Local intermediaries and insular space in late-18th century Ottoman Cyprus

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Geç 18. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Kıbrısı'nda Yerel Aracılar ve Adasal Mekân

Öz ■ 18. yüzyıl ortalarından 19. yüzyıl ortalarına kadarki dönemde Osmanlı taşrasındaki servet ve iktidarın yeniden dağıtılmasına ilişkin tartışmalara katkı yapmayı amaçlayan bu makalede, üç mahalli seçkin üzerine odaklanılmaktadır: Kıbrıs tercümanı Hadjiyorgakis Kornesios (Acı Yorgaki), muhassıl Hacı Abdülbaki Ağa, Ermeni asıllı tüccar ve aynı zamanda elçilik tercümanlığı yapan Sarkis. Çalışmada, katı bir merkez-çevre ikileminin ötesine geçen analitik kategoriler aranmış, imparatorluk coğrafyasını daha iyi anlamak ve şimdiye kadar daha çok idari teşkilat üzerinden tanımlanan mekânsal tahayyülün ötesine geçmek için alternatif bir yaklaşım denenmiştir. Braudel'in "minyatür kıtalar" kavramı kullanılarak Kıbrıs'taki yalıtılmış mekân olgusunu tasavvur etmek mümkün olmuş, bu sayede daha genel bağlamda ekonomik ilişkilerin doğası, üretim biçimleri ve taşradaki artıdeğerin birikimi daha iyi anlaşılabilmiştir. Burada incelenen üç yerel aracı, bu türden bir yaklaşımı araştırmacı için kolaylaştıran ve hatta teşvik eden ideal vakalar sunmuşlardır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Osmanlı Devrinde Kıbrıs, adasallık, Sarkis, Hacı Abdülbaki Ağa, Hadjiyorgakis Kornesios, ayan, tercüman, aracılar.

This article examines three provincial intermediaries in Cyprus during the closing decades of the eighteenth century. It considers these cases as examples of some of the groups of Ottoman subjects who came to benefit in more ways than one from the redistribution of wealth and power in the Ottoman Empire during the period between 1750 and 1850. In this era, Ottoman imperial governance

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faced a series of challenges, and horizontal and vertical relationships of power and authority were undergoing significant renegotiation and reformulation.[1]

A well-established historiographical trend on the study of this particular period concerns the shifting of attention from the imperial to the local.[2] Rather than reflexively adopting the vantage point of Istanbul, and often taking the documentary record produced by the central bureaucracy at face value, historians are now enquiring into the regional and provincial expressions of Ottoman repertoires of power. Paying equal attention to the horizontal as well as the hierarchical, there is a growing interest on the multilateral nature of imperial governance, the vernacularization of the language and discourse of legitimacy, and the local renditions of structures of authority and power encountered throughout the empire.[3] Neither a homogeneous and uniform imperial order, nor a disorderly collection of idiosyncrasies, the emerging picture depicts the multiple dimensions of political, economic and social organization. Historians are now much more aware of the need to go beyond conventional and rigid understandings of institutions and the role of historical actors therein.

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1 The bibliography on the period is vast. For some of the most recent and comprehensive treatments, see Ali Yaycıoğlu, "Provincial Power-holders and the Empire in the later Ottoman World: Conflict or Partnership?" in *The Ottoman World*, ed. Christine Woodhead (New York: Routledge, 2011), 436-452; Dina Rizk Khoury, "The Ottoman Centre Versus Provincial Power-holders: an Analysis of the Historiography," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey*. Vol. 3: *The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603–1839*, ed. Suraiya, N. Faroqhi, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 135-156; Bruce Masters, "Semi-autonomous Forces in the Arab Provinces," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, 3, ed., Faroqhi, 186-206.

2 Marc Aymes, *A Provincial History of the Ottoman Empire: Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean in the nineteenth century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014); Ariel Salzmann, *Tocqueville in the Ottoman Empire: Rival Paths to the Modern State* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2004); Molly Greene, *A Shared World: Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Hülya Canbakal, *Society and Politics in an Ottoman Town. 'Ayntab in the 17th Century* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2007); Charles L. Wilkins, *Forging Urban Solidarities: Ottoman Aleppo 1640-1700* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2010); Antonis Anastasopoulos, "Centre-Periphery Relations: Crete in the Eighteenth Century," in *The Province Strikes Back: Imperial Dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean*, eds. Björn Forsén and Giovanni Salmeri (Helsinki: The Finnish Institute at Athens, 2008), 123-136.; *idem.*, ed. *The Eastern Mediterranean Under Ottoman Rule: Crete, 1645-1840*. (Rethymno: Crete University Press, 2008); Michalis N. Michael, Matthias Kappler and Eftihios Gavriel, eds. *Ottoman Cyprus: A Collection of Studies on History and Culture.* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009).

3 See generally, Woodhead, ed. *The Ottoman World.*

Three Historical Actors and Their Historian

> [T]he dragoman of Cyprus […caused] sedition and discord […] by performing a great deal of villainy to the Muslim worshippers […He was] executed in front of the Sublime Gate, and his corpse was put upside-down in the basket of a broom-seller, carried around, and left outside the gate of the fish market; he thus became a warning to others […] It was rumored that all his property and cash totaled 11,000 purses [5,500,000 kuruş].[4]
>
> Cabi Ömer Efendi

> How could this faithless man become a governor?[5]
> Sultan Abdülhamid I, on Hacı Abdülbaki Ağa

> We went to the house of Mr Se[r]kis, […] His house was in all respects a palace, possessing the highest degree of Oriental magnificence. The apartments […] were adorned with studied elegance; the floors being furnished with the finest mats bought from Grand Cairo, and the divans covered with satin, set round with embroidered cushions.[6]
>
> *E. D. Clarke*

Contributing to these debates, I will be examining here three case studies: Hadjiyorgakis Kornesios, dragoman of Cyprus; the *muhassıl* (tax-farming governor) Hacı Abdülbaki Ağa; and the Armenian consular dragoman-cum-merchant Sarkis. These are men that will not be encountered in Ottoman history textbooks, and for good reason. Primarily, none of them was remotely comparable to the better-known and prominent *ayan* in the Balkans and Anatolia who have received a lot of attention in the historiography of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century. Looking at the spatial context within which these men were situated, there is nothing extraordinary about Cyprus during this period. Viewed from

4 Cabi Ömer Efendi, *Cabi Tarihi (Tarih-i Sultan Selim-i Salis ve Mahmud-ı Sani)*, ed. Mehmet Ali Beyhan, vol. 1, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2003), 426-427. In the edited text of this work, the name of the dragoman is incorrectly transcribed as "Petraki". For an explanation for this mistake see Antonis Hadjikyriacou, "Society and economy on an Ottoman island: Cyprus in the eighteenth century," Ph.D. thesis (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2011), 261 fn. 800.

5 C.DH. 6699, undated *hatt-ı hümayun* by Sultan Abdülhamid I.

6 E. D. Clarke, "Clarke," in *Excerpta Cypria: Materials for a History of Cyprus*, ed. Claude Delaval Cobham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908), 386-387.

the vantage point of center-periphery studies, Cyprus appears as just another Ottoman province of no special consequence.[7] Many of the processes encountered throughout the empire are reflected on the island, and there is little deviation from the grand scheme of things as far as center-province interactions are concerned. In that sense, what can be learned by scrutinizing such a topic, beyond gaining glimpses into the micro-history of local intermediaries during a period of empire-wide reconfigurations of power?

