



## NORTH THRACE/EASTERN ROMILIA WAS LEFT OUTSIDE THE GREEK BORDERS\*\*

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### Abstract:

This paper examines the modern history of Northern Thrace, a Hellenized region since early antiquity, which nowadays belongs to Bulgaria.

With the Greek revival in the 19<sup>th</sup> c., the Greek revolution of 1821 against the Ottoman Empire, the agreements of the Great Powers and the Treaties, the modern Greek state was founded, limited yet to Peloponnesus, the Cycladic islands, and some parts of Central Greece, leaving outside its state borders other Greek regions, such as Thrace.

This paper focuses on the modern history of the region of Northern Thrace (the region between the Balkan and the Rodopi mountain ranges) in the 19<sup>th</sup> c., with particular attention to Agathoupolis, using written sources by its local Greeks. They describe the coexistence of Greeks and Bulgarians, which had been amicable until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. That was the time when the Bulgarian revival, revolution and attempt to form a sovereign Bulgarian national state was also taking place, claiming also Northern Thrace. The Greek politicians did not make any great effort to acquire Northern Thrace, as part of Greece, which was eventually given to Bulgaria. Persecutions followed and Greeks were forced to migrate to Greece and other places.

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\*\* In this paper most of the sources are works of Northern Thracians, gathered from the *Αρχαίον Θρακικού και Γλωσσικού Λαογραφικού Θησαυρού and Θρακικά [Archive of Thracian and of Language and Folklore Treasure; and Thrakika]*. Regardless the sentimentalism and some possible overstatements, it is fair to have some space in the study of history.

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As Sofia Klimi-Panagiotopoulou states, Thrace “is one of the most suffering of the Greek territories. Invaded by many, beaten by a series of displacements and seeking refuge, with its expectations many times betrayed ... hopeful in summits and treaties, which changed its borders arbitrarily.”<sup>1</sup>

The Dorians built the cities of Medea, Mesimvria, and Byzantium in the 7<sup>th</sup> c. BCE, and the Ionians settled in the region between Thynias and Achialos. In the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE Thrace was ruled by the Macedonian kings, and most of the coastal cities were Alexander’s allies during his campaign to Asia. The culture was Thracio-Hellenistic, and Greek was the main language of its administration.<sup>2</sup> The Thracians were fully hellenized during the Roman period, during which most of the inscriptions are in Greek and very few in Latin. Its Hellenization occurred also in religion, since Greek religion existed along with the local deities.<sup>3</sup>

During the period of Byzantium, a demographic and geopolitical shift occurred, when a great number of Greeks moved from the south Balkans (today’s Greece) to Thrace, placing Thracians at the center of Hellenism, since Thrace belonged to Constantinople’s vicinity.<sup>4</sup> Like Asia Minor and Macedonia, Thrace is one of Byzantium’s major regions.<sup>5</sup>

In 1361 sultan Murat I occupies Adrianople and makes it the capital of the Ottoman state. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the benefits for Christians that the sultan issued did not reach Thrace, since fear, humiliation, persecution, attacks, murders continued there. That time many criminals migrated from the East to Thrace, among other areas, in order to have the Muslim populations increased. The “*epilides*” took over houses, persecuted Christians and turned churches into mosques.<sup>6</sup> Each part of Thrace was given to the commander of the group that had conquered it, who received the title of ‘Bey’, and who now owned and had jurisdiction of the fields, meadows, buildings, mills, and anything that provided revenues.<sup>7</sup>

During their frequent campaigns, the sultans’ and viziers’ armies set off from Constantinople and passed through Thrace, where they usually plundered its populations. Between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Thracians suffered serious damages and devastation, and some found refuge in the woods and mountains.<sup>8</sup> After 1650 the ottoman government, in its attempt to guarantee security for all its subjects, issued beneficial laws that improved their lives.<sup>9</sup>

At the time of the Greek Revolution of the 1821, Mahmud II sent his navy to the Thracian coasts at the Black Sea in order to punish those who belonged to the movement of Philikoi at Agathoupolis, Vasiliko, Sozopole, Achialos, Varna etc., who were agents that traveled with their ships to Russia, Rumania and other ports, keeping in contact with other Greeks of diaspora.<sup>10</sup> In Agathoupolis the Greeks saved themselves by making a deal and paying ransom, yet, in Prodivo and Kosti about 30 were killed.

