

THE MILITARY FUNCTION OF THE PASTORAL COLONIZATION. IN SEARCH OF THE BYZANTINE INSTITUTIONAL PATTERNS IN A VENETIAN ADMINISTRATIVE ENVIRONMENT

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The main research question of this study is the imitation of a Byzantine institutional model by the Venetians, that of the *stratiotes*. The research area concerns the Byzantine Despotate of the Morea and the Venetian possessions in the Greek peninsula. During the 14th–15th century, the lack of cultivators and defense needs forced the Venetians to settle Albanian and Vlach nomads in exposed coastal areas and near fortified locations; the Byzantines have used both legislation and settlement practices while coping corresponding problems. In reference to relevant Byzantine sources, the Venetian documents help us determine the nature of the relationship of the military units camped in rural areas with their pastoral inhabitants and/or newcomers and moreover, whether we could argue for a *Byzantine model* or a *Byzantine background* while forming this relationship. We comment on the typology of choices available to the Venetians, and their attempt to convert the local peasants into a cavalry *militia* through legislation – such as the replacement of a domestic tax or tax exemptions – or integration practices, such as land concession, land reparcelling, concession of hereditary rights and mixed marriages’ license.

Keywords: Migration, Albanian tribes, Vlachs, Byzantines, Despotate of Morea, Venetian possessions, cavalry, stratiote/stradioti, compagnia, angaria, katuns, Ralli (family), Mamona (family), military land, *pronoia*, integration.

In the late 1960s, an interesting concept was presented at the first International Congress of Balkan and South-East European Studies (*Congrès international des études balkaniques et sud-est européennes*) by the Romanian historian Eugen Stanescu. It regarded a study based, in turn, on a project issued by Nicolae Iorga, the founder of the International Congress of Byzantine Studies and the Institute of South-East European Studies (ISSEE), on the common character of South-Eastern European institutions. Stanescu dealt with the background of the *viteji* of Moldavia and the *voinici* of Valachie. According to the author, these military units, which emerged from the Middle Ages but survived the Ottoman conquest, were formed in the same legal environment and by the associated resource needs that gave birth to the military structures of the late Byzantine period. It is indicative that these structures, fruit of specific Byzantine choices in the military and fiscal field, were persistently replicated in the Serbian territories of the 14th–15th-century.¹

¹ Eugen Stanescu, “Les ‘stratiotes’: diffusion et survivance d’une institution byzantine dans le Sud-Est de l’Europe,” in *Actes du premier Congrès international des études balkaniques et sud-est européennes* (Sofia,

Stanescu's study lacks documentation, obviously due to its short length. However, the author proposes an extremely interesting, dynamic interpretive framework, which in any case should be specified.² The imitation of a Byzantine institutional model, that of the *stratiotès* (that is, *soldiers*), on the late Medieval Greek peninsula will be our main research question. Our archival sources are specific: Byzantine and Venetian documents of the 10th–15th-centuries.

Our research area concerns the Byzantine Despotate of the Morea/Mistras (in Greek: *Δεσποτάτον τοῦ Μορέως*) and the Venetian possessions in the Greek peninsula in the 14th and 15th-century. For this region, a rich Venetian archive is offered to the researchers. In reference to relevant Byzantine sources, the Venetian documents can help us determine the nature of the relationship of the military units in rural areas with their pastoral inhabitants and whether we could argue for a *Byzantine model* or a *Byzantine background* regarding this relationship.

The Venetian armed forces in the Greek East were mainly consisting of mercenaries who were recruited from abroad and transported to the Venetian possessions as garrisons or, in time of war, as special, supporting or extraordinary troops. However, due to the high cost and the need for safety, other solutions were quickly sought; solutions that did not have a heavy budgetary impact on the finances of the Venetian state. Almost from the beginning, the measures chosen were targeting to cope with the demographic deforestation of the territory that had been conquered so as to ensure continuous cultivation of the land while strengthening the possessions' defensive adequacy and internal security.

Putting the natives aside, the groups from which the Venetians could benefit in order to enrich their peasant farming population were specific: on the one hand,

26 août–1 septembre 1966), vol. 3, ed. Vladimir Ivanov Georgiev, Sofia, Académie Bulgare des Sciences, 1969, p. 227–234. See also the classical study of Nicolae Iorga, *Le caractère commun des Institutions du Sud-Est de l'Europe*, Paris, Librairie Universitaire J. Gabler, 1929, especially p. 3–6, 10–12, 80–109.

² The *viteji*, guards of the heavy cavalry, belonged to small nobility known as the *curteni* – the court cavalry. On the contrary, the *voinici* infantry provided various military services and were exempted from tax burdens, constituting, from the 15th century onwards, the personal guard of the *voivode* of Wallachia. Cf. Rhoads Murphey, "Woynuk," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 11, ed. Peri Bearman, Thierry Bianquis, C. Edmund Bosworth, E.J. van Donzel, and Wolart Heinrichs, Leiden, Brill, 2002, p. 214. Stanescu indifferently compares these units to the *stratiotai* (soldiers) and to the holders of a form of military *pronoia* (provision). He also seems to point to a similar productive, fiscal and military function of the soldiers-small landowners and the *pronoia*-soldiers of the late Byzantine period. We also believe that they probably came from the same institutional and legislative *milieu*, but this remains to be investigated thoroughly. We should note that the Byzantine archeology of the pre-modern military institutions of the Greek regions under Latin rule was supported in Greece in the 19th-century by Konstantinos Sathas, in his first study, *Ἕλληνες Στρατιῶται ἐν τῇ Δύσει* [= *Greeks Soldiers in the West*], Athens: Fimomythos, 1993, (reprint). Perhaps we should look for the beginning of these aforementioned Romanian military units under the reign of Stephen the Great (Prince of Moldavia, 1457–1504), who equipped all the farmers and villagers in an effort to create a peculiar *militia* in order to get rid of the *boyars* and their centrifugal tendencies. King Stephen also reformed the army by promoting men from the free peasantry *răzeși* (i. e. freeholding landowners, who were holding and cultivating a small landed estate) to infantry (*voinici*) and light cavalry (*hânsari*). Interesting comparisons could be also made between the *stratiotai* of the 15th-century (known as *stradioti*, in the language of the Venetian documents) and the Moldavian light cavalry of the type of the *călărași*, encountered at the same period.

stockbreeders and farmers of the adjacent Byzantine areas who were displeased by the burdens imposed on them by the regional authorities; on the other, refugees coming from the areas gradually occupied by the Ottomans. For the Venetian possessions in the Peloponnese, this first category could be subdivided in two: a very small number of inhabitants of Morea and an equally small number of migrants settled in the Despotate during the last decades of the 14th-century and mainly after 1395.³ The second category, that is the one of the refugees coming from the areas occupied by the Ottomans, was the most populated – and promising, as far as the expectations and trust were concerned. It gradually affected all Venetian possessions. However, despite all of these distinct categories mentioned right above, in reality there were no boundaries as to the origin and identities of the newcomers; they might very well have moved directly from the north of the Greek peninsula and occupied several territories by force (such as the regional units of Thessaly and Aetolia-Acarnania) or found shelter after various agreements with the Catalan, Florentine or Byzantine regional administration. We will discuss this issue in more detail later in this paper.⁴ However, it should be noted that their previous regime affected their integration into the Venetian possessions. Either way, these individuals namely originated from pastoral and nomadic micro-societies that had, in the period prior to the Venetian presence, followed a collective migration wave heading from northwest to the southeastern Greek peninsula; this meant previous familiarity with the Byzantine administrative structure and affiliation with the Byzantine military organisation.

In an attempt to document the main typology of choices available to the Venetians, let us look at some examples.

At the beginning of the 14th-century, the Ottoman expansion into the Greek mainland contributed to the entry of a number of refugees in the Venetian possessions Modon (Methoni) and Coron (Koroni). This number must not have been demographically significant yet. However, on the second half of the 14th-century the sensitive demographics of the region quickly deteriorated due to the joint Ottoman and Catalan invasions (1318–1329) and the outbreak of the plague (1347–1348).⁵

³ For the events at the region of the Despotate of Morea under Theodore I Palaiologos (1383–1407) see later in this study, pages XXX.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ David Jacoby, “Catalans, Turcs et Vénitiens en Romanie (1305–1332): un nouveau témoignage de Marino Sanudo Torsello,” *Studi Medievali*, 3^a serie, 15, 1974, p. 238–259; David Jacoby, “The demographic evolution of Euboea under Latin Rule, 1205–1470,” in *The Greek Islands and the Sea (Proceedings of the First International Colloquium at the Hellenic Institute, Royal Holloway University of London, 21–22 September 2001)*, ed. Julian Chrysostomides – Charalambos Dendrinos – Jonathan Harris, Camberley, Porphyrogenitus, 2004, p. 145. As early as January 1385, the Venetian Senate had discussed the undergoing depopulation of the Karystos region, which was of particular concern for the possession’s internal economy; Giuseppe Valentini, ed., *Acta Albaniae Veneta saeculorum XIV et XV*, vol. 8, München, R. Trofenik, 1970, p. 170–171, n° 2100, and 365–368, n° 2167. For the Black Death, cf. Freddy Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations du Sénat de Venise concernant la Roumanie*, vol. 1, Paris-The Hague, Editions de l’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1958, n° 209.

