronjo*), that “the name derives from the Greek *pronoia* (πρόνοια: providence, care, foresight) > *pronoiaros* (προνοιάριος: beneficiary); *pronoia* was the Byzantine system of ‘provision’, according to which land property and/or this land’s tax farming was ceded to state dignitaries in return of their military service.”

¹⁷ Krapsitis 1991, 70. According to Balta, this volume, there was a strong Albanian presence starting from the late fourteenth century in the *sancak* of Chamlik (Tsamouria). She adds that the powerful Proniatis family in Paramythia were managers of taxes and became *çiftlik* holders, accruing wealth. In her concluding remarks, she mentions once again the Albanian character of the ruling feudal class.

¹⁸ Krapsitis 1991, 70-71. For other later members of the Pronios’ family in Paramythia, see Biris 1960, 361-363.

¹⁹ For these data see Balta, this volume.

Bibliography

- Allahwerdi and Hallenberg 1992 = H. Allahwerdi and H. Hallenberg, *Islamin porteilla*, Helsinki 1992.
- Balducci 1932 = H. Balducci, *Architettura turca in Rodi*, Milan 1932.
- Biris 1960 = K.I. Biris, *Αρβανίτες, οι Δωριείς του νεώτερου ελληνισμού. Ιστορία των Ελλήνων Αρβανιτών*, Athens 1960.
- Chidioglou 1985 = P. Chidioglou, Οθωμανικές επιγραφές της Κρήτης (πέτρες τάφων, τεμενών, τεκέδων, κρηγών και κτιρίων), in T. Detorakis (ed.), *Πεπραγμένα Ε' Διεθνούς Κρητολογικού Συνεδρίου (Άγιος Νικόλαος, 25 Σεπτεμβρίου - 1 Οκτωβρίου) III*, Heraklion 1985, 247-260.
- Dimitriadis 1983 = V. Dimitriadis, *Τοπογραφία της Θεσσαλονίκης κατά την εποχή της τουρκοκρατίας 1430-1912*, Thessaloniki 1983.
- Kiel 1990 = M. Kiel, *Studies on the Ottoman Architecture of the Balkans*, London 1990.
- Kiel 1996 = M. Kiel, 'Little-known Ottoman Gravestones from some Provincial Centres in the Balkans: Eğriboz/Chalkis, Niğbolu/Nikopol, Rusçuk/Russe', in J.-L. Bacqué-Grammont and A. Tibet (eds.), *Cimetières et traditions funéraires dans le monde islamique I*, Ankara 1996, 319-332.
- Kiel 2006 = M. Kiel, 'The Bektāṣī Tekke of Durbalı Sultān in Central Greece: Some Notes on Its Architecture, Epigraphy and History', in A.Y. Ocak (ed.), *Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society: Sources, Doctrine, Turuq, Architecture, Literature, Iconography, Modernism*, Ankara 2006, 421-441.
- Krapsitis 1991 = V. Krapsitis, *Η Ιστορία της Παραμυθιάς*, 2nd ed., Athens 1991.
- Mann 1948 = Stuart E. Mann, *An Historical Albanian-English Dictionary*, published for the British Council, London, New York and Toronto 1948.
- Matuz 1994 = J. Matuz, *Das Osmanische Reich. Grundlinien seiner Geschichte*, Darmstadt 1994.
- Newmark 1998 = L. Newmark, *Albanian-English Dictionary*, Oxford 1998.
- Petronotis 1999 = A. Petronotis, 'Ottoman Architectural Monuments of Arkadia (Greece)', *Arab Historical Review for Ottoman Studies* 19-20 (1999), 379-418.
- Salahuddin 1999 = A. Salahuddin, *A Dictionary of Muslim Names*, New York 1999.
- Strohmeier 1992 = M. Strohmeier, 'Einige osmanische Inschriften aus dem Ägäis-Raum', in C. Fragner and K. Schwarz (eds.), *Osmanistik, Turkologie, Diplomatie: Festgabe an Josef Matuz*, Berlin 1992, 275-287.
- Wehr 1976 = H. Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, J.M. Cowan (ed.), New York 1976.