1 Σοφία Κλήμη-Παναγιωτοπούλου 1983, 91.

2 Hoddinott 2001, 275.

3 Δ. Τριαντάφυλλος 1995-1998, 355-357; Δ. Τριαντάφυλλος 2000, 112-113.

4 Ελ. Σπαθάρη-Μπεγλίτη 1997, 38, 47-48.

5 Ελ. Γλύκατζη- Αρβελέρ 2009, 24.

6 Γιαννακάκης 1958, 211.

7 Ibid., 8-9.

8 Ibid., 52.

9 Ibid., 70.

10 Βαφεύς 1948, 222-223. Efthimios Vafeas was born in Agathoupolis in 1893. His father was the priest Georgios Valasiou Vafeas and his mother was Margarita Tsolaki. He graduated from the public school of Agathoupolis and when he was 14 he went to Kostanza. Three years later, in June 1910, he went to the USA with the steam boat “Themistokles”.



In October 1853 Russia declared war against the ottoman empire, with the desire to be acknowledged as the protector of its Orthodox populations. According to the testimony of Athanasios Theofanides, they attacked the coastline, including Agathoupole.<sup>11</sup> After the end of the Crimean war (1853) and the Treaty of Paris (1856), the European powers persuaded Sultan Metzit to issue a new Hatti Humayun that would give benefits to Christians: self-governed schools and philanthropic associations, freedom of religious practice, equality before the law and in taxation. During that time, Greek schools were founded in all towns.<sup>12</sup>

Yet, the Greek communities of Eastern Romilia still felt insecure due to the Bulgarian aspirations.<sup>13</sup> K. M. Apostolides, a historian and philologist, born in Philippoupolis in 1869, says that, during the ottoman years the Bulgarians lived amicably with the Greeks under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and even some of them joined the Filiki Eteria at Vlachia and fought for the Greek purpose.<sup>14</sup>

The priests, the high-ranking clergy, the monks, and the bishops of Bulgaria were either Greeks or Bulgarians trained with the Greek language and letters. At the schools of the towns with only Bulgarian population, which were founded at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> c., Greek was taught along with Bulgarian, as in Sistova and Tirnavo.<sup>15</sup> Yet, in the middle of the century “the seed of hatred” against the Greek orthodox priesthood, against the Greek language and education as well as against the Greek nation purposefully started to be cultivated amongst the Bulgarian people, as the enemy of their national revival and restoration. Apostolides quotes the example of the “Thourio”, a battle hymn that was taught in Bulgarian schools: “Until when ... will the Greeks, through the Fanari priesthood, suppress our dearest nation? Go for it ... to drive them away from here ... go away Greeks ... with your lies you usurp our national Patriarchate ... everything turned in ashes by the Greek Fanari evil power!!!»<sup>16</sup>

Before migrating to Greece, D. K. Vogazles practiced law at his birthplace, Philippoupolis, the years 1903-1914. In his study, along with the Greek sources, he also used Bulgarian, South Slavic, and Turkish ones, since he knew well these languages. Himself, who “lived through most of the events he describes”, as the Director of the *Archive of Thracian and of Language and Folklore* Treasure Pol. Papachristodoulou affirms, states that,

“The Bulgarian people, with whom I spent the first forty years of my life, I knew in depth, in all their affairs, classes and political opinions.... What I will say ... I have gleaned them from the Bulgarian newspapers and particularly from three publications of the “Thracian Library”, by Ivan Tasiev, Stojan Bezanov and Michael Razboinikov. They all ... took active part in the revolution of Thrace.”<sup>17</sup>

11 Βαφεύς 1948, 162.