Faced with this situation, the Venetians primarily tried to ensure the demographic stability to the greatest extent practicable. Then, with regard to the rural population, they adopted measures that encouraged the settlement of migrant peasants.

The Venetian settlement policy was inaugurated in Negroponte (Euboea) by the head of the officials to the island, the *bailo* Pietro Gradenigo (1362–1364). It mainly concerned a number of *villani* from the Duchy of Athens, who had left their homeland due to the civil war and the predatory activity of the Ottoman mercenaries. At the end of the civil war in 1365, the Catalans demanded the return of these people but the Venetian Senate refused of being aware of Gradenigo's actions in an attempt to buy some time. New waves of refugees were welcomed by the Negroponte administration in 1379, due to the raids of the Navarrese Company in the region of Attica.⁶ A decade later (1385), it was Venice's turn to accuse Nerio I Acciaiuoli, ruler of the Duchy of Athens, of kidnapping its peasants.⁷ Finally, in 1405, an agreement was signed and each one was forced to return the peasants who had taken from the other – an agreement most likely made in vain.⁸

However, the choices of Venice in Negroponte did not prove to be very effective, at least initially. This was mainly due to the precarious tax exemptions promised to the peasant settlers.⁹ Thus, the local authorities experimented with alternative measures that were combining land concession, land reparcelling and the development of auxiliary military forces. Of particular interest is the attempt to convert the local peasants of the island into a cavalry *militia* through the replacement of a tax: the Senate declared the possibility to replace the *capinico* – the Byzantine domestic tax (*καπνικόν*) – from the obligation of every head of family to bear arms and participate in the possessions' defensive forces. The measure, however, did not work; many peasants left the island en masse to avoid recruitment.¹⁰

From 1390 onwards, when Negroponte was completely acquired, Venice launched a procedure to stimulate the region demographically. The island had

⁶ Jacoby, "The demographic evolution of Euboea," p. 172.

⁷ *Ibidem*. For a similar case some years after, Venice, Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter: ASVe), *Senato*, Deliberazioni Misti, reg. 44, fol. 22v [30 January 1397 more Veneto (hereafter: m.v.)].

⁸ David Jacoby, *La féodalité en Grèce médiévale. Les "Assises de Romanie": sources, application et diffusion*, Paris – La Haye: De Gruyter Mouton, 1971, p. 210.

⁹ The Treaty of Turin (1381) provided for the evacuation of the island of Tenedos and the installation of 4,000 people in different places of Negroponte. We do not know if all of them eventually settled; however, a number of settlers must have eventually been transferred. Despite the fiscal exemptions, a large number of settlers left for the Duchy of Athens and other places; cf. Spiridon Theotokis, *Θεσπίσματα της Βενετικής Γερουσίας, Μνημεία της Ελληνικής Ιστορίας*, vol. 2, Athens: Publications Office of the Academy of Athens, 1937, p. 289–293 n° 842 and 284 n° 846; Freddy Thiriet, "À propos de personnes «déplacées» au XIV^e siècle. Le transfert des Ténédiotes en Romanie vénitienne," *Travaux et Mémoires* 8, 1981, p. 521–529.

¹⁰ *Μνημεία Ελληνικής ιστορίας. Documents inédits relatifs à l'histoire de la Grèce au Moyen Âge publiés sous les auspices de la Chambre des députés de Grèce par C.N. Sathas*, ed. Konstantinos Sathas, vol. 2, Paris, Maisonneuve et Cie, 1881, p. 63, 122 and vol. 3, Paris, Maisonneuve et Cie, 1882, p. 310. Eventually the *capinico* was relaunched as a tax sometime within the year 1404. Maintaining this tax is evidence of the consistent policy of succession followed by Venice in its eastern possessions; Jacoby, "The demographic evolution of Euboea," 137.

already suffered many losses; as a result, a large part of it remained uncultivated.¹¹ The authorities maintained the Byzantine fiscal regime of the Komnenian period because they were interested in keeping a steady flow of agricultural and livestock products for domestic consumption but also for export, and thus to secure cash revenues from trade and other taxes. This time, however, the settlement policy, which proceeded in parallel with the military preparation, had a dual purpose: on the one hand the supply of cultivators; on the other hand, with pending warriors, who would not burden the public treasury demanding salaries and supplies.¹²

The Albanian and Vlach transhumant groups that had previously flooded the Thessalian plain were a solution for the Venetians of Negroponte. From the beginning of the 13th century, the flow of immigrants from the northwestern area of the Balkan Peninsula was such, that, after the final flood of the 14th-century, the region was already known as *Megálē Vlachía* (in Greek: *Μεγάλη Βλαχία*).¹³ Nevertheless, the composition of these groups who moved as migrants, mercenaries and raiders, was mixed. We have to mention something important that was pointed out by Nicholas G. L. Hammond and several other scholars: although the majority of the newcomers were speakers of the Albanian, there was a significant number of Vlachs among them.¹⁴ We cannot precise their numbers but we can surely mark down the

¹¹ William Miller, *Η Φραγκοκρατία στην Ελλάδα 1204–1566*, trans. Angelos Fouriotis, Athens, Greek Letters, 1990, p. 429; Jacoby, *La féodalité en Grèce médiévale*, p. 185–211; Johannes Koder, *Negroponte. Untersuchungen sur Topographie und Siedlungsgeschichte der Insel Euböia während der Zeit der Venezianerherrschaft*, Wien, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1973, p. 56–62. Owning only one district in the urban center of Negroponte in 1211, Venice gradually expanded its authority against the Frankish *terzieri* and in 1390 resulted in having total sovereignty over the whole island; Jacoby, “The demographic evolution of Euboea,” p. 132–133.

¹² On June 10, 1398, the Venetian Senate decides to strengthen the defense against Ottoman attacks; ASVe, *Senato*, Deliberazioni Misti, reg. 44, fol. 43v; Likewise, it decided to send four *banderie peditum*, which included *ballistrarij* amounting to 100 mercenaries, strictly *forestieri*; ASVe, *Senato*, Deliberazioni Misti, reg. 44, fol. 97v (11 April 1399).

¹³ The name derives from the well known transhumant ethnic group settled in several mountainous areas of the Balkans, the Aromanians or Vlachs. It is believed to be descended from ancient latin-speaking populations mixed with locals and people from the barbarian invasions of Late Antiquity. As far as the Byzantine sources are concerned, the Vlachs of Thessaly are first mentioned in the *Strategikon of Kekaumenos* and Anna Komnene’s *Alexiad*, both sources of the 11th-century. Kekaumenos records a failed Vlach uprising of 1066. Anna Komnene reports a Vlach settlement near Mount Ossa in 1083, in connection with the campaign of her father, Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081–1118), against the Normans. A chrysobull of Emperor Alexios III Angelos (r. 1195–1203) in 1198 includes the *Provincia Valachie* among the districts of Thessaly. The same is repeated in the list of provinces granted to Boniface of Montferrat in the *Partitio Terrarum Romaniae* (1204). The late 12th-century Byzantine province of Vlachia “was situated in the Mount Othrys region, occupying the area lying between the towns of Lamia, Domokos and Halmyros” according to George C. Soulis, “Βλαχία-Μεγάλη Βλαχία – Ἡ ἐν Ἑλλάδι Βλαχία. Συμβολή εἰς τὴν ἱστορικὴν γεωγραφίαν τῆς μεσαιωνικῆς Θεσσαλίας,” in *Γέρας Ἀντωνίου Κεραμοπούλου*, Athens, Society of Macedonian Studies – Editions Myrtide, 1953, p. 272; Alkmini Stavridou-Zafraka, “Μεγάλη και Μικρή Βλαχία,” *Τρικαλινά* 20, 2000, p. 171–179; George C. Soulis, “Thessalian Vlachia,” *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta* 8/1, 1963, p. 271–273; Brendan Osward, “The Ethnic Composition of Medieval Epirus,” in *Imagining Frontiers, Contesting Identities*, ed. Steven G. Ellis, Lud’a Klusáková, Pisa, Pisa University Press, 2007, p. 125–154.

¹⁴ Nicholas G.L. Hammond, *Migrations and invasions in Greece and adjacent areas*, New Jersey, Noyes Press, 1976, p. 57–58.