The most commonly-employed units of analysis utilized for the purposes of such inquiries are those of capital and province. While these may seem as the most obvious tools to understand imperial realms, and indeed ones that cannot entirely be discarded, it may be possible to transcend the limits of a state-centered spatial imagination, which can often obfuscate alternative realities and historical processes. In an attempt to contribute to the quest for analytical categories that move beyond the center/province dichotomy, this article will make an initial attempt towards articulating an alternative scheme for understanding imperial space, and move beyond a spatial imagination confined to conventional administrative organization. Utilizing the Braudelian concept of 'miniature continents'[8] allows an envisioning of the Cypriot insularity that sheds light on the nature of economic relations, modes of production, and patterns of concentration of the rural surplus.[9] Key provincial agents were able to manipulate the economic structures

7 Antonis Hadjikyriacou, "The Ottomanization of Cyprus: Turbulent times of transition and the quest for new analytical tools," in *Ottoman Worlds: Foundational Coexistences*, ed. Devrim Ümit (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, forthcoming 2014).

8 Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, vol. 1, transl. Siân Reynolds (London-New York: Fontana, 1972), 148-167

9 For other conceptualizations of insularity see Nicolas Vatin and Gilles Veinstein, eds., *Insularités Ottomanes* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, Institut Français d'études Anatoliennes, 2004), particularly the contribution of Marc Aymes, "'Position Délicate' ou Île sans Histories? L'Intégration de Chypre à l'État Ottoman des Premières Tanzîmât," 241-275; Spyros I. Asdrachas, "The Greek Archipelago: A Dispersed City," in *Maps and Map-makers of the Aegean*, eds., Vasilis Sphyroeras, et al., (Athens: Polis, 1985), 235-248; Elias Kolovos, "Insularity and Island Society in the Ottoman Context: The Case of the Aegean Island of Andros (Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries)," *Turcica* 39 (2007): 49-122; Stephan R. Epstein, *An Island for Itself: Economic Development and Social Change in Late Medieval Sicily* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Roxani Margariti, "An Ocean of Islands: Island, Insularity and Historiography in the Indian Ocean," in *The Sea: Thalassography and Historiography*, ed. Peter N. Miller (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013): 198-229; Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith, eds. *Islands in History and Representation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); Godfrey Baldacchino, "Islands, Island Studies, Island Studies Journal," *Island Studies Journal* 1 (2006): 3-18;

of the island in different ways, and their study becomes a means to better understand the articulation of material conditions in an imperial setting. Hadjiyorgakis, Abdülbaki, and Sarkis are ideal case studies that can facilitate, or indeed instigate, this sort of inquiry.

Their story is as much about the lives and times of three Ottoman intermediaries, as it is the story of my own personal journey as an Ottomanist. I will therefore be infusing the narrative of how they came to be at the center of economic and social life in the island with that of how an inquiry into eighteenth-century Ottoman Cyprus led me to a quest for a total history of their lives which, in turn, unfolded insularity as an analytical tool that permitted an alternative conceptualization of the processes at stake.

Having returned from my first fieldwork trip to the *Başbakanlık* archives, and like any doctoral student, I was confronted with masses of photocopied Ottoman documents. I needed a strategy on how to deal with this material in order to prioritize types of documents or registers that I would start examining. Unsure of how to proceed, I was browsing the summaries of documents from the *Cevdet* series, and identified an imperial order concerning the affair of the confiscation of Hadjiyorgakis' property in the aftermath of his execution.[10] Thinking that he is an extremely well-known figure in Cypriot history on whom little is known from Ottoman sources, I decided that this would be a good enough starting point for my venture into Ottoman documentation.

Ambition and Excess: Hadjiyorgakis Kornesios

Fast-forwarding towards the end of my doctoral studies, and having left Hadjiyorgakis aside to focus on other issues of eighteenth-century Cyprus, I came across a reference to an edition of Cabi's *History*. After I browsed through various accounts of contemporary Ottoman historians, I had lost all hope of finding any mention of Hadjiyorgakis in chronicles of the period. This made perfect sense, given that the dragoman was executed in 1809. In the background of the turbulence caused by the deposition of two Sultans and the murder of Selim III, one would assume that Ottoman historians had bigger fish to fry than to comment on the execution of an out-of-favor provincial official. In my last attempt to find

Alexis Rappas, "Insularity and Ethnicity: The Dodecanese under Italian Colonial Rule," in *Mediterráneos: An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Cultures of the Mediterranean Sea*, eds. S. Carro Martin et al. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 263-174.

10 Başbakanlık Osmalı Arşivi (BOA) [Ottoman Archives of the Prime Ministry], Cevdet Adliye (C.ADL.) 2156.

something on Hadjiyorgakis, however, I came across the passage by Cabi's *History* quoted in the previous epigraph.

The story of Hadjiyorgakis has been told elsewhere,[11] and a range of studies offer a rare abundance of information on a particular historical actor.[12] I will therefore limit my analysis here to some of the more important facets of his life and times.

His ascendance to the position of dragoman meant that he had to coexist with the other two poles of power in Ottoman Cyprus at the time: the *muhassıl* (governor), and the Orthodox archbishop.[13] The balance of power between the three loci of power was neither consistent, nor determined by religious affiliation. Hadjiyorgakis' appointment as dragoman was acquired with the assistance of *muhassıl* Abdülbaki Ağa, with whom, however, he subsequently clashed in a power struggle.[14] Similarly, while the dragoman had allied himself with the bishops during his conflict with the *muhassıl*, his relationship with the prelates was tense.[15]

Once Abdülbaki was removed from power, the prelates were also stripped of their tax-collecting functions, having been found guilty of excessive taxation and irregularities.[16] With the simultaneous discrediting of both the bishops and

11 Antonis Hadjikyriacou, "The Province goes to the Center: the case of Hadjiyorgakis Kornesios, dragoman of Cyprus," in *Living in the Ottoman Realm: Sultans, Subjects, and Elites*, eds. Kent F. Schull and Christine Isom-Verhaaren (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, forthcoming 2014).

12 See indicatively, Theoharis Stavrides, "Cyprus 1750-1830. Administration and Society," in *Ottoman Cyprus*, eds. Michael, Gavriel and Kappler, 89-106; 100-141; Mette Pihler, ed. *A Dragoman's House.* (Copenhagen: Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture Publishers, 1993); Michalis N. Michaēl, *Ē Ekklēsia tēs Kyprou kata tēn Othōmanikē Periodo (1571-1878). H Stadiakē Sygkrotēsē tēs se ena Thesmo Politikēs Exousias* (Nicosia: Kentro Epistēmonikōn Ereunōn, 2005), 150-6; Euphrosynē Rizopoulou-Ēgoumenidou, "Ιστορική Μαρτυρία Ιωάννου Κορνάρου του Κρητός," in *Nea Eikona kai Istorikē Martyria Iōannou Kornarou tou Krētos*, eds. *eadem.* and Christodoulos Chatzēchristodoulou (Nicosia: Iera Mētropolis Pafou kai Vyzantino Mouseio Hōrepiskopēs Arsinoēs, 2000), 19-46; Nuri Çevikel, *Kıbrıs Eyaleti: Yönetim, Kilise, Ayan ve Halk (1750-1800). Bir Değişim Döneminin Anatomisi*. (Famagusta: Doğu Akdeniz Üniversitesi Basımevi, 2000), 86-89, 123-129.

13 Michalēs N. Michaēl, "Ο Μουχασίλης, ο Δραγομάνος, ο Αρχιεπίσκοπος και η Διεκδίκηση της Πολιτικής Εξουσίας στην Κύπρο της Οθωμανικής Περιφέρειας, 1789-1810," *Epetērida* 32 (2006): 229-237.