12 Γιαννακάκης 1958, 166-167.

13 Ibid., 210-211.

14 Κ. Μυρτίλου Αποστολίδου 1946-1947, 63, 65-67. Apostolides writes in 1926.

15 According to Professor Anastas Ischirkow, “The Greeks survived till today (1910) due to the Hellenization of the Bulgarians.” Bulgaria, Sofia, 1910, 142. Βαφεύς says that the first Bulgarian school was founded in 1835 at Grabovo by the merchant Aprilov. The first national school was founded in 1844 and the first Bulgarian journal was printed in Smyrna. Until 1877 there was only one print shop in Bulgaria, and “until then Bulgarians ... used the Greek letters, the Greek religious books.” Βαφεύς 1948, 165. Also, Jelavich 2006, 531.

16 Αποστολίδου 1946-1947, 68.

17 Βογαζλής 1961, 35-36, 47.



Vogazles makes a distinction about Bulgarians: on the one hand, there are the Northern Bulgarians (the inhabitants of Mysia), on the other hand there are the Southern Bulgarians (the inhabitants of Eastern Romilia) and the Bulgarian-Macedonians. The Southern Bulgarians, “not only they do not have any racial animosity against Hellenism ... on the contrary ... a mixture of admiration and deep appreciation.»<sup>18</sup> He also differentiates the Southern Bulgarians who were educated and raised in a Greek environment, that is until 1845-50, from those who studied in Russia, “who were instilled with panslavic hatred against Hellenism:”

“The opinions of the first ones [Southern Bulgarians who were educated and raised in a Greek environment] about us were identical with those of the Northern Bulgarians. The opinions of the latter were identical with those of the Bulgarian-Macedonians, yet not so strong. However, I should underline--a fact that felt into [my] immediate perception, that not even one Bulgarian from Philippoupolis participated in the anthellenic movement of the 16<sup>th</sup> of July 1906, when, as it is known, the anthellenic persecution began. In fact, the elders severely criticized it. The only one exception was the degenerate ... son of Hatzi Gioka.... This mindset of the Southern Bulgarians is inexplicable, especially of the urban intellectuals towards the Greeks. At the beginning of the previous century, most of them came from their villages and settled in the Greek cities, at Philippoupolis, Adrianople, Constantinople.... Many of them, during the National-socialist war in 1860, were against the Patriarchate and even on the side of Ilarion Makariopolis’ intransigents ... and of Stefan Vogoride. But, then, with the *fermani* of March 1870, the Exarchate was recognized as autonomous Church and independent from the Patriarchate, and when the Bulgarian nation was recognized as an independent nation, these Bulgarians thought that their differences with the Patriarchate and Hellenism had ended forever.”<sup>19</sup>

In 1870 the sultan issued a decree (*firmani*) that recognized the Bulgarian church as autonomous and autocephalous under the religious leadership of the Exarch.<sup>20</sup> The Bulgarian Exarchate comprised of the territories north of the Balkan Mountains, of Varna and of Philippoupolis. It was based in Constantinople, where Bulgarian religious communities were formed with their own churches and schools under the jurisdiction of the Exarchate. In 1872 the Ecumenical Patriarchate declared them schismatic. Bulgarians who belonged to the Patriarchate as well as slavophone Greeks who stayed faithful to

18 Ibid., 35-6.

19 Ibid., 35-6. Jelavich writes: “In 1858 the Slavic Philanthropic Association was founded. Representing the interests of panslavism, it offered scholarships to young Bulgarians to study in Russia.... Instead of love and respect for the orthodox Russia, many adopted the radical European ideologies. Others were deeply influenced by the idea of panslavism. The interest for panslavism remained firm in Bulgaria and had a significant influence in Bulgarian history.... The supporters of pan Slavism had neither a comprehensive program nor a representative. In general, they wanted the Slavic people to break away from the foreign rule, that is, of the Ottomans and Habsburgs, and to unite in a confederation under the leadership of Russia. Emphasis was given to the orthodox Slavs, Serbs, Bulgarians and Montenegrins. The movements’ central organization was the Slavic Philanthropic Association, founded in 1858 in Moscow, along with local organizations that were founded later in other towns. It was this group that brought hundreds of Bulgarian and other Slav students to study in Russia.” Jelavich 2006, 532, 556-557.