Byzantine response to them in terms of political measures taken and the terminology the Byzantines used to describe them. The Byzantine rulers chose either to integrate them (the Emperor Andronikos III gave land to 20,000 Vlachs in Thessaly) or to face them in the battlefield (the *Great Domestic* John Cantacuzenus carried out a campaign from Durrachium to Aetolia against the Albanian speaking tribes in 1335 and 1341). Let it be noted though that, as far as the terminology is concerned, for the Byzantine or Latin writers all of these tribes were “*Albanians*” because they came from the well known district of “*Arbanon*”.¹⁵

These tribes, armed and still moving in the regional unit of Thessaly, was a solution, for the repopulation of Negroponte. However, the Venetian authorities of the island chose to make use of it rather reluctantly, since the conduct of these semi-nomadic people had convinced them that the possession’s defense should not be entrusted to unreliable individuals. For it was well known that many people from these transhumant groups had previously been recruited by the Catalans, with whom they carried out raids in the area of Boeotia, directly opposite the island of Negroponte.¹⁶

Yet, the lack of cultivators and the need for soldiers for defense eventually forced the Venetians not only to allow the admission of these individuals but furthermore, to seek the colonisation of Negroponte with Albanian and Vlach nomads. The desolation of entire villages after a series of measures taken for the safety of the rural population contributed to the need to overcome the reservations towards the new settlers.¹⁷ In a state of high alert and with the rural élite building

¹⁵ The *Arvanítes/Arbëror* (in Greek, *Αρβανίτες* and *Αλβανίται*; in Venetian sources, *Albanesi*) was a semi-nomadic group with a strong belligerent character, who moved constantly, basing their survival in rudimentary animal husbandry. They were organized in clans (in Albanian, by *farë*, which means by *seed*) and factions – archaic forms of social organization based on family origin and affinity (similar to *spóros*, offspring). The descent of these tribes in the Greek mainland begins in the 14th century, having as initial cradle the *Arvanon* region within the borders of the Despotate of Epirus. Their initial settlement was made around 1325, in Thessaly. Those who had settled in 1380–81 in the valley of Sperchios, sought refuge in the following years to the Duchy of Athens. After the permission of Peter IV of Aragon, they strengthened the defense of the Duchy against multiple foreign raids. After the occupation of Thessaly by the Ottomans (1393), a large number of these Orthodox Christians fled, through the Isthmus (Korinthos), to the Peloponnese (1404–05), where they had the permission of the Despot Theodoros I Paleologos to enter to the Byzantine region of the Morea. There they were gradually engaged in agriculture, thus acquiring a permanent establishment; Era L. Vranousi, “Οι όροι Αλβανοί και Αρβανίται και η πρώτη μνεία του ομονόμου λαού της Βαλκανικής εις τα πηγές του ΙΑ΄ αιώνας,” *Βυζαντινά Σύμμεικτα* 2, 1970, p. 207–254; Mirco Barjaktarović, “O balkanskim plemenima,” *Gjurmime albanologjike*, 6, 1966, p. 99–112; Alain Ducellier, *La façade maritime de l’ Albanie au Moyen Âge: Durazzo et Valona du XI^e au XV^e siècle*, Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1981. See also below in the text, note 34.

¹⁶ Antonio Rubió y Lluch, *Diplomatari de l’Orient Català (1301–1409)*, Barcelona, Institut d’ Estudis Catalans, 1947, p. 548.

¹⁷ Similarly, Venice had already restricted respectively prohibited, in 1413, the cultivation of grain in the *terraferma*, opposite the bridge of Euripus, fearing that their subjects would be abducted by the Ottomans or by men of the Duchy of Athens – there have been several cases of this type of violence – or even slaughtered by Catalan and Albanian raiders who were ravaging the area on regular basis. The decision of 1413 was revoked in 1421 due to the increased needs of grain production. It was relaunched in 1433. Newer efforts by the local authorities to revoke the order were rejected in 1434 and 1439 by the Senate. However, the settlers who came to live on the borders of Negroponte were given permission to cultivate and to graze their animals on that land free of charge even in the nearby hinterland. This exception is a clear illustration of the

defensive towers, the *reggimento* forced, in 1402, all rural residents to relocate from the exposed coastal areas further inland, within fortified locations or near them. On April 20 of the same year (1402) the Senate approved the public call of settlement in Negroponte:

*“[...] quod quilibet Albanensis, vel alia gens, qui non sint nostri subditi, qui cum equis volent venire et venient ad habitandum, a die captionis presentis partis, usque duos annos proxime aequantes, in insulam Nigropontis, recipientur et sint ac erunt perpetuo liberi et andoluti ab omni angaria reali et personali, et sibi donabuntur de terrenis nostri comunis absoluti ab omni angaria reali et personali, et sibi donabuntur de terrenis nostri comunis incultis, que tamen sint apta ad laborandum, cum conditione tamen, quod dicti tales Albanenses et alia gens equestres, teneantur tenere tot equos, quot homines capita familie erunt numero, nec possint recedere de dicta insula sine licentia dicti regiminis, sed teneantur et debeant, omni vice qua erit nevesse, equitare et ire ad defensionem insule, et offensionem quorumcumque volentium dannificare insulam nostram predictam, et post mortem eorum, dicta terrena sint et esse debeant suorum heredum, qui habitarent super dicta insula, cum obligatione, tenendi angariam predictam. Si vero non haberet heredes, dicta terrena revertantur in nostrum comune. Verum dictum regimen Nigropontis, in facto dandi de dictis territoriis nostri comunis dictis Albanensibus, et aliis equestribus venientibus habitatum in insula predicta, habeat libertatem dandi predictis illam quantitatem de terrenis nostri comunis, per modum predictum qui ipsi regimini videbitur, secundum qualitatem personarum, et quantitatem ac conditionem illius qui venerit habitatum in insula predicta”.*¹⁸

Through this proclamation, Venice offered land for settlement, the specification of which would be carried out by the local authorities. This land was offered free from fiscal burdens but also from personal chores (*angaria*) for the settlers, who, in turn, were allowed to gradually exercise some kind of rights in rem (e. g. to rent their fields or fields of others). They could also transfer these rights to their descendants, under certain conditions. The main condition was to ensure that they would provide continuous military service and all related obligations: to maintain their usual small arms or light weapons and war horses; to be self trained and ready for war; to obey orders without hesitation; to demonstrate their faith in the regime. Observing the proclamation in particular, the following aspects should be noted:

a) In effect, the settlement was not intended for single families but for large groups of people. In other words, Venetians aimed at large numbers of cultivators whom they expected to contribute, at the same time and in turn, a few hundred

disrepute towards the newcomers let alone the arousing anti-settlement sentiment of the Venetian authorities; *Μνημεία*, vol. 3, p. 6–7, 230–231, 417–418, 420, 455–456.

¹⁸ *Μνημεία*, vol. 2, p. 79–80.

soldiers. However, the granting of land would be carried out on the basis of each family; certain persons from these groups were obliged to enlist for military service while the rest of the family members were left to their agricultural and pastoral occupations. While the whole family would enjoy the exemptions, some of its members were to participate in groups of cavalrymen (*compagnie*) under the *reggimento*'s orders.

b) The invitation was addressed mainly to the Albanian elements existing in the countryside of Boeotia and southern Thessaly, which is clearly stated, but also to other groups of horse riders: *gens equestris*. Of course, the Vlachs met the description and the requirements, as well as other irregular bands, remnants of the previous period looting the region. These cavalrymen employed irregular military tactics in low-scale combat, using and focusing on small, stealthy, hit-and-run engagements. These practices were giving them mobility and also flexibility, in case they found it more suitable to dismount their horses and fight in hand-to-hand combat. We have to note though, that, except for the Catalans, all the aforementioned groups of irregular cavalries were just performing their customary role as parts of a clan. The *compagnia* of cavalrymen, the *gens equestris* of the Venetians, were in fact the vanguard of the clan, its personal security force. The actual engagement of these people was carrying out pastoral activities together with the rest of the clan, nurturing bigger or smaller transhumant herds that were grazing in high areas in summer and low areas in winter.

c) The most important element of the proclamation is the definition of military service as *angaria*. The heads of each family had to keep as many war horses as the number of male members who could bear arms in order to defend Negroponte wherever and whenever needed. The definition of recruitment as *angaria* reveals that the military service was occasional; the primary role of these individuals was pastoral and secondarily also agricultural. In defining the military obligation, the pastoral family was regarded as a unit that is subjected to a series of obligations covering the declaration of loyalty to the regime. Besides, we need to remember the constant reluctance of Venice to avoid undue charge on the public treasury. Therefore, we cannot define these irregular cavalry units as mercenaries who became involved in armed conflicts for monetary motives or for private gain.

d) The settlers were not granted ownership of the land. The land and pastures remained a state property and could be withdrawn from the settlers if the latter did not fulfill their obligations. This provision worked as a stimulus for the large families of the shepherds and pastoralists, who undertook the pattern of the shepherd-warrior for life and transformed it to a hereditary status.