14 Stavrides, "Cyprus 1750-1830," 96.

15 Rizopoulou-Ēgoumenidou, "Ιστορική Μαρτυρία," 20.

16 BOA, C.ML. 26268; BOA, A.DVN.KBŞ. 27; Çevikel, *Kıbrıs Eyaleti*, 88-89.

the governor, Hadjiyorgakis emerged as the only credible official on the island, essentially controlling the right to administer tax-collection and overshadowing the *muhassıl* and the bishops. Hadjiyorgakis had assumed the title of "representative of the non-Muslims" (*reaya vekili*), allowing him a great degree of authority over the fiscal and political affairs of the community, as well as implying leadership over it.

From that point onwards, Hadjiyorgakis gradually but steadily proceeded to expand the realm of his authority either within or beyond what was legally permissible. Nonetheless, his power was not uncontested. Extant documents report the questioning of his authority in various shapes or forms, and at different stages of his career. Even before he was appointed dragoman, and when Hadjiyorgakis was still at the bottom level of the tax-collecting process, a collective petition reported the double charging of taxation on his behalf.[17] In 1790, Hadjiyorgakis reported violent opposition against his authority, when "certain bandits" had "secretly and in a violent manner" opposed the payment of taxes.[18] On a different level, there are three separate cases when individuals accused Hadjiyorgakis of illegally expropriating their fixed assets.[19] Finally, the biggest challenge against the dragoman took the form of an open revolt in 1804. In this year, he was assigned the collection of extraordinary taxes to cover the costs of the military expedition to Egypt during Napoleon's occupation.

In the aftermath of Muslim resistance to his tax-collecting authority, Hadjiyorgakis wrote to the Porte to explain the situation. In his petition, he described himself as "representative of the province" (*vilayet vekili*), clearly a step further from his previous title as "representative of the non-Muslims" (*reaya vekili*). This conveys a sense of an institutional identity implying authority over both communities of the island.

This is the only evidence for the use of this unprecedented title, and there is no extant documentation from Istanbul confirming or inaugurating such an appointment. On the one hand, the stretching of meanings of titles and its use to augment one's power through the projection of an institutional identity is frequently encountered in Ottoman Cyprus.[20] At the same time, if this were indeed

17 BOA, A.DVN.KBŞ, 1/25, undated petition of the *reaya*s of Cyprus.

18 BOA, C.ML. 3132, f. 1.

19 BOA, A.DVN.KBŞ, 1/25, order to the *molla* of Nicosia, last days of Receb 1198/9-19 of June 1784; BOA, A.DVN.KBŞ, 1/34. See also Çevikel, *Kıbrıs Eyaleti*, 232.

20 Hadjikyriacou, "Society and Economy," 176-189.

the case, it would be an extremely audacious move to write to the sultan adopting this title with no foundation whatsoever.

The fiscal authority endowed to certain officials was often used as justification to adopt titles that conveyed the sense of broader jurisdiction with reference to communal representation in Cyprus. The blurred boundaries between fiscal and administrative functions meant that tax-collecting was used as the means to project an institutional identity and legitimacy.[21] These issues are eloquently manifested in this particular episode, when Hadjiyorgakis essentially claims authority over the island as a whole, yet not in an entirely arbitrary fashion. The right to collect extraordinary taxes essentially gave authority to the dragoman over the island's Muslims and created a precedent that allowed him to project a particular institutional identity. Such a development, if unprecedented, was entirely in line with the gradual expansion of Hadjiyorgakis' fiscal and administrative functions. This was despite the fact that he was a non-Muslim, and mainly because he was able to perform these functions in a fashion that appeared efficient and effective from the vantage point of Istanbul.

Nonetheless, the several cases of complaints encountered above would justify, at the very least, the anticipation of irregularities or excesses in performing his fiscal and administrative functions. Indeed, the description of the procedure by Hadjiyorgakis himself in 1804 justifies the suspicions of those incredulous towards his intentions: the dragoman contracted a debt from various local lenders under his own name and paid the money on behalf of the Muslims. He then requested the assistance of the Porte in collecting the taxes from the Muslims to cover his expenses, including any interest incurred to his creditors.[22] This essentially meant that these costs compounded the original amount of the taxes, leaving ample space for constructive ambiguity where hidden profits would fit. The degree of the dragoman's profit-seeking activities through taxation exceeded what was normal, acceptable, or even sustainable on behalf of the tax-payers, and such transgressions prompted riots and revolts.

These considerations raise the issue of the degree of power that Hadjiyorgakis enjoyed which, if high enough, translated into unilateral actions. Whereas the equilibrium of power between different poles of authority inherently necessitated certain checks and balances that would limit the ambitions and excesses of powerful individuals, the dragoman was able to sideline these regulatory mechanisms,

21 *ibid*.

22 Iōannēs P. Theocharidēs, "Ανέκδοτα Οθωμανικά Έγγραφα για το Δραγομάνο της Κύπρου Χατζηγεωργάκη Κορνέσιο," in *Symmeikta Dragomanika tēs Kyprou* (Ioannina: Panepistēmio Iōanninōn, 1986), 29-30, 42-43, 53, (doc. 1).

and exert such a degree of control over the economy of the island to the extent that he jeopardized the very sustainability of surplus extraction. Indeed, this was the highest priority from the vantage point of Istanbul.

A chain of events that was nothing short of a watershed in the history of Cyprus vividly illustrate these observations: in 1802, Hadjiyorgakis had managed to concentrate and illegally export the vast majority of the island's cereal production. The grain was transported to Spain, where prices were inflated due to the Napoleonic wars. In the meantime, the local population in Cyprus experienced famine. Two years later, rumors of another imminent dearth due to grain hoarding, alongside the above-described collection of extraordinary taxes created an explosive mix that led to the outbreak of riots, followed by a two year-long period of chains of revolts and instability. While Hadjiyorgakis managed to escape to Istanbul unscathed, he was ultimately executed in 1809.[23]

Yet, the dragoman made sure he left with a bang: after his execution it emerged that he had incurred several debts of almost 1.3 million kuruş spent on 'communal affairs'. Since Hadjiyorgakis was the representative of the province (*vilayet vekili*), this essentially meant that the people of Cyprus were responsible for the dragoman's debts.[24] This kind of financial breakdown was unprecedented, as Hadjiyorgakis was not just 'too big to fail', but was the biggest one of all. In short, a collapse of the financial system came about by the collective long-term indebtedness of the Muslims and non-Muslims of the island to the creditors of the dragoman.

Turning "the country to the nest of crow and owl": Hacı Abdülbaki Ağa

While concentrating and processing documents on Hadjiyorgakis for the purposes of my doctoral research, I quickly realized that Ottoman documentation relevant to his person was overlapping with another dominant figure of the period: Hacı Abdülbaki Ağa. His life unravels as a colorful and controversial story of social mobility.

Abdülbaki has been depicted by Greek-Cypriot historians as emblematic of the iniquitous nature of Ottoman rule. Discourses of the period attach the most negative of adjectives to his name, and Kyprianos, a local contemporary chronicler, paints the period of Abdülbaki's rule with the gloomiest of colors. So much so that one would even be tempted to take his bitter account with a pinch of

23 Hadjikyriacou, "The Province goes to the Center".

24 BOA, C.ML. 3801, f.1.

salt, especially when taking into consideration the author's propensity to liberally shed venom at anyone who opposed the interests, ideology, and legitimacy of the clerical hierarchy of the time. Nevertheless, as far the factual aspect of Kyprianos' account of the period is concerned, he was fairly accurate and often confirmed by Ottoman documentation.[25]

Leaving the moralistic assessment of Abdülbaki aside, his case is a particularly useful example of how one could reach the position of *muhassıl*, his patronage networks, and more importantly the economic logic of such an individual. Nonetheless, the phenomena described have been observed elsewhere in the empire and, more than anything, their explanation lies in the nature of the period under examination. For example, the case of Hacı Ali Haseki, *voyvoda* of Athens, is strikingly similar.[26]

One of the features that make Abdülbaki a particularly interesting case is that he was a local of humble rural background. As such, he did not fit the usual pattern of Ottoman officials who were appointed to the position. A timber-carrier, one-eyed, and illiterate, he entered the Ottoman military from the ranks of irregular soldiers (*levend*s).[27] He managed to steadily climb to the top of provincial hierarchy by occupying several positions of authority that allowed him to become a major player in the financial and commercial affairs of the island, and develop complex business and personal relations with the European consuls involving bills of exchange.[28] At the same time, he ensured that his patrons in Istanbul were powerful enough to let him get away with virtually anything.