20 Jelavich writes: «In 1849, the sultan agreed that the “Bulgarian millet” could have its own Church in Constantinople. This is the first official recognition of the Bulgarian nation.” Jelavich 2006, 541-543.



the Patriarchate were called "Greeks" or "*Grekomans*".<sup>21</sup> Over the years, the ones who belonged to the Ecumenical Patriarchate and who practiced their religious duties in Greek, in which they also taught their children at school, were considered Greeks. The ones who went with the Exarchate and who used the Slavic/Bulgarian language in church and school were considered Bulgarians.

After this development, Bulgarians escalated their fight against the Greek Church, language and nation at large, aiming at the separation of the Bulgarian speaking ones from the Patriarchate.<sup>22</sup> The "*Grekomans*" were forced to abandon the Patriarchate and join the Exarchate: "A fierce persecution begun ... not so much against the Greeks as against the Bulgarians who belonged to the Patriarchate and against the Vlachs ... they were forced to declare that they join the Exarchate ... terror was spread at Macedonia and Thrace.... The komitadjis threatened, terrorized, torched houses and whole villages, tortured, murdered...."<sup>23</sup> Some Orthodox Bulgarian speaking communities left the Patriarchate out of terror.<sup>24</sup> Giannakakis emphasizes that, indeed, "the higher Orthodox priesthood received heavy taxes from the Bulgarians."<sup>25</sup>

Bulgarian revolutionary movements appeared in 1868. When they revolted in 1876, an irregular army of ruthless Bashibazouks and Circassians went on rampage at Batak, Rodopi. The 'pan-Slavic propaganda' stuffed the mutilated bodies and sent them to London, where they put them on public display. The British media condemned these barbarous acts and Russia declared war on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 1877. In the Autumn the Russians reoccupied Agathoupolis and established a local government with Adreikos as the first Greek Orthodox Mayor.<sup>26</sup> In January 1878 they captured Adrianople, and proceeded to St. Stefan, few kilometers away from Constantinople.

In 1877 Russia declared war against the Ottoman State, as it desired to occupy Bosphorus and Hellespont and have free navigation to the Mediterranean. With the 'pan-Slavic propaganda' it caused trouble that would justify its intervention in the Balkans, where the orthodox people saw Russia as the liberator from the Ottomans.<sup>27</sup>

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 1878, Ottoman and Russian diplomats (with Ignatiev) signed the Treaty of St. Stefano, which made territorial arrangements and distribution of the Ottoman territories in the Balkans. According to the 6<sup>th</sup> article, there would be an autonomous Bulgarian Principality that would include the land between Danube and the Balkan mountain range, North, Western and parts of Eastern Thrace, and most of Macedonia, rendering it as the dominant Balkan power. It also prescribed for a two-year presence of Russian military and the Russian involvement in the formation of the government.

21 Βογαζλής 1961, 65-66.

22 Αποστολίδου 1946-1947, 66.

23 Βογαζλής 1961, 21-22.

24 Αποστολίδου 1946-1947, 69.

25 Γιαννακάκης 1958, 158-9, 175-6. Η Jelavich γράφει: "The supporters of pan Slavism had neither a comprehensive program nor a representative. In general, they wanted the Slavic people to break away from the foreign rule, that is, of the Ottomans and Habsburgs, and to unite in a confederation under the leadership of Russia. Emphasis was given to the orthodox Slavs, Serbs, Bulgarians and Montenegrins. The movements' central organization was the Slavic Philanthropic Association, founded in 1858 in Moscow, along with local organizations that were founded later in other towns. It was this group that brought hundreds of Bulgarian and other Slav students to study in Russia." Jelavich (2006), 556-557.