The public proclamation provided a two years' period in order to be implemented. An unknown number of shepherds from Livadià and Thessaly responded and settled in rural areas of Negroponte. However, once more the figures were proven against the Venetians; the number of human losses from the Ottoman attacks exceeded the number of new settlers. Indeed, the population of the

coastal areas, in which mainly the newcomers settled, was deforested as early as the first decades of the 15th century.¹⁹

From a confidential letter addressed to the *reggimento* of Negroponte we learn that in 1425 the local government, with the consent of the local council, welcomed 300 families of shepherds from Livadià (i.e., around 1,500 people) who agreed to establish themselves and legally reside in the island.²⁰ They came from territories within the Florentine Duchy of Athens. The newcomers took an oath of loyalty before the *reggimento* and promised that they would not harm the inhabitants while engaged in agricultural and livestock farming activities. Nevertheless, they were excluded from living in fortified areas, especially in the area of southern Karistia. However, there were several members of the possession's Council who protested; they sent a letter to Venice stating that, given that the original agreement did not provide military service from these groups, they could not expect any benefit from them; these people were practically useless.²¹ Thus, Venice finally decided to return them to Antonio I Acciaiuoli.²²

The largest number of shepherd settlers entered Negroponte shortly before its own fall. We assume this from the protests of the Ottomans in 1462 that demanded their return. The Venetians had replied that the newcomers were neither invited nor forced to settle nor to offer their services and that, in any case, they were free to leave whenever they wanted. This answer reveals the inability of the *reggimento* to oppose the Turks, a weakness that was to be dramatically confirmed within less than a decade.²³

Indeed, the information is confirmed by the so-called *Capizzi Code*. In this text, after the list of mercenaries constituting the multinational guard (composed of Slavs, Spaniards, Franks, Germans, Scots and Hungarians), only twenty-five cavalrymen were listed as “*stradioti a cavallo delle varde delle mure della terra*” and, among other soldiers, called “*provisionati de comun, la bandiera de' soldati*”

¹⁹ It was estimated in 1430 that the Ottomans had abducted more than 5,000 inhabitants of Negroponte within the past eight years; *Mνημεία*, vol. 3, p. 388 §35–38. By 1416, 1,500 inhabitants from *Lipso* (Edipsòs), *Licháda*, *Iálutra* (Gialtra) and other settlements in the northwest of the island were abducted by the Turks. The remaining residents were granted a five-year tax exemption while a new call was made for the settlement of shepherds and farmers, to whom the tax exemption would be applicable for ten years; cf. *Mνημεία*, vol. 3, p. 125 § 20–34, 127 § 17–42. At the same time, Venice demanded the return of its subjects being held captive. However, only 200 of them were actually returned in 1415 by the Turks. It is indicative that, due to the desolation of Karistos in 1421 (*propter depopulationem ipsius loci*), Venice was forced to reduce almost all taxes; Nicolae Iorga, *Notes et extraits pour servir à l'histoire des Croisades au XI^e siècle*, vol. 1, Bucharest, Edition de l'Académie Roumaine, 1915, p. 308 (March 18, 1421). In 1426, the Turks kidnapped about 700 settlers and inhabitants from Oreos. A delegation from Negroponte reported significant labor shortage along with the damages caused; *Mνημεία*, vol. 3, p. 306–307.

²⁰ *Mνημεία*, vol. 3, p. 287–88 (May 22, 1425).

²¹ *Mνημεία*, vol. 3, p. 287–88 (January 21, 1426).

²² *Ibidem*, p. 319–20; Kenneth Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, 1204–1571: The fifteenth century*, vol. 2, Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1997, p. 50–52.

²³ *Acta Albaniae Veneta saeculorum XIV et XV*, ed. Giuseppe Valentini, vol. 24, München, R. Trofenik, 1974, p. 462–463.

del contestabile”, a group of thirty Albanians was enregistered as “*condotta di trenta albanesi*”.²⁴

In the case of Negroponte, the selective integration of shepherd settlers in the possession and their recruitment in local defense forces was done occasionally and with remarkable hesitation. Besides, it was premature. These individuals, who entered the service until the first decades of the 15th century, coming from a shepherd-clan background, had no former experience in a coordinate military administration or in any administration whatsoever, like the Byzantine or the Venetian one. Their semi-nomadic and often migratory way of life and the predatory customs they followed in order to survive in Thessaly, usually prevailed over the discipline required to settle in a place ruled by others. It was difficult for them to come to terms with the rapid change in their way of life, from nomads to permanent farmers. In addition, due to the great restraint being exercised by both, inhabitants and the Venetian administration, the measures taken to recruit and integrate these individuals proved sluggish enough and therefore not really effective. The small population of settlers and, consequently, the *compagnie di stradioti*, that is the light cavalymen who came from them (in Greek: *στρατιώτης/στρατιώται*), were decimated before the island was hit by the Ottomans.

The settlement policy inaugurated by Venice in Negroponte should not be evaluated separately from a broader plan to address the productive and defensive needs of all of its eastern possessions. During the last decade of the 14th-century, this policy was applied uniformly to all Venetian possessions and its results contributed to the extended militarization of the *Stato da Mar*. However, the ways in which the shepherd settlers functioned socially and militarily was not a result of the *Serenissima*'s innovation policy. On the contrary, it was merely replicating existing arrangements made by the Despotate of Morea, in order to deal with similar risks and to address the combination of fiscal and defense objectives. We are able to confirm it because the Venetian sources speak about it clearly.

On June 3, 1397, the Ottomans invaded Argos (Peloponnese). Millions of animals were slaughtered and gigantic fires burned almost everything. They invaders exterminated about 14,000 people before withdrawing. The Venetians, rulers of the region at that time, hurried to rebuild and reinforce the small community by reorganizing its administrative base and colonizing the area that served as a shield

²⁴ Constantinople, Topkapi Saray Müsesi Kütüphanesi, Mss Ven. Cod. G-i-19a; in particular, Carmelo Capizzi, “Un documento inedito sulla guarnigione veneziana di Negroponte negli anni 1460–1462,” *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici* n.s., 12–13, 1975–1976, p. 35–108; Carmelo Capizzi, “Mercenari slavi, albanesi e greci nella guarnigione veneta di Negroponte (1460–1462),” *Atti e memorie della Società Dalmata di Storia Patria*, ser. 3, 3, 2001, p. 47–71; Marino Zorzi, “Le truppe veneziane a Negroponte nel 1460–1462 in un codice trascritto e commentato dal compianto C. Capizzi,” in *Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου Βενετία- Εύβοια, Από τον Έγριπο στο Νεγροπόντε (Χαλκίδα, 12–14 Νοεμβρίου 2004)*, ed. Chryssa A. Maltezos, Christina E. Papakosta, Venice-Athens, Hellenic Institute of Byzantine and Post-byzantine Studies – Society of Euboic Studies, 2006, p. 41–43.

for the important city of Napoli di Romania (Nafplio).²⁵ Therefore, they issued a public announcement for anyone who wanted to settle in the area with his family. According to the relevant provisions, each family would receive from the *reggimento* forty acres of public land to cultivate, which was declared free from any burden, fiscal charge or levy. There would also be an additional provision of four acres of vineyards with cottages and farmhouses, stables and warehouses, which nevertheless had been more or less damaged by the ottoman invasion.²⁶

Eighteen families responded to the invitation of the Venetian authorities for a start and then another seven. About fifty years after the Ottoman invasion, in 1451, the number of shepherd and farmer families settled on the outskirts of Argos had reached 115. They all came from areas of the Despotate of Morea. Venice had sent to the local authorities a set of *capitula*, statutory decrees on how the settlers should be dealt with and any problem that might arise concerning their status in the possession.²⁷

One of these problems was the presence of bands of horsemen, who were protecting the nomadic groups moving in the region between the borders of the Venetian and Byzantine territories. Without any control, turning more and more insolent and radical, these bands destroyed the crops and harassed the peasant farmer population. The *reggimento* had suggested to the Senate that it was better to approach them and try to recruit a small number of them. This way, they hoped to lure the whole clan in order to see if it is possible to negotiate some sort of arrangement with them. The first recruited *stradioti* of these bands, along with their families, settled to uncultivated lands of rural areas, would be easily turned against the remaining *outlaws*. According to the Venetian officials, the policy of combining agro-pastoral and military functions which they agreed upon with foreigners in order to integrate them, was an efficient Greek practice (*usanza greca*). This way, the *allochtoons* could be controlled to the benefit of the regime, as the example of the neighboring Despotate has shown:

“[...] Ancora per i Albanesi che fa danno in lo luogo e vien fato brighe e ferixion e micidy a le fiade; la exelsa signoria no ha in quello luogo homeni d’arme chomo se dixè le *s t r a t r i o t i* [sic!] a l’ *u s a n z a g r i e g a*, perché i sforza a la via e vasta i so menadi e vasta e roba i zardini, i signori ha previsto de ‘ste malfate cosse e da cerca 15 homeni terreni vegri che non se

²⁵ Katerina B. Korre, “H Napoli di Romania των stradioti (15ος – 16ος αι.): πώς ο αγώνας για την κατοχή του χώρου μετασχηματίζεται σε πατρίδα” [Napoli di Romani degli stradioti (15th–16th-century): How the struggle for land possession is transformed into fatherland], *Nafpliaka Analekta* 9, 2017, p. 104–106.

²⁶ *Acta Albaniae Veneta saeculorum XIV et XV*, vol. 21/pars 3 (1451–1452), ed. Giuseppe Valentini, Munchen: R. Trofenik, 1975, p. 73–75, n° 5720, (July 26, 1451: *Capitula Argos*).

²⁷ *Ibidem*, n° 5720, (July 26, 1451: *Capitula Argos, Ad primum*); Aggeliki Tzavara, “H οργάνωση της διοίκησης και της άμυνας του Άργους κατά την πρώτη βενετοκρατία”, in *Proceedings of the International Scientific Meeting Venice-Argos. Signs of the Venetian presence in Argos and its region (Argos, October 11, 2008)*, ed. Chryssa Maltezou and Angeliki Panopoulou, Athens-Venice: Hellenic Institute of Byzantine and Post-byzantine Studies – Municipality of Argos, 2010, p. 59.

semenava e semenando ha de utilità ducati 2 d'oro; e sia l'omo el so cavallo e le arme secondo lo luogo a tuti vostri comandi e de honor de la exelsa vostra signoria e ben e utele de la comunità de quela terra, con pocha spexa, che i Albanesi a paura per qui s t r a t i o t i; e per questo se recomanda a la exelsa vostra signoria che non i sia tolti quei tereni che i serve ben e lialmante.