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25 Archimandritēs Kyprianos, *Istoria Chronologikē tēs Nēsou Kyprou. Ekdosis Palligennēsias.* Reprint of 1788 edition. (Nicosia: Etairia Kypriakōn Spoudōn, 1971), 326-330.

26 See generally Katerina Stathi, "A Confrontation of Sources for the History of Athens in the Late 18th Century," unpublished paper presented at the Princeton University workshop "The Greek Experience Under Ottoman Rule," Santorini, June 23-24, 2007; Johann Strauss "Ottoman Rule Experienced and Remembered: Remarks on Some Local Greek Chronicles," in *The Ottomans and the Balkans: A Discussion of Historiography*, eds. Fikret Adanir and Suraiya Faroqhi (Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill, 2002), 208-214; Spyros I. Asdrachas, *Viōsē kai Katagrafē tou Oikonomikou: Ē Martyria tēs Apomnēmoneusēs*. (Athens: Ethniko Idryma Ereunōn, 2007), 214-238.

27 Kyprianos, *Istoria*, 326; Athanasios Komnēnos Ypsēlantēs, *Ekklesiastikōn kai Politikōn tōn eis Dōdeka Bibliōn H' Th' kai I' Ētoi Ta Meta tēn Alōsin (1453-1789),* ed. Archimandritēs Germanos Afthonides Sinaïtēs, Second Edition (Athens: Ekdoseis Karabia, 1972), 636.

28 Edhem Eldem, *French Trade in Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century*. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 113-173; Giustiniana Migliardi O'Riordan, ed., *Archivio del Consolato Veneto a Cipro (fine sec. XVII–inizio XIX)* (Venice: Archivio di Stato di Venezia, 1991), *passim.*; Paschalēs M.

The aforementioned conflict between Abdülbaki and Hadjiyorgakis could only be resolved through its transfer to Istanbul, where the perpetual animosity between the Grand Vizier and the *Kapudan* Pasha, who were the *muhassıl*'s and dragoman's respective patrons, was employed for the final resolution of the affair.[29] Other accusations against Abdülbaki came to the assistance of the dragoman, and a collective petition by the *ulema* and Muslim notables of Cyprus was sent to Istanbul. It lists no less than twenty five accusations against Abdülbaki, and pleads for his dismissal and exile.

Apart from the usual vague accusations of illegal exactions and the formulaic language of "oppression and transgression" (*zülm ü ta'adi*), more novel crimes, and detailed descriptions thereof, include: taking possession of inheritances; forcibly taking money as alleged loans by producing false witnesses at the court; causing the divorce of married women (again, by producing false witnesses at the court) and taking them into his custody; forcibly taking donkeys, cotton, and silk; coercing people to sell their produce at cheap prices; exporting grain to Europe when the island was in need of cereals; diverting the water supply of the Selimiye (Aya Sofya) mosque of Nicosia to his *çiftlik*s thus starving the city of water; forcing the writing of false petitions in his defense; stealing the stamps of court officials and forging an *i'lam* stating that the complaints against him were slanders; imprisoning the dragoman Hadjiyorgakis, falsely claiming that he owed him money, and commissioning an attempt to his life; including five- and six-year-old children in the registers to reduce the per-capita nominal tax rate; demolishing the houses of those unable to pay their taxes and taking the timber as payment; refusing to cooperate with the authorities during the investigation against him; and, finally, being rebellious, and entrenching himself in the citadels of the island with bands

Kitromēlidēs, *Koinōnikes Sheseis kai Nootropies stēn Kypro tou Dekatou Ogdoou Aiōna* (Nicosia: Sugkrotēma Laïkēs Trapezas, Ekpaideutiko kai Politistiko Kentro, 1992), 31-34 (doc. 8).

29 Nikodēmos [Mylōnas, Metropolitan of Kition], "Ανέκδοτα Ιστορικά Έγγραφα," *Kypriaka Chronika*, 3 (1925): 171-233; for Abdülbaki's version of events see BOA, A.DVN.KBŞ 1/22; BOA, C.ML. 26268; Sir George Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, vol. 4: *The Ottoman Province, The British Colony*, ed. Sir Harry Luke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 96-99; Kyprianos, *Istoria*, 328-330; Ypsēlantēs, *Ta Meta tēn Alōsin*, 636-638, 640. On patronage networks in general, Suraiya Faroqhi, "Political Activity among Ottoman Taxpayers and the Problem of Sultanic Legitimation (1570-1650)," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 35 (1992): 2-3; *eadem.*, "Civilian Society and Political Power in the Ottoman Empire: A Report on Research in Collective Biography (1480-1830)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17 (1985): 109-117.

of armed men.[30] Under the weight of such accusations, and having to deal with a powerful rival patronage network, Abdülbaki's position was dire.

He was dismissed, only to be reappointed *muhassıl* shortly thereafter. By taking advantage of the new configurations in Istanbul after the dismissal of the Grand Vizier Halil Pasha, Abdülbaki became close to the *Şeyhülislam*. Through various bribes and new patrons, he was about to return triumphant to the island.[31] As another petition dramatically explains, the news came to Cyprus like a bombshell. In a desperate tone, the inhabitants of the island explain how "for eight consecutive years [he has] infested us, [has been] usurping our properties, violating our lands, and with various oppressions we were left without power and strength, scattered, dispersed, disturbed, and disappearing, and everything was left in ruins." The *müfti* was so terrorized by the prospect of Abdülbaki's revenge, that upon receiving the news that he was reappointed as *muhassıl*, he fled to Damascus with his family. He was soon followed by all the *ulema*, notables, and many people who rushed to escape the wrath of Abdülbaki. The petition reached a crescendo with a final plea to the Sultan to show mercy to the people and revoke the appointment "for the sake of God, your sacred imperial head, and the heads of our lords, the exalted young princes."[32] The dramatic tone did the trick. An enraged Sultan Abdülhamid I commented: "how could this faithless man become *muhassıl* again? […] This kind of support for oppression is not met with my most exalted approval."[33]

It is worth at this stage to consider certain questions arising from the relevant documentation. The anguish of the authors is evident and the language used against him is damning. In a typical example, the *kadı* of Nicosia wrote of his "satanic tricks".[34] Even if we allow for a certain degree of exaggeration, there can be little doubt about the violent nature of his rule and his abuse of specific characteristics of the economy. Yet, an important question remains unanswered on what appears as an orchestrated and almost universal appeal for the end of Abdülbaki's rule: why had there been no recorded complaints previously? This is in sharp contrast to the tone of the post-1784 petitions, but also established practice. As Kyprianos (bitterly) informs, and archival documents confirm, Cypriots would often comp-

30 BOA, A.DVN.KBM. 1/40.

31 BOA, C.DH. 6699, undated petition (*'arzuhal*) of the inhabitants of Cyprus; Ypsēlantēs, *Ta Meta tēn Alōsin*, 640.

32 *ibid*.