26 Βαφεύς 1948, 167.

27 Jelavich 2006, 532.



The Ecumenical Patriarchate reacted, since its church provinces would be subjugated to the Bulgarian Exarchate, and sent petitions to the European states complaining that the rights of the Greeks were sacrificed to Slavism.

Almost three months later, the Treaty of St. Stefano was revised by the Treaty of Berlin. The prime minister of Greece Koumoundouros asked Harilaos Trikoupis (a friend of the British) to handle the case. Trikoupis accepted the duty, yet he asked for full power, even the king's resignation if needed, to which the king himself agreed. Yet, Russia, through its ambassador in Athens, managed to cancel Trikoupis' appointment, and, instead of him, the minister of Foreign Affairs Diligiannis was sent.

The first meeting of the delegates occurred on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 1878. At the second session, the British Foreign Secretary and Marquess of Salisbury, Robert Arthur Talbot Gascoyne-Cecil, expressed the concern that the Greeks who live in Bulgarian territory will be subject to the Slavic majority, with which its relations are not amicable, and maintained that the Greek populations that live in the Ottoman territories, that is, Crete, Thessaly, Epirus, Macedonia and Thrace, be given to Greece. In contrast, the Russian Count Pyotr Andreyevich Shuvalov claimed that the Greek borders should be at Thessaly and Epirus.

When Diligiannis was called to state the Greek position and side with the British proposition, he, instead, limited himself to the issue of Crete, Thessaly and Epirus. The fact that the Greek delegation did not rise to the occasion and did not support the Greek rights annoyed the British, who, few days later entered into an alliance with the ottomans, whom would defend in the case that Russia continued its advance in Asia Minor and Armenia.

According to the Treaty of Berlin, the territory between the Danube and the Balkan mountain range will belong to the autonomous Bulgaria, where the young Prince Alexander of Battenberg, an Austrian relative of the tsar and of the royal British families, was appointed to reign. The territory between the Balkan and Rodopi mountain ranges, where Greeks, Turks and Bulgarians lived, was declared semi-autonomous, with the name "Eastern Romilia",<sup>28</sup> and it will be under the political and military authority of the sultan, who would appoint a Christian governor and provide army for its protection. Its populations will enjoy freedom of religious practice, of language, traditional values and customs, and the right to participate in public affairs.<sup>29</sup> The rest of Thrace, Macedonia and Albania remained under the ottoman sovereignty.<sup>30</sup>

After the declaration of the Autocephalous of the Bulgarian Church in 1870, in Eastern Romilia the Ecumenical Patriarchate had five dioceses: of Philippoupolis, of Achialos, Mesimvria, Sozoagathoupole, and Varna.<sup>31</sup> Giannakakis writes that the population of Eastern Romilia was about 600.000. Papachristodoulou says that the Greeks consisted of the 1/5, that is, around 150.000, while others raise the number to 250.000. The Greeks lived in mainly urban compact communities, while most Bulgarians lived in rural areas.<sup>32</sup>

28 "This arrangement signified the end of the ottoman sovereignty in the Balkans." Jelavich 2006, 566-567.

29 The French call it "Roumélie Orientale," the Italians "Roumeli Orientale," the Germans "Ost Rumélien." The Turks called it "Rum-Eli", that is, of the sancak of the city of Sofia of the vilayet Rum-Eli (of the region of the Romans). Βογιατζής 1961, 38.

30 The Treaty of Bucharest in 1913 gave the region between the rivers Nestos and Evros to Bulgaria with the name "Western Thrace". Then the region between the river Evros and the Black Sea was called "Eastern Thrace". Γιαννακάκης 1958, 191-194.

31 Αποστολίδου 1946-1947, 67.

32 Newspaper *Πολιτεία Αθηνών*, February 7, 1926, p. 1. Also, D. Howgarth (1903), *The Nearer East*, London, 154.



After the Treaty of Berlin, Turks started to migrate to the south, leaving their properties to Bulgarians.