*Respondeatur: Volumus quod de terrenis stratiotorum qui servire tenentur cum equis suis nihil innovetur, cum illa terrena eis designata fuerint loco stipendii, ut servire teneantur cum equis et armis suis ad mandata rectoris nostri”.*²⁸

The local authorities were authorized to invite a number of the wandering nomads and their bands to settle in the countryside as cultivators and stockbreeders. In exchange for the granted lands, a small number of the experienced cavalry of their clans would be included in the defense structures of the possession as a certain type of *homeni d'arme*, as *stradioti*. In other words, the cavalry was called to serve with their horses and personal weaponry, patrolling the countryside or mobilizing with other mercenaries when the need arose. The Venetian authorities praised the measures that would offer armed men at zero cost.²⁹ This policy has since been followed in all Venetian possessions in the Greek east.

Lepanto (Nafaktos, 1407–1499) was also one of the areas affected by the ottoman expansion, raids, outbreaks of plague and friendly or hostile takeovers. The Venetian possession was subjected to constant restructuring, since it was a territory with severe and permanent natural and demographic limitations. The Venetian authorities often tried to stimulate the demographic indicators by permitting shepherd settlements from 1416 and reducing the taxes regarding cultivation. The measures begun to pay off, since, thirty years later (1451), the region is referred to as “*populosus et utilis*” in the sources, while there is also evidence of an economic recovery.³⁰ The defense strategy was based on the presence of a small number of Italian infantry (*fanti*) and light cavalry of the type of *stradioti*.³¹ The latter came entirely from the recruitment of semi-nomadic bands, which the authorities were, by now, very well acquainted with. Administrative head of the units was the *rettore* (rector) of Lepanto.³²

The origin of the *stradioti* of Lepanto was mostly Vlach and only secondary Arbëror.³³ The gradual arrival of the Vlach tribes in the 13th century marked a profound change in the agricultural economy of the whole region and the start of

²⁸ *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, vol. 21/pars 3 (1451–1452), p. 73–75, n° 5720, (July 26, 1451: *Capitula Argos, Ad quartum*); Tzavara, “Η οργάνωση της διοίκησης και της άμυνας του Άργους κατά την πρώτη βενετοκρατία”, p. 60–61.

²⁹ *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, vol. 21/pars 3, n° 5720.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 117 [5771] (November 26, 1451) and vol. 8, 30–1 [2019] (May 14, 1416).

³¹ *Μνημεία*, vol. 6, Paris, Maisonneuve et Cie, 1884, p. 12–4 (June 25, 1465).

³² *Ibidem*, vol. 2, 180 (July 15, 1407); *Acta Albaniae Veneta saeculorum XIV et XV*, vol. 5, Munich, Rudolf Trofenik, 1970, p. 37–8 [1262] (July 15, 1407).

³³ See the relevant note 15.

sheep, goat and cattle breeding in the area. Many of them having being recruited in the service of Greek and Serbian rulers were already formed warriors by the time the Venetians undertook the Lepanto region.³⁴ For example, in the region of Ágrafa, there were pastoral leaders such as *comes Glávas* (Count Glava) and his brother Comíni (Kominis), who were claiming to be “*lords of Agrafa*”, the mountainous region “*apud Neopactum*”. Along with their clans, these leaders fled to Lepanto in order to be protected before the Ottomans, offering their military services in return.³⁵

According to the archival evidence, the military head of the *stradioti* of Lepanto was named *voevoda*, also referred to as *voivode* and *vaiuoda*. As it is easily understood, the title of the military office is a linguistic remnant of Slavic origin related to a senior position in the army.³⁶ In medieval Serbia, it was indicating a high-ranking commander of the bands of a clan and, consequently, the commander of a militarized territory – a kind of camp.³⁷ This title is also evidenced to the names of many *stradioti* of Lepanto: Vaiuoda Manesi and his brother Elia, who found refuge in Napoli di Romania after the fall of Lepanto into the hands of the Ottomans (1499);³⁸ as well as Machmut Vaiuoda, who stayed in Lepanto having initially embraced Islam but later escaped and served in a “*compagnia di*

³⁴ In fact, the flood of the so-called “Albanian movement” in Epirus have taken place in parallel with the ongoing invasion of the Serbs of Stephen Dušan (1341–1342) and the occupation of Arta while the Vlach movements preceded or continued their southward movement. In 1359, while Aetolia and Acarnania – that is the region around Lepanto – was desolated, Albanian clans invaded under the orders of Carlo Thopia and assisted by the forces of the Serbian Tsar Stephen Dušan (1331–1355). As expected, they caused extensive destruction. Nikiforos II ruler of Epirus (1338–1340 and 1356–1359) was defeated in the battle of the river Achelóos leaving the region without protection, resulting in a period of anarchy. See also note 15 and the relevant passage in the text.

³⁵ *Μνημεία*, vol. 6, 12 (June 25, 1465).

³⁶ The term *voevoda* is complex: from the word *voi* meaning *local army* and the word *voditi*, which means to *lead*; Franz Ritter von Miklosich, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der Slavischen Sprachen* (Wien: W. Braumüller, 1886), 393. Vojevoda in older Slavic was relating to the *bellidux*, the leader of the army and, consequently, the head of the police troopers; Konstantin Josef Jireček and Vatroslav Jagić, *Staat und Gesellschaft im mittelalterlichen Serbien*, vol. 4, Wien, Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1919, p. 25–26; Ioannis Lambrides, *Μαλακασιακά*, Ioannina, Society for Epirotic Studies, 1993, p. 8.

³⁷ During the Ottoman period, *voivode* was a title held by a provincial official whose responsibilities were related to the administration, security and collection of taxes in an area under specific treatment. According to the *Chronicle of the Voutsà Monastery*, the Slavic title of *voevoda*, which prevailed in some areas of Epirus and Thessaly, indicated the leader of a clan or a Vlach community; Fikret Adanir, “Woywoda,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 11, ed. Peri Bearman, Thierry Bianquis, C. Edmund Bosworth, E.J. van Donzel, and Wolart Heinrichs, Leiden, Brill, 2002, p. 215. In the medieval Romanian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, *voivode* was part of the official title of each prince or ruler, a title that referred to the right of commanding the army. After the 17th-century in Ottoman-occupied Greece, the so-called *subasi* (commander of a region called *soubasiliki*) coincided with the title of *voyvoda* (the region was then called *voivontikò* or *voivondaliki*). The two titles were used alternatively for the administration of the regions of Epirania and the Peloponnese; Jireček, *Staat und Gesellschaft*, 26.

³⁸ Elia died young while Vaiuoda Manesi fought in the Italian peninsula as *capo di* 400 mercenary *stradioti*; ASVe, *Senato*, Deliberazioni Terra, reg. 14, fol. 113r (October 17, 1500).

stradioti” of Argos, to end up in Napoli di Romania and later die as mercenary in the Venetian Friuli.³⁹

The Venetian possessions of Modon and Coron (1206–1500) had been decimated by the plague of 1347–1348, the Ottoman military campaigns of 1396 and 1460 and the first Venetian-Turkish war (1463–1479).⁴⁰ On the other hand, the sheer exploitation of the peasants drove many of them into emigration.⁴¹ In an effort to improve livestock production, local governors slightly reduced taxes, rationalised the crop rotation on the public and private holdings, redistributed pastures, and worked for a solution to the problem of the farmers’ and animal keepers’ shortage. Yet again, the recovery remained relatively volatile.⁴² The defense capabilities of Methoni and Koroni were also limited. We refer to small territories, with small population and limited administrative, financial, etc. resources, which were often experiencing particular difficulties, especially in rejecting the constant attacks made by soldiers of the neighboring Despotate in the borders.

In 1402, the Senate ordered the *castellans* of Modon and Coron to seek and recruit on approval “*twelve Albanians or other men who were proven to be fearless horsemen*”, in order to guard the passages and to accompany villagers to the fortresses in dangerous times.⁴³ The families of the newcomers were allowed to settle as farmers within the territories of the possessions but not within or near urban space. However, the settlement of foreigners, shepherds and farmers, had

³⁹ A.S.V., *Senato*, Deliberazioni, Terra, reg. 14, fol. 132v (January 19, 1500 m.v.).

⁴⁰ Freddy Thiriet, “La Messenie meridionale dans le systeme colonial,” in *Acts of the First International Conference of Peloponnesian Studies (Sparta, September 7–14, 1975)*, vol. 1, Athens, Society for the Peloponnesian Studies, 1975, p. 90–8; Christine A. Hodgetts, “The colonies of Coron and Modon under Venetian administration, 1204–1400” (Phd diss., University of London, 1974); Katerina B. Korre, “Η Μεθώνη του 1500 μέσα από τη δραστηριότητα του φιλενωτικού επισκόπου Ιωάννη Πλουσιαδηνού (1492–1500),” in *Proceedings of the International Scientific Meeting De Veneciis Ad Mothonam. Greeks and Venetians in Methoni during the years of the Venetian rule (Methoni, March 19–20, 2010)*, ed. Gogo Vartzelioti and Angeliki Panopoulou, Athens-Venice, Hellenic Institute of Byzantine and Post-byzantine Studies – Association of Friends of the Methoni Castle, 2012, p. 131.