33 BOA, C.DH. 6699, undated *hatt-ı hümayun* by Sultan Abdülhamid I.

34 BOA, A.DVN.KBŞ. 1/31.

lain to the authorities about the abuses of local dignitaries.[35] If the situation was so grave, why did the central bureaucracy have no idea about it? Or, to put the question more accurately, why were complaints not sent previously?

This prompts the question of what triggered the initial complaint against Abdülbaki in 1784 by the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the dragoman Hadjiyorgakis. The only source that provides an answer to this question is the English consul Michael De Vezin. He points out that Abdülbaki was the only *muhassıl* who had managed to keep his position for such an extended period of time, contrary to the usual practice of year-long appointments. He attributes this to the support of the archbishop and his patronage networks in Istanbul. This relationship came to an end in 1784 when the commercial interests of the *muhassıl* and the bishops conflicted, causing the all-out clash between the two sides.[36] Kyprianos also confirms that the higher clergy supported Abdülbaki in becoming *muhassıl*,[37] just as Hadjiyorgakis was originally appointed dragoman with the support of Abdülbaki.[38] Thus, the lack of complaints prior to 1784 is explicable by the cooperation and mutual assistance between the *muhassıl,* the prelates and/or the dragoman. In fact, this is a phenomenon observed throughout the eighteenth century.[39] A similar situation can be assumed for the Muslim notables who despite their vociferous denunciation of Abdülbaki's rule in their petitions, remained silent for most of the period. In short, there was a configuration of consensus between the island's main power-holders, during which they saw no reason to inform the capital of the serious problems in local administration.

The official inquiry into the conduct of Abdülbaki estimated that over nine years he had collected more than 16,000 *kise* (8,000,000 kuruş).[40] This figure is by far the biggest I have encountered in Cyprus, both in current and constant prices. This was more than half the central Ottoman treasury's revenue for that year (14.5 million kuruş).[41] Bearing this in mind, the description of the situation on the

35 Kyprianos, *Istoria*, 314-315, 317, 329.

36 Michael De Vezin, "De Vezin," in *Excerpta Cypria*, ed. Cobham, 368.

37 Kyprianos, *Istoria*, 327. He implies, however, that they were cheated.

38 Stavrides, "Administration and Society," 96.

39 Alexander De Groot, art. "Kubrus," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition; Michaēl, "Ο Μουχασίλης," 229-237.

40 BOA, HAT 4122.

41 Erol Özvar, "Osmanlı Devletinin Bütçe Harcamaları (1509-1788)," in *Osmanlı Maliyesi. Kurumlar ve Bütçeler*, eds., Mehmet Genç and Erol Özvar (Istanbul: Osmanlı Bankası Arşiv ve Araştırma Merkezi, 2006), 220.

island in the relevant report is hardly surprising: "the country will be a destitute and desolate place" (literally: "the country will be the nest of crow and owl").[42]

The affair ended with the exile of Abdülbaki and his appointment as customs officer (*gümrük emini*) at Jaffa. It is particularly intriguing that he was appointed to a profitable post of a Mediterranean entrepôt – hardly a punitive exercise. There is no mentioning of an official sentence or a confiscation. Abdülbaki engaged in his usual transactions during his time in Jaffa, like being involved in the market for bills of exchange, while debts owed to him from Cypriots were still considered valid.[43] In other words, despite the Sultanic wrath, it appears that Abdülbaki's patrons were still able to secure a decent retirement post.

Behind the Scenes: Sarkis, a Consular Dragoman in Ottoman Cyprus

The consistent nature of the documentation pertinent to Hadjiyorgakis and Abdülbaki prompted me to look for other similar cases with a critical mass of material on. Browsing through my notes, summaries and documents, I noticed that the name "Sarkis, son of Ovak" appeared in a frequency that rivaled the two actors examined above.[44] Upon further research, I quickly discovered that Ottoman documentation on Sarkis was unexpectedly gradually being complimented by several scattered references in travelers' accounts or secondary literature that no one had put together in the past in reconstructing the portrait of an impressive figure.[45]

The emerging picture portrays a rich merchant, employed at the French and English consulates, enjoying the benefits of this protection, and who was very well connected to the centers of political and economic power of the island. This is nothing new. The power, wealth, and entrepreneurial activities of consular staff are well-documented throughout the empire, and several studies have elaborated on this issue. What makes his case valuable, however, is the fact that it is possible to document in detail the ways with which he was able to manipulate several factors

42 "memleketleri āşyāne-i būm ve ġurāb olaca[ḳ]". HAT 4122.

43 BOA, D.BŞM.MHF. 76/1; BOA, D.BŞM.MHF. 76/65; BOA, D.BŞM.MHF. 77/19; BOA, D.BŞM.MHF. 77/38; BOA, C.ML. 5221; BOA, C.ML. 30133; BOA, C.ML. 25166; BOA, C.HR. 6653; BOA, C.HR. 6997.

44 Thanks to the kind assistance of Maurits van den Boogert, I was able to locate the following additional references to Sarkis: The National Archives, State Papers [henceforth TNA, SP] 105/190, p. 90; November 12, 1798; SP 105/190, p. 117: May 30, 1799; SP 105/190, p. 139, September 12, 1799; BOA, ED 51, p. 8.

45 See also Sir Harry Luke, *Cyprus Under the Turks, 1571-1878* (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), 112-114.

in the diplomatic, legal, and economic arena to his advantage through his many connections. His story is important as far as it reveals the path to success (and eventual persecution) of someone who was outside the official state apparatus.

His most valuable asset was that he was a consular dragoman; more precisely, an honorary dragoman i.e., he was less of an interpreter and more of a commercial intermediary, offering his knowledge of the local market and extensive trading links. Sarkis came from a family of merchants-cum-dragomans. His father was also dragoman of the French consulate, and Sarkis succeeded him in 1777.[46] His brother, Aretin, occupied the same position for the Dutch consulate and was also succeeded by his own son.[47] Sarkis and Aretin were business partners, and appear as major lenders in a register of communal debts.[48] Sarkis' son was also a *beratlı*, and had as his 'servant', as the rules of the capitulations had it, a member of the well-known and rich Greek-Orthodox family of Karydis, also deeply rooted in consular services.[49] The family's deep relationship with trade is also revealed by a joint export venture of Aretin with Hadjiyorgakis Kornesios in 1786.[50] Additionally, the two brothers appear in the list of subscribers for Kyprianos' *History*. The book was the first Cypriot attempt towards a late-eighteenth century synthesis of enlightenment and religious historiography, and the two brothers' subscription is another indication of their degree of integration with the small circle of educated Greek-Orthodox administrative, religious, and merchant elites. They were the only non-Greek Orthodox subscribers, save for a Russian priest in Venice.[51]

Sarkis was originally working for the French, and following Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, the Ottomans responded by shutting down French consulates. As a French protégé, his property was confiscated. Sarkis quickly moved to reinstate his position by offering his services to the English, and the consul requested the

46 Thoukydidēs P. Iōannou, *Emporikes Sheseis Kyprou-Gallias Kata to 18o Aiōna.* (Nicosia: Politistikes Ypēresies Ypourgeiou Paideias, 2002), 58.

47 BOA, KBM 1/14, f. 2; Mehmet Akif Erdoğru, "Onsekizinci Yüzyıl Sonlarında Kıbrıs'ta Avrupalı Konsoloslar ve Tercümanları," *İkinci Uluslararası Kıbrıs Araştırmaları Kongresi. 24-27 Kasım 1998*. vol. 2, eds. İsmail Bozkurt, Hüseyin Ateşin, M. Kansu (Famagusta: Doğu Akdeniz Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1999), 319; Ioannēs P. Theocharidēs, "Το Καθεστώς του Δραγομάνου του Ολλανδικού Προξενείου στην Κύπρο επί Τουρκοκρατίας," in *Symmeikta Dragomanika*, 74-79, 84-88, 95-96 (docs. 3-4).