⁴¹ *Μνημεία*, vol. 3, p. 313, 421, 459; vol. 4, Paris, Maisonneuve et Cie, 1882, p. 29; vol. 5, Paris, Maisonneuve et Cie, 1883, p. 94; Korre, “Η Μεθώνη του 1500,” p. 132.

⁴² Gaetano Cogo, “La Guerra di Venezia contro i Turchi (1499–1501),” *Nuovo Archivio Veneto* 18, 1899, p. 30; Peter Topping, “The post-classical documents,” in *The Minnesota-Messenia expedition: reconstructing a Bronze Age regional environment*, ed. G.R. Rapp Jr and W.A. McDonald, Minneapolis, The University of Minnesota Press, 1972, p. 68, 70; Korre, “Η Μεθώνη του 1500,” p. 131.

⁴³ “*Quod scribatur et mandetur Castellanis locorum nostrorum Coroni et Mothoni, quod debeant accipere ad soldum XII Albanenses, vel alios homines confidentes equestres, pro quolibet dictorum locorum, qui sint boni et sufficientes homines, et habeant bonos equos, et arma haberi deinde per tales, dando cuilibet ipsorum de soldo, in mense, a quindecim usque viginti yperperos, prout melius facere poterunt. Et quilibet ex Castellanis in loco sibi commissio, debeat operari dictos equestres vel partem eorum, in mittendo et tenendo ipsos ad loca et passus Amoree in quibus melius et citius posit sciri adventus et intention Turchorum vel aliorum volentium venire in Amoream, vel ad damna territorium nostrorum locorum [...] declarando dictis Castellanis quod accipiant dictos equestres qui sint homines habentes familiam, et quod sua familia veniat ad habitandum in locis predictis.*” *Μνημεία*, vol. 2, p. 65–66, n° 279 (14 February 1401).

already begun in Modon, the very same period when it was conducted in Negroponte and Argos, that is, in the second half of the 14th-century. Several individuals who asked permission to enter and establish themselves in the possessions' mainland came from clans of shepherds and their horsemen guard who had previously arrived in Argos from the regions of Boeotia and Aetolia or from the Florentine Duchy of Athens. According to a document, the Venetians were transferring families from one possession to another as early as 1398:

*“Quia est hic unus albanensis, qui vocatur Pinchera, et venerat huc, pro volendo se concordare nobiscum, de intrando in aliquem ex locis nostris Argos, seu alijs, cum gentibus suis, cum certis pactis, cum quibus dominatio nostra; noluit attendere, et ipse optet redire, cum licentia nostra, ad partes suas. Vadit pars, quia non habet aliud passagium, et staret hic, cum maximo damno suo, quod ipse cum sua familia levarj possit super galea nostra grossa, quae vadit Mothonum, sine aliquo nabulo, et conduci usque ad partes Mothoni, in illo loco, qui sibi placuerit, non exeunte galea, a recta via sua; et similiter leventur ambaxiatores Sithines”.*⁴⁴

Thereafter, the settlement of new population was to be made more intensively. The Black Death, which hit Modone and Coron most severely, acted as a catalyst for the taking of very drastic and effective remedial measures.⁴⁵ Most of these measures concerned the demographic changes and the disturbed population balance, as evidenced by the communication between the possessions: *“proper mortalitates que fuerunt ibi, non sunt ita bene fulcita gentibus et soldatis forinsecis, sicut necesse foret ymo in Corono sunt multo plures Greci quam Latini, quod non est bene securum, maxime presenti tempore et sonantibus his que sonant”.*⁴⁶ The desired *ratio* between the numbers of Greeks and Latins in the inhabitants of the two Venetian possessions had been overturned and the Venetians feared of a revolt, at a time when the neighboring Despotate was acting very aggressively.

In 1425, the settlement permissions given by the *castellano* of Modon were more generous; concerned more than 500 individuals, horsemen with their accompanying pastoral families. Meanwhile, the territory of the possession had been extended and with it, the need for protection became more intensive. The settlement areas were four: *Zonclo*, *Sancto Elia*, *Molentini* and *Niclaina*. Each family was granted a proportion of crops and pastures as well as an income of up to 400 ducats for their first needs, under the condition not to enter the fortress, unless unarmed and individually, and after authorisation granted by the competent authority. Each *oikos* of farmers and shepherds (in Greek, *οἶκος*, house, corresponded to an extended family in a wider sense) received a crop of equivalent value. Its main fiscal obligation was to pay the *capinico* tax, which corresponded to one Venetian *ducato* a year or its equivalent in farming yield. The main obligation

⁴⁴ ASVe, *Senato*, Deliberazioni Misti, reg. 44, fol. 33r (January 30, 1397 more veneto).

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, reg. 44, fol. 95r (April 4, 1399) and fol. 105r (June 9, 1399).

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, reg. 45, fol. 121v (December 17, 1401).

of each *oikos* was to offer a given number of *stradioti*, light-armed cavalymen who would serve the *reggimento* loyally and without any other compensation, while they were fighting within the borders of the region, with the exception of the right of looting the enemy.⁴⁷

The *oikos* appears to be the socio-economic cell of the shepherd clans. It is known that the communities of transhumant shepherds preserved a social organization more archaic than that of the other peasants. Moreover, the normative structure found in a social environment as particular as that of the transhumant settlers of the 14–15th-centuries is hard to be described in detail, first of all because of its complexity and variety and second, because of the scarcity of the sources. In general, there were micro-communities of self-preservation, with “self” meaning the expanded net or relatives and blood-brothers.⁴⁸ The everyday life was formed not around a conjugal (nuclear) family but connected to a parental network of relatives, little or more extensive, that went beyond the domestic group. Members of this net were also individuals who were considered “members of the family” without actually belonging to the conjugal family. Far from the urban areas, in constant movement and with different family structures, the shepherds’ family life seemed disordered. These heterogeneous characteristics undoubtedly marginalized them in the host societies, regardless of how integration processes were unfolded.⁴⁹

A significant point that we have to mention is that, given the strict administrative frame posed by the Venetian authorities, the original socio-economic fabric of the shepherd clans described above was about to experience a constant change: the livestock cooperation groups of the nomads, known as *katuns*, based on blood family relationship, parentage, marriage or affinity, abandoned the mountains and settled in valleys and open spaces.⁵⁰ Moreover, a significant part of

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, reg. 8, fol. 9 (February 4, 1464, old numeration); *Μνημεία*, vol. 1, Paris, Maisonneuve et Cie, 1880, p. 176; Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations du Sénat de Venise*, vol. 2, Paris – La Haye: Mouton et Co, 1959, p. 227 (n° 1985); Antoine Bon, *La Morée franque. Recherches historiques, topographiques et archéologiques sur la Principauté d’Achaïe (1205–1430)*, Paris, Éditions E. de Boccard, 1969, p. 284–290, 431–436; Jacoby, *La féodalité en Grèce médiévale*, p. 231–231; Peter Topping, “Albanian settlements in medieval Greece: some venetian testimonies,” in *Charanis Studies: Essays in Honour of Peter Charanis*, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou-Thomadakis, New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press, 1980, p. 261–272. For the different locations cf. Korre, “Η Μεθώνη του 1500,” p. 127–152.

⁴⁸ We use the term “micro-society” to signalize the social unit which has as its main characteristics the strong personal relations of its members, homogeneity and resistance to change and is self-sufficient; Robert Redfield, *The little community and peasant society and culture*, Chicago & London, The University of Chicago Press – Midway reprint, 1989, p. 3–4.

⁴⁹ Karl Kaser, “Κτηνοτροφία, συγγένεια, οικογένεια και οικολογία στον ορεινό χώρο της δυτικής Βαλκανικής (14ος-αρχές 20ού αιώνα),” in *The mountainous area of the Balkans. Establishment and Transformations*, ed. B. Nitsiakos and Ch. Kasimis, Konitsa, Plethron, 2008, p. 97–114; Alan J.B. Wace and Maurice Scott Thompson, *The nomads of the Balkans. An account of life and customs among the Vlachs of northern Pindus*, London: Methuen & Co., 1914, p. 258–259.