48 BOA, C.ADL. 2737; Nikodēmos, "Ανέκδοτα Ιστορικά Έγγραφα," 222-228.

49 This was Krikor. TNA, SP 105/190, p. 117, 30 May 1799; SP 105/190, p. 139, 12 September 1799. The 'servant', in reality someone who benefited from capitulatory status, was Konstantinos, son of Andronikos Karydis.

50 Çevikel, *Kıbrıs Eyaleti*, 287.

51 Kyprianos, *Istoria*, 404.

issuing of a *berat* for his new dragoman-cum-commercial intermediary. The Ottoman authorities flatly rejected the request, perhaps rather unexpectedly. The consul called upon his ambassador in Istanbul, Lord Elgin, to push for Sarkis' appointment and re-instatement of his property. The ambassador exerted a great degree of pressure to the Porte, but to no avail.[52]

During this period, the Ottoman state was deeply concerned about the manipulation of the rules of the capitulations, and keen to take action to re-establish its authority. There was widespread concern about dragomans who were conspicuously not performing their specified duties, and simply sought *beratlı* status to acquire European protection, evade taxation and gain a more competitive position in trade through lower customs duties.[53]

The English consul and ambassador were not deterred by the Porte's refusal, and continued to push for the appointment of Sarkis and re-instatement of his property. Lord Elgin "petitioned [this case] with the repeated submission of notes, and no matter how many times the necessary replies were given, he was even more persistent."[54] In the continuing refusal of the Ottoman authorities to allow the appointment of Sarkis, the English became more aggressive, and elevated it to an issue that might have affected relations between the two states, forcing a discussion of the problem with the Ottoman ambassador in London, Ismail Efendi. After repeated discussions in London, continuing pressure from the English, and the relevant recommendations by Ismail Efendi, it was decided that the request would be permitted by Sultanic command, as a token of the sincere and honest relations between the two states.[55] One can imagine Selim III dragging his hand while unwillingly writing his rescript on the relevant document: "let it be permitted".[56]

Clearly, the issue was blown out of proportion. It would be naïve to accept in an unqualified manner the fact that a petty dragoman at a provincial consulate could have disturbed the bilateral relations of England and the Ottoman Empire. Much more important dynamics were at play here.

A better understanding of the affair can be reached if it is placed in the context of the relations of European powers with the Ottoman Empire at the time, and the debates on the extents and limits of the meaning of the capitulations. While

52 BOA, HAT 15333.

53 Maurits van den Boogert, *The Capitulations and the Ottoman Legal System: Qadis, Consuls, and berātlıs in the 18th Century* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2005), 105-112.

54 BOA, HAT 15333.

55 *ibid.*; Luke, *Cyprus Under the Turks,* 112-114.

56 BOA, HAT 15333, undated *hatt-ı hümayun* by Sultan Selim III.

one may assume that a certain degree of prestige and diplomatic bullying was involved, it would be too simplistic to leave it at that. Sarkis had something to offer to the English consulate in Cyprus. Having already been a protégé of the French, he was a seasoned merchant. The prospect of incorporating within the English consulate someone who was well-acquainted with the French trading networks in Cyprus must have been attractive, particularly so when Napoleon was invading Egypt and the French consulate on the island was closed down. Regardless of the complex reasons behind this affair, there can be little doubt about who the eventual beneficiary was. Sarkis managed to cancel the confiscation of his estate and acquire the position of dragoman. This was no small achievement considering that little more than a dozen people held that status in Cyprus at the time.[57]

Equally, if not more, controversial was the confiscation of Sarkis' estate following his death. This was an affair that lasted several years, and is richly documented in the Ottoman archives by a collection of detailed reports from various officials involved in the process.[58] In accordance with the usual procedure, an inquiry officer (*mübaşir*) was sent from Istanbul in order to calculate the value of Sarkis' estate. The original report stated that the confiscation could not take place because the amount of money in arrears was in excess of the total value of the inheritance: the assets of Sarkis totaled 79,859 kuruş, whereas his arrears amounted to 98,044 kuruş.[59]

Complications arose when the *kadı* informed Istanbul that serious irregularities took place during this investigation, questioning the validity of these figures. According to this report, Sarkis' assets were hidden in order to present the accounts at a loss, thus preventing the confiscation. The *kadı* reported that the real transactions register of Sarkis had been hidden, and that the family had given various amounts of money to certain officials in order to prevent investigators from finding the cash: 50,000 kuruş worth of gold was allegedly entrusted to the Armenian bishop of Cyprus; 50,000 kuruş to the *muhassıl*; 25,000 kuruş to the *na'ib* of Nicosia; and 15,000 kuruş to the *müfti* – in total 140,000 kuruş.[60] The accusations also involved the inquiry officer Abdi Efendi, who was also accused of "connivance and negligence."[61]

57 van den Boogert, *Capitulations*, 90.
58 BOA, C.ML. 4890.
59 *ibid.*, f. 2.
60 *ibid.*, ff. 3-6.
61 *ibid.*, f. 6.

These allegations were the tip of the iceberg. According to the same report, during the investigation large volumes of cash crops and commodities were found in Sarkis' warehouses. The most impressive claim concerns 30,000 *kile*s (769.68-923.62 metric tons) of grain. If this was true, then one merchant kept twice as much as what was reportedly illegally exported to Europe in 1784 by Abdülbaki (15,000 *kile*s),[62] and the equivalent of three-quarters of the total amount of grain required from the whole island by the Ottoman military in 1800 (40,000 *kile*s).[63]

As evidence for the wealth of Sarkis, the *kadı* points to the luxurious family residence, confirming the description of a visiting Englishman encountered above.[64] Other European travelers hosted in the mansion further elaborated on the dazzling exhibits of riches, conspicuous consumption and displays of power by a man prestigious enough to regularly make his home available to visiting foreigners of some stature:

> At Lefkosia [Nicosia] we are very hospitably entertained by an Armenian merchant, of the name of Sarkes, who is an English baratli, and under that protection has amassed a considerable property, and lives in splendour; he and his relations seem to occupy all the principal offices of the island held by the Christians, such as interpreter and banker to the Mutesellim, or deputy of the Qapudan Pasha, collector of the contributions of the Christians, head of the Christian community &c.[65]
>
> I dismounted at Nicosia, at the house of a rich Armenian merchant called Sarkis. The house he lives in, recently built by himself, is very large, well decorated and luxuriously furnished. This show of luxury in the house of a Christian proves the mildness of the Government in Cyprus. Throughout Asia Minor no rayah dare make such show of this.[66]

The residence was not included in the probate register because the court accepted that Sarkis had transferred it to his children prior to his death. The *kadı* also stated that upon Sarkis' death, the family rushed to purchase extremely expensive luxury household goods, furniture and upholstery worth 100,000 kuruş, thus converting cash in order to prevent its confiscation. By claiming that these are household items, and therefore part of the house, they were technically not

62 BOA, A.DVN.KBM. 1/40.

63 BOA, C.AS. 5835.

64 W. M. Leake, "Leake" in *Excerpta Cypria*, ed. Cobham, 338-339.

65 Clarke, "Clarke," 386-387.

66 L. A. Corancez, "Excerpta Cypria: Corancez," in *Kypiaka Chronika* 1 (1923): 152.

the property of the deceased. The *na'ib* of Nicosia was implicated in this episode, something that casts shadows over the court's acceptance of the transfer documents from Sarkis to his children.[67] Finally, it is estimated that that the real value of Sarkis' assets amounted to 1,000 *kise* (500,000 kuruş) in total, more than ten times the official amount of 49,859 kuruş.[68] These accusations notwithstanding, subsequent investigations revealed no new proof, and the original probate register was officially accepted. The confiscation was therefore cancelled, and the inheritance left to the family.[69]