⁵⁰ Jacques Lefort, *Les villages dans l’Empire byzantin (IV^e–XV^e siècle)*, Paris, Lethielleux, 2005, p. 22, 329–349. Milenko Filipović (1902–1969) stated that a *katun* in the Middle Ages referred to “a group of several families or households gathered around one elder, under whose authority they fulfilled their duties to the feudal lords and performed various activities pertaining to the livestock

its members was quickly accustomed to be dependent on earnings coming from activities that were regarded, up to now, as secondary, such as military service and mercenarism. This process, along with the increased dependence from personal or collective negotiations with their employers as well as the disruption of the continuity of the family bands of the *stradioti* cavalry, loosen the ties between those who were shepherds or farmers and those who were fighters under the new regime. Inevitably, the transformation process was fully open for these groups, which would eventually bring them closer to the local communities and the complete integration.⁵¹

Peter Topping observed that the handful of Albanian shepherds employed by Venice in that time were harbingers of their much more numerous compatriots who served in the forces of the principality of Achaia and the Despotate of Morea.⁵² We would expand his perceptive observation to include all other categories of settlers in the Venetian territories. Indeed, the majority of irregular cavalrymen was recruited as *stradioti* cavalry and entered the Venetian possessions along with their families after the definite occupation of Argos by the Turks (1463) and, in any case, after the final fall of the Despotate.⁵³ A large number of them, combined with inhabitants, once formed a private rural force at the disposition of a powerful Byzantine landowner of the Despotate, named Emmanuel Rallis.⁵⁴ In turn, Rallis had been a strong supporter of the house of the Palaiologi, sharing mutual interests with certain members of the imperial family. A similar case was that of Michael Ralli Isis, probably a relative of the aforementioned Emmanuel, who is referred to as “the first head of the house of Thomas Palaiologos”.⁵⁵

The settlement process in the Venetian possessions of Morea from the second half of the 15th-century and before the fear of an Ottoman invasion, transformed to include refugees, asylum seekers or persons granted other forms of protection, i. e. the Despotate’s élite. Many members of the downfallen *árchontes* (magnates, noblemen) were accepted as *conduttori di huomini d’arme*, that is, captains in command of men-at-arms, a structure which was taken by the mercenary companies of the medieval West: military leaders who were serving a city or a lord as contractors, having a large number of soldiers under their command. The magnate

breeders’ economy”. It was not a community based exclusively on kinship, since it included both patrilineal and matrilineal kin; Milenko Filipović, “Struktura i organizacija srednjovekovnog katuna” in *Simpozijum o srednjovekovnom katunu (24–25 November 1961)*, vol. 2, ed. Milenko Filipović, Sarajevo: Scientific Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1963, p. 45–108 (especially 47–81); Relja Katić, *Stočarstvo srednjovekovne Srbije*, Belgrade, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 1978, p. 27; Karl Kaser, “The origins of Balkan patriarchy,” *Modern Greek Studies* 8, 1992, p. 144–56.

⁵¹ In particular, Katerina B. Korre, “Stradioti, mercenaries of Venice: military and social role (XVth–XVIth centuries) (in greek)”, Phd diss., Ionian University, 2018, p. 130–133.

⁵² Topping, “Albanian Settlements in Medieval Greece,” p. 265.

⁵³ Konstantinos N. Sathas, *Τουρκοκρατούμενη Ελλάς*, vol. 1, Athens, Nea Synora/Livanis, 1995, p. 34.

⁵⁴ Korre, “Stradioti, mercenaries of Venice,” 194 et seq.

⁵⁵ *Georgio Sfrantze Chronaca*, ed. Riccardo Maisani, Rome: Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 29, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei 1990, p. 76. According to Spandugino, Ralles Isis was *homo molto valoroso in opera d’armi*; *Μνημεία*, vol. 9, Paris: Maisonneuve et Cie, 1890, p. 161.

conduttore was rewarded with a significant annual salary according to his contract; his men (in fact, the heads of his erstwhile farmers and shepherds) were used on a recurrent basis at various fronts inside and outside the specific possessions, while their families were permanently settled in the Venetian territories.⁵⁶

It is obvious that the *usanza greca*, which referred to the institution of the *stradioti*, was successfully transplanted to meet the needs of the Venetian state. The Byzantine practice of combining land concession and soldiers was long applied to different groups of individuals and with remarkable variations according to the circumstances and the financial, political and military needs of the state. Let us elucidate this at the following example regarding the Byzantine region of Monemvasia (Malvasia).

In 1394, the migratory flow of pastoral populations that had settled in *katuns* or formed small shepherd communities in Thessaly, Epirus, Aetolia and Acarnania throughout the 14th-century, starts knocking on the doors of southern Greece. The fragile system of local rulers in the mainland was destabilised by the military operations of Carlo Tocco in the regions of Epirus and Aetolia-Acarnania. Then, numerous groups reached and crossed the narrow passage of Isthmus, spreading to Argolis and harassing the inhabitants. We have already described the efforts of the Venetian authorities in Argos to integrate a small number of them.⁵⁷ However, the Byzantine response was more coordinated; aimed in larger scale integration and proved wise enough in order to ensure that these people would not represent a future problem in their region.

After an agreement with the Despotate Theodore I Palaiologos (1383–1407), thousands of refugees were driven across the border into the Despotate of Morea to settle in specific places.⁵⁸ However, the settlement agreement concerning these people (some sources mention over 9,000 refugees) could not be explained exclusively as a demographic stimulus. Theodore I Palaiologos was in dire need of troops loyal to him and this is evidenced both by the events prior to the agreement and by the internal politics of the Despotate. For this exact time (1394) and after a revolt, he was forced to recognize a wide autonomy to the most powerful magnates, like the Mamonàs family.⁵⁹ Theodore was determined not to allow

⁵⁶ Korre, “Stradioti, mercenaries of Venice,” p. 196–199.

⁵⁷ See in the above text, and notes 26 to 29.

⁵⁸ Denis A. Zakythinos, *Le despotat grec*, vol. 1, London, Variorum, 1975, p. 131. Michael S. Kordosis, *Συμβολή στην ιστορία και τοπογραφία της περιοχής Κορίνθου στους μέσους χρόνους*, Athens, Karavias, 1981, p. 114; Nafsika Vassilopoulou, “Ο Θεόδωρος Α΄ Παλαιολόγος και η Πελοπόννησος στα τέλη του ΙΔ΄ αιώνα,” *Εώα και Εσπέρια* 8, 2008–2012, p. 325–51; Spiridon Lambros, *Παλαιολογία και Πελοποννησιακά*, vol. 3, Athens: n.p., 1926, p. 4 (*Μανουήλ Παλαιολόγου, Λόγος επίταφιος εἰς τὸν αὐτάδελφον αὐτοῦ Δεσπότην πορφυρογέννητον κὺρ Θεόδωρον τὸν Παλαιολόγον*).

⁵⁹ Peter Schreiner, *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken*, vol. 1, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, 12/1: *Chronica Byzantina Breviora*, Wien, Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1975, p. 233, n° 32/28 and vol. 2, Wien, Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1979, p. 346–348; Peter Schreiner, “Παρατηρήσεις διὰ τα προνόμια της Μονεμβασίας,” in *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Peloponnesian Studies*, Athens, Society of Peloponnesian Studies, 1981, p. 160–66.

further contestation of his authority. Thus, we can explain the provisions of the silver bull (in Greek *ἀργυρόβουλλον*) released by Theodore and interpret the chain of places conceded to the foreign immigrants who came under the jurisdiction of Monemvasia:

“[...] καὶ διατηρεῖσθαι καὶ αὐτοὺς ἐλευθέρους παντελῶς καὶ ἀκαταδούλωτους, ὥσπερ καὶ τοὺς ἄνωθεν εἰρημένους, καὶ μὴ εὐρίσκειν αὐτοὺς παρὰ τινος τῶν ἀπάντων δι’ οὐδένα τῶν ἀπάντων τρόπων καταδυναστείαν τινὰ ἢ διενόχλησιν καὶ διασεισμὸν ἐπὶ τοῦτοις, χωρὶς μόνων τῶν ἐπὶ οἰκῶν τῆς περιοχῆς τῶν Βατίκων, τῆς Τζακονίας, τῶν Μολάων, τοῦ Ἑσοποῦ, τοῦ Ἑλούς, τοῦ Ἱερακίου, τοῦ Ἀπιδέων, τοῦ Σεραφῶνος, τῶν Τζιντζίνων, τοῦ Ρέοντος, τοῦ Πραστοῦ, τῆς Καστάνιτζας καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Λεωνίδου. Οἷος δὲ ἐξ αὐτῶν βουλευθῇ ἐλθεῖν εἰς τὴν Μονεμβασίαν, ἵνα ἀναφέρῃ καὶ ἐρωτᾷ πρῶτον περὶ τοῦτον τὴν βασιλείαν μου, καὶ καθὼς ὀρίζει αὐτὴ, νὰ γίνηται”.⁶⁰

Not enough scholarly attention has been paid yet to the language of the silver bull agreement, especially to those passages that mention the (Greek) word *εποίκου* (settlers). It is generally accepted by the relevant bibliography that this word refers to the *inhabitants of the area* (in Greek: *κατοίκων*). This way, the word “*εποίκων*”, which clearly means “*settlers*” that is, not inhabitants, was considered to be a *lapsus* probably from the part of the scribe of the text. However, this assumption is not accurate; even for interpretative reasons, replacing a specific word with another one regardless its historical reference is incomprehensible. Thus, we were driven to unsubstantiated conclusions.⁶¹

Instead, we propose a reading that, in the silver bull agreement, the word *εποίκου* refers exactly to those people: the “foreigners” that Theodore I allowed to settle in Mani, the most mountainous regional unit of the Despotate in 1394. The newcomers settled in clans in the thirteen areas mentioned in the document forming small or bigger *katuns*. However, and while all residents of the region, free or villain, were to enjoy full and lifelong tax exemption, freedom of movement, settlement and full management of their property according to the silver bull, the settlers were denied the right of free movement outside their settlement areas. In particular, they had to have the explicit permission of the Despot in order to leave their *katuns* for whatever reason. Moreover, the military service they owed was transformed into an inherited obligation.