Biography of an Ottoman Island

The stories that started taking shape after I had finished studying these three individuals during my research were, if anything, a colorful read and I decided that putting them together would make a good chapter. Once I started thinking about their overlapping narratives, the most important common thread was the impressive amount of wealth they all accumulated, even by Cypriot standards. Abdülbaki gained a total of 8 million kuruş during his governorship, an amount that was more than half the central Ottoman treasury's revenue for that year; Hadjiyorgakis' property was reputedly 5.5 million kuruş; Sarkis' residence was described as a "grand three-door mansion containing one hundred rooms, all of them exquisitely furnished".[70]

Sarkis, Abdülbaki, and Hadjiyorgakis, incidentally all of them Cypriot and representative of the three main religious communities on the island, demonstrated an acute entrepreneurial spirit, with extensive trading and financial activities. They were deeply involved in the grain, cotton, and silk trade, the three main products of the island, often exporting large quantities of goods legally or illegally. They had privileged access to administrators who either openly helped them, or were looking the other way. Their deep knowledge and experience of the political, economic, and commercial networks of the island, as well as the Levant and Istanbul, were particularly beneficial. Hadjiyorgakis had some bones to pick with Mehmet Ali, governor of Egypt, who confiscated one of the dragoman's ships;[71] while Sarkis and Abdülbaki appear to have been engaged in several financial tran-

67 BOA, C.ML. 4890, f. 4; see also MAD 972, f. 240.

68 BOA, C.ML. 4890, f. 3 marginal note (*derkenar*) dated 18 Ramazan 1225/17 October 1810.

69 BOA, C.ML. 4890, f. 8.

70 BOA, C.ML. 4890, f. 4

71 BOA, C.ML. 19843

sactions involving debts and bills of exchange in Jerusalem.[72] As a result of their involvement in all sorts of affairs and transactions, they were also the subject of complaints and accusations, and they frequently appear in court disputes.

Their official titles obscure much more than what they reveal about the range of their activities. A dragoman was not just an interpreter, and a *muhassıl* was not just a tax-farmer. A great deal of other capacities should be added to the ones recognized and assigned to by the Ottoman state, an issue pointed out by Christine Philliou and Palmira Brummett.[73] These men were at the same time entrepreneurs, moneylenders, financiers, merchants, and political players, with extensive networks of commercial and financial activity. At a different level, the growing literature on intermediaries in Mediterranean 'contact zones' puts under scrutiny particular individuals who were able to traverse the fluid cultural, linguistic and identity boundaries of the early-modern world, illustrating how rigid understandings of these analytical categories inhibit the conceptualization of individual and collective agents.[74] The three cases examined here fit perfectly into this category of intermediaries.

Alongside two high-profile state functionaries who are central to any history of the period (Abdülbaki and Hadjiyorgakis), Sarkis is a little-known figure, and one who did not occupy any official state position. Yet, he emerges as an important factor in the economic and social life of Cyprus. The interaction of a non-state actor with the Ottoman state lends important insights into the position, influence, and relationship of individuals positioned in the middle-to-upper level of society – but clearly more towards the upper side.

These men not only benefited from the readjustments of center-province relations at various stages, but they were also sometimes instrumental in the

72 BOA, D.BŞM.MHF. 76/1; BOA, D.BŞM.MHF. 76/65; BOA, D.BŞM.MHF. 77/19; BOA, D.BŞM.MHF. 77/38; BOA, C.ML. 5221; BOA, C.ML. 30133; BOA, C.ML. 25166; BOA, C.HR. 6653; BOA, C.HR. 6997.

73 Christine Philliou, "Mischief in the Old Regime: Provincial dragomans and Social Change at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 25 (2001): 119; Palmira Brummett, *Ottoman Seapower and Levantine Diplomacy in the Age of Discovery* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 14.

74 E. Natalie Rothman "Interpreting Dragomans: Boundaries and Crossings in the Early Modern Mediterranean," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51 (2009): 771-773; *eadem.*, *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2012), 4; Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* 91 (1990): 34; also *eadem.*, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Second Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

formulation of these readjustments. Hadjiyorgakis and Abdülbaki in particular, were recipients of fiscal authority devolved from Istanbul to Cyprus, and were able to negotiate, and even stretch the meaning of the terms that prescribed their authority and power. In that, they occupied lofty positions in the tax-collecting pyramid and administration of the island. Their positioning in the credit nexus meant that they could efficiently and effectively transfer large amounts of money to the Ottoman coffers at times of need, be it with the use of bills of exchange, or their own financial networks.[75]

The growing provisioning needs of the Ottoman state from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards opened a wide range of opportunities for all three of them. Their role in urban-rural relations meant that they were able to concentrate large amounts of key goods – a major asset for both the Ottoman state and foreign consulates. At the same time, the position they occupied in the economic, social, or political life of the island meant that their removal would be tantamount to a complete dismantling of their networks and a restructuring of complex systems of power. This explains their indispensability, why they occupied their positions for so long, as well as the spectacular fashion in which they fell out of favor.

At the same time, this is a period when the Ottoman state is actually not raising its demands from Cypriot taxpayers. The analysis of revenue data from the period between 1785 and 1799 reveals that there is a rise in current (nominal) prices of 75.62%, i.e. an annual rise of roughly 5%.[76] However, taking inflation and debasement into consideration changes the picture dramatically. If we account for inflation, the annual rise in taxes is 1.78%, while if we convert the currency to bullion in order to consider the declining silver content of the kuruş, we notice that Istanbul's revenue was only rising by a meager 0.25% per year.[77] This is also a period when the rise of imports of luxury goods had changed the balance of trade of Cyprus.[78] If this is an indication of a certain growth in the economy, and in view of the fact that increased revenue did not accrue to the Ottoman state in the form of taxes, then the question of who benefited from the surplus of the island is raised. The obvious answer is that it was men like Hadjiyorgakis, Abdülbaki and Sarkis, confirming, and giving further substance to, the observations regarding

75 Hadjikyriacou, "Society and Economy," 170-176, 181-204, 238-274.

76 BOA, C.ML. 12909, f. 2.

77 Inflation is calculated here according to the Consumer Price Index and silver content of the Ottoman currency provided in Şevket Pamuk, *İstanbul ve Diğer Kentlerde 500 Yıllık Fiyatlar ve Ücretler, 1469-1998* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, 2000): 16. For the full analysis, see Hadjikyriacou, "Society and Economy," 156-158.

78 Iōannou, *Emporikes Sheseis*, 280, 312-312, 320.

the rise of local entrepreneurs in the Ottoman Empire and the Mediterranean at large during this period.[79]

The profit-seeking behavior encountered in eighteenth-century Cyprus is typical of what Ottoman documentation rather formulaically describes as "oppression and transgression" (*zulm ü ta'adi*). Petitions against Abdülbaki are particularly graphic on the description of several crimes that go beyond what is usually known of the actions of petty and great *ayan*, while his fortune rivalled the annual revenue of the Ottoman treasury. This was immediately followed by a period dominated by the dragoman Hadjiyorgakis Kornesios, whose activities culminated in causing a famine through grain hoarding. At the same time, Sarkis' warehouses could supply 75% of the amount of cereals requisitioned from the whole of the island in 1800. One is struck not only by the degree of control such men had over production, but also by the fact that the economy was even functioning, let alone surplus-producing.