⁶⁰ “[...] and may all of them be free and without any sense tie of serfdom, as well as those mentioned before; and may not be obliged under any way or by any authority in terms of endangering their status, except the *settlers* of the areas Vatica, Zaconia, Molai, Aesopo, Aelos, Geraki, Apidea, Seraphon, Zinzino, Reon, Praesto, Kastaniza e San Leonida. Whoever of them, having this status, wants to come to the city of Monemvasia, must first have my permission and obey it”; *Acta et diplomata Graeca medii aevi sacra et profana*, ed. F. Miclosich and J. Müller, vol. 5, Wien, C. Gerold, 1887, p. 172. For a more extensive analysis of the events of the period and the location of the settlements cf. Korrè, “Stradioti, mercenaries of Venice,” p. 122–124 and 217–224.

⁶¹ Charis Kalliga, *Η Βυζαντινή Μονεμβασία και οι πηγές της ιστορίας της*, Athens, Estia, 2003, p. 208.

This arrangement was a particularly wise move on Theodore's side, given the complexity of the situation. However, it did not constitute an innovation. As a rather regular practice, it is witnessed in different periods of the Byzantine Empire.⁶² Its benefits for the financial interests of the State are obvious: demographic stimulation of the provinces, social control over the separatist rural élite, strengthening defense by rapid mobilisation of decentralised troops, resurgence of local stock raising and agriculture and strategic disarmament of the rebel raiders and their warlords. The settlers were reliable fighters because of their close connection to the land in which they lived. In fact, the system of military settlements provided for the maintenance of the peculiarity of their social structure as far as it served the interests of the state. The settlers' leaders would express the faith of each clan, both by being responsible for the regular supply of men-at-arms and by their personal service as heads of each independent military unit. If a *stradiotes*, a soldier of the land, was proven unable to serve, he could be replaced by another member of the same group, of the same clan; thus, through compulsory collective liability schemes the state could ensure the stability of the system.

There are several references to this type of settlements in the Byzantine territory throughout the history of the empire: nomads coming from the north and the east of the empire (such as the Cumans and the Pechenegs), Armenians, and people from the Balkans, most prominently Albanians, Serbs and Vlachs. Some indicative examples: Constantine IV Doukas (1059–1067) settled Oghuz/Uzes in Thrace, while land at *Myriophyton*, north of the Kassandra peninsula, was given to the Armenians.⁶³ Settlements were also provided to Greek populations (*Prosalentes*, *Thelimatari* of the 13th century, Michael VIII's marine troops known as *Tzakones*). All soldiers-settlers of this type belonged to lower social classes: lightly-armed horsemen (Cumans), sailors (*Tzakones*), infantrymen (*Thelimatari*) and rowers-sailors (*Prosalentes*). Some soldiers-settlers were cultivating their own land along with their families (the Cumans and the *Prosalentes* definitely, the *Tzakones* and the *Thelimatari* possibly). In particular, the Cuman cavalry groups were placed in specific areas and their military obligations were hereditary. There are indications that during the 14th-century, Cuman horsemen possessed joint military *proniai* (in Greek *πρόνοιαι*).⁶⁴

⁶² The soldiers of the Byzantine army could own land according to the individual provisions of the relevant legislation. The imperial legislation of the early Byzantine era (e.g. provisions of the *Digesta*) allows soldiers to acquire estates anywhere in the empire or to be tenants (*conductores*) except to the province they served; Martha Gregoriou-Ioannidou, *Στρατολογία και έγγεια στρατιωτική ιδιοκτησία στο Βυζάντιο*, Thessaloniki, Vaniias, 1989, p. 48. The thematic soldier of the Middle Byzantine era had the right to own land within the thematic regions of the state, as *limitaneus* and *akrites* used to do. The same applied to the late Byzantine soldier; John Haldon, "Military service, military land and the status of soldiers. Current Problems and Interpretations," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 47, 1993, p. 17–20, 24, 29–41, 59–62.

⁶³ Mark Bartusis, *Land and Privilege in Byzantium. The institution of pronoia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 123.

⁶⁴ Bartusis, *Land and Privilege*, p. 159.

These settlers were forming a *sui generis* category. To begin with, they neither were owners of military estates (*stratitika ktemata*), in the technical sense of the term as it was formed in the mid-Byzantine period, nor holders of a *pronoia*, as it was functioning in the late Byzantine Empire. The state provided the means of settlement (land for cultivation and shelter for their families) mainly to “foreigners”, warlords and rebel groups, in exchange for permanent, hereditary military service. This practice has developed its own characteristics as part of a system with great heterogeneity. Testimonies of this heterogeneity are the hybrid forms of integration of different groups of individuals, such as the soldiers of the *sebastokrator* Isaac Komnenos in 1152,⁶⁵ or the granting of collective *pronoia* to groups of settlers such as the Cumans under the command of Alexios II Komnenos in 1181.⁶⁶ The settlement practice was influenced by the laws of the “military land” that is, the *stratitika ktēmata*. This institution was protecting, from the 10th and on, the land of the soldiers acknowledging full exemption of its owner from taxes and fiscal burdens. The perception of a protected military land, granted or otherwise acquired by its owner, evolved through the centuries until the collapse of the empire having developed special forms depending on the social structures of the groups of settlers and the needs of the central or provincial Byzantine administration.⁶⁷

The settlement policy for demographic, fiscal and defensive reasons, which we have seen applied in Monemvasia of Theodore I Palaiologos, was therefore not an exceptional case for the Byzantines. The settlement’s framework is very reminiscent of the 10th-century military legislation although it would be rather inaccurate to say that it follows it clearly. Still, it seems safe enough to argue that it follows its echo, in the sense that some protective provisions of the 10th-century have left their mark in the later period, at least in the form of legal custom, since they were never repealed.⁶⁸ Within the limits of the interpretation given to us by the military laws of the 10th-century and taking into consideration the specific agreements between the Byzantine authorities and the groups of settlers that mention the obligations of both sides, we could support this interpretative suggestion with legitimate expectations of correspondence to the historical realities of the 14th and 15th-century.

⁶⁵ Georges Papazoglou, *Τοπικόν Ισαακίου Αλεξίου Κομνηνού της Μονής Θεοτόκου της Κοσμοσώτειρας* (1151/2), Komotini: n.p., 1994; Bartusis, *Land and privilege*, p. 105.

⁶⁶ “Οι τας παραδόσεις των κομανικών προνοιών του θέματος Μογλενών”; Bartusis, *Land and Privilege*, p. 52–53.

⁶⁷ A more extensive analysis of those settlement practices in Korre, “Stradioti, mercenaries of Venice,” p. 92–118, with the relevant bibliography.

⁶⁸ For instance, several provisions from the Novel 947? of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, as well as from that of Nicephore Phocas of the year 966/997, of the mid-Byzantine period, are identified as they were in the *Exabiblos* of Armenopoulos, a legal text of the late period; Nikos Svoronos, *Les Nouvelles des empereurs Macédoniens concernant la terre et les stratotes*, Athens, Centre de Recherches Byzantines, F.N.R.S. Fondation Culturelle de la Banque Nationale, 1994, p. 105 and 177.

We believe that this is the historical and conceptual meaning of the term *stratiotai/stradioti*, for these populations of shepherd and agricultural settlers of the Late Medieval East. Furthermore, these individuals were admitted to the Venetian possessions under the same status they once enjoyed in Byzantine territories: “*Volumus, quod de terrenis stratiotorum, qui servire tenentur cum equis suis, nihil innouetur cum illa terrena eis designate fuerint loco stipendij, vt servire teneantur cum equis et armis suis ad mandata Rectorum nostrorum*”;⁶⁹ the Venetians would eventually copy an effective practice that has been used for centuries by the Byzantines.

But in the Venetian territories, the agricultural-pastoral role as well as the military service of the *stradioti* has undergone radical change, starting with their way of fighting and ending to their status in the central Venetian state. The warriors were gradually transformed into special units of mercenary cavalry, constantly serving far from their families and the granted land, on distant fronts to which the *Signoria* was transporting them. As these fighters were completely losing their protective role towards the members of the clan and wandering to other corners of the Balkans or the West, the shepherds were being integrated into the communities of their new homelands, creating new families and genealogies and shaping their collective imagination by developing new identities. In the end, it was just human.

⁶⁹ *Acta Albaniae Veneta saeculorum XIV et XV*, vol. 21/pars 3 (1451–1452), Munchen: R. Trofenik, 1975, p. 75, n° 5720, (July 26, 1451: *Capitula Argos*). For a comparative study, cf. Karl Kaser, *Freier Bauer und Soldat. Die Militarisierung der agrarischen Gesellschaft in der kroatisch-slawonischen Militär grenze (1535–1881)*, Graz, Institut für Geschichte der Universität Graz, Abt. Südosteuropäische Geschichte, 1986, p. 241–258.