Conclusion: Towards Insular Space as an Analytical Category

Having finished the chapter with these questions in mind, I left Sarkis, Abdülbaki and Hadjiyorgakis to rest, and proceeded to write the remaining eight chapters wondering what was it that made the economy sustainable. I was puzzled by the question of how it was possible for a Cypriot to accumulate a fortune that amounted to a substantial proportion of the Ottoman budget. A few decades later, and as if this was not enough, it was not until the manipulation of a staple food market that a revolt would take place, marking the tipping point of a whole system of power on the island.

The study of these three individuals directed me to two variables while trying to understand the economy and society of Cyprus that was clearly sustainable to a large extent, before it would collapse under the weight of someone who monopolized power and gravely disturbed the distribution of resources: the productive capacities of the island, and the ability of key individuals to control its economic structures. What was the constant that bound the two together?

Towards the end of my research, and when I was able to have a more holistic picture, I felt that I came to full circle, and my impression that space could be this constant was further enhanced. An understanding of the Cypriot insularity cannot afford to ignore the relationship between space and productive structures.

79 Faruk Tabak, *The Waning of the Mediterranean, 1550-1870: A Geohistorical Approach* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 177.

Put simply, Cyprus was large enough and had the geological and climatic conditions for a cash-crop oriented economy where international trade occupied a vital role. Other aspects of my research demonstrate that the means and ability to concentrate the rural surplus took complex forms and had a range of social and political ramifications in Ottoman Cyprus. Consequently, funneling the island's key products to ports, warehouses, and workshops were central elements for the career of any local power-broker.

What Braudel formulated as 'miniature continents' – referring to the economies, societies and cultures of the larger Mediterranean islands – can function as a conceptual framework here. To better understand the different attributes of various categories of insular space, consider the vast majority of the smaller Aegean islands, where geography, ecology and productive structures were conducive to trade and population mobility (but not a cash-crop agricultural economy), leading Spyros Asdrachas to call the Aegean a "dispersed, liquid city".[80]

The dense links formed due to these conditions in the Aegean led to an important degree of mutual dependency and cohesion within communities, even if this cohesion was not beyond corrodibility.[81] Such communities were characterized by "solidarity and collective responsibility" in matters of taxation, while "mutual control became a necessity, and individual freedom was subordinated to the common interest".[82] So much so, that interest-free loans to the community were recorded.[83] Other communities situated in continental spatial settings also demonstrated a notable sense of communal solidarity, to the extent that Socrates Petmezas described "the rules and values of a 'moral economy' which provided for the reproduction of local societies".[84] Local notables who had a vested long-term

80 Asdrachas, "The Greek Archipelago", 235-248

81 Spyros I. Asdrachas, "Νησιωτικές κοινότητες: οι φορολογικές λειτουργίες (I)," *Ta Istorika/Historica* 5 (1988): 3-36; *idem.*, "Νησιωτικές κοινότητες: οι φορολογικές λειτουργίες (II)," *Ta Istorika/Historica* 5 (1988): 229-258.

82 Gilles Veinstein, "İnalcık's views on the Ottoman Eighteenth Century and the Fiscal Problem," in *The Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Kate Fleet, Special Issue of *Oriente Moderno* 17 (1999): 9.

83 Asdrachas, "Νησιωτικές κοινότητες (II)," 238.

84 Socrates D. Petmezas, "Christian Communities in Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Greece: Their Fiscal Functions," *Princeton Papers* 12 (2005): 77-85; *idem.*, "Διαχείριση των Κοινοτικών Οικονομικών και Κοινοτική Κυριαρχία. Η Στρατηγική των Προυχόντων: Ζαγορά 1784-1822," *Mnēmon* 13 (1991): 77-102; Spyros Asdrachas, "Φορολογικές και Περιοριστικές Λειτουργίες των Κοινοτήτων στην Τουρκοκρατία," *Ta Istorika* 3 (1986): 45-63; Giōrgos D. Kontogiōrges, *Koinōnikē Dynamikē kai Politikē Autodioikēsē: oi Ellēnikes Koinotētes tēs Tourkokratias* (Athens: Nea Synora, 1982).

interest in the sustainability of the community felt compelled to pay attention to its internal cohesion and tax-paying capacity in order to ensure their future profit opportunities through tax-collection, despite certain exceptions to this rule. These are precisely the self-regulatory processes that appear less rigorous and to be functioning to a lesser degree in Cyprus, as these three cases of intermediaries colorfully illustrate.

Taking these issues into consideration, one is better situated to answer the question of what explains the sustainability of the Cypriot economy, and provide an alternative conceptualization of the presence and realm of activities of men like Hadjiyorgakis, Abdülbaki and Sarkis who appeared in succession, but also overlapped with each other during a time-span of fifty years. Large islands with a cash-crop oriented agricultural economy had very different needs and productive structures to the ones encountered, for example, in the Aegean islands, and relations of social and economic power developed accordingly. Put simply, Cyprus was big and productive enough to have a sizeable surplus, and at the same time contained enough to permit the creation of a commercial and credit nexus that facilitated the efficient and effective concentration of production to satisfy the interests of state, private agents, or both.[85]

Exploring insularity and insular space comes with an important caveat: it is too easy to lean towards the idiosyncratic in attempting to understand the historical processes at stake. By definition, an inquiry into the nature of insular space is prone to questions pertaining to peculiarity, difference, aberration or deviation. Documenting and justifying an argument based on those grounds is far more difficult. In that, while local specificities partly explain certain processes, these were not necessarily unique and blend in with empire-wide phenomena. What I illustrate here is that space (be it insular, continental, montane, riverine, or otherwise) can function as a tool that has more of an analytical than an explanatory value, and permits a different conceptualization of phenomena encountered in the Ottoman Empire or elsewhere.

Useful as they may have been, debates on the Ottoman eighteenth and nineteenth centuries still remain unresolved as to the degree, extent and effect of decentralization. More than thirty years on, the discussion on the Ottoman transition to modernity, largely revolving around the ability or willingness of the state to effect, monitor and regulate this process, is perhaps reaching its explanatory potential. Broadening the scope of inquiry beyond the immediate purview of the state, or at least what is conspicuously recorded as such in official documentation,

85 Hadjikyriacou, "Society and Economy," 205-237, 275-285.

is a necessary step towards understanding the less visible elements of historical processes.

Transcending, but not necessarily discarding, center-province relations as the dominant paradigm in the study of the Ottoman Empire, necessitates the employment of novel lines of inquiry, analytical tools and categories. Space or, in this case insular space, may prove to be one such alternative that can shed light to less apparent dynamics relevant to the formation of material conditions in imperial realms. Such a conceptualization opens exciting possibilities for the pursuit of knowledge within and beyond the field of Ottoman Studies.

Local Intermediaries and Insular Space in late-18th century Ottoman Cyprus

Abstract ■ Contributing to the discussions on the reconfigurations of wealth and power in the Ottoman Empire between the mid-eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth century, this article considers the cases of three provincial notables in a provincial setting: Hadjiyorgakis Kornesios, dragoman of Cyprus; the *muhassıl* (tax-farming governor) Hacı Abdülbaki Ağa; and the Armenian consular dragoman-cum-merchant Sarkis. Seeking analytical categories that move beyond a rigid center/province dichotomy, this article makes an initial attempt towards articulating an alternative scheme for understanding imperial space, and move beyond a spatial imagination confined to conventional administrative organization. Utilizing the Braudelian concept of 'miniature continents' allows an envisioning of the Cypriot insularity that sheds light on the nature of economic relations, modes of production, and patterns of concentration of the rural surplus. The three local intermediaries examined here are ideal case studies that can facilitate, or indeed instigate, this sort of inquiry.

Keywords: Ottoman Cyprus, insularity, Sarkis, Hacı Abdülbaki Ağa, Hadjiyorgakis Kornesios, *ayan*, dragomans, intermediaries.

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