Giannakakis states that the separation of Eastern Romilia from Bulgaria and its declaration as semi-autonomous aimed at averting the formation of a big Bulgarian state by the Russians. On the other hand, for the Bulgarians the autonomous state meant union.<sup>33</sup>

With the consent of the Powers, in Eastern Romilia the sultan appointed Aleko Vogoridis as the governor, who had also served at the Porte. But after the grievances of Greeks to the sultan and to the Powers and their accusations for illegitimate actions by the Bulgarians (for taking over schools, churches and monasteries), a European inspector was sent, who verified the complaints. Vogoridis was replaced by Gabriel Krustevic.

The autonomy of Eastern Romilia did not last long. In September 1885 a Bulgarian revolt demanding unification took place in Philippoupolis, whose triumphant leaders took over the control of the government and declared the union with Bulgaria.<sup>34</sup> Prince Alexander accepted the situation and became the governor of the union, which was also accepted by the Powers and the Porte.

The Bulgarians demanded Eastern Romilia with the claim that the majority of its population was Bulgarian. Papachristodoulou writes that, "Indeed the Bulgarians in the countryside were a majority, yet, except for some country-dwellers, most of the Greeks lived in the towns and, although fewer in number, they were greater in the commerce, industry, arts and culture."<sup>35</sup> Papachristodoulou states that since 1859 the 'pan-Slavists' had scattered Bulgarians from the countryside into the towns and strengthened the Bulgarian factions amongst the Greek population. They removed the Bulgarian professionals from the guilds ('esnafia') and founded separate 'rufetia'. They excluded the Greeks from any public office, they unfairly and illegitimately taxed them, and they obstructed them from participating in the elections.<sup>36</sup>

Coexistence of Greeks and Bulgarians was seriously disrupted. In 1886 the Mayor of Philippoupolis sent a letter to the Greek Bishop, stating that the authorities will not accept official documents written in Greek.<sup>37</sup> Similar notices were sent to the Bishops of Achialos, Sozopolis and to all the Greek mayors.<sup>38</sup> The pressure was intensified around 1900. Apostolides describes the situation:

"... screaming maniac mobs" attacked, looted and seized the Greek churches, monasteries, schools and other foundations. The Bulgarian government eradicated the Greek communities, which from now on could practice their religion in the Bulgarian churches. In his memorandums, the bishop of Philippoupolis Fotios denounces the Bulgarian government, "*that it cruelly persecutes the Christians of the Ecumenical Patriarchate ... harassing the conscience of my Christians with flogging and all kinds of tortures, aiming at their expulsion.*"<sup>39</sup>

33 Παπαχριστοδούλου 1951, 79.

34 Jelavich 2006, 580, 582.

35 Παπαχριστοδούλου 1951, 76-77. Also, Jelavich: "It was difficult for Bulgaria to avoid the Greek cultural dominance." Jelavich 2006, 529.

36 Παπαχριστοδούλου 1951, 92.

37 Jelavich says that, "At the end of 18th and at the beginning of 19th c., Greek was replaced by ecclesiastical Slavonic, a language similar to Bulgarian, in most civil service." Jelavich 2006, 531.

38 Newspaper *Φιλιππούπολις*, Year 8, 19<sup>th</sup> of April 1866, nr. 729. See Παπαχριστοδούλου 1951, 78-9.

39 Αποστολίδου 1946-1947, 70-71. See also, Kasasis N., *Greks et Bulgares au XIX et au XX siècle*. Edit. P. Y. Stock, Paris 1907, footnote 4; Drossos D. (1918), *Les persecutions de l' element Grec en 1906, dans la Revue de Grece*, Athenes.



After the expulsion of the Greek priests, the use of the Greek language was also prohibited, in public as well at homes, although everywhere in the country one could freely speak the European languages, Turkish, Hispano-Jewish, Koutsovlach, Armenian, Serbian, Rumanian, Albanian and Roma. The Greeks were deprived of the right to participate in the government, and at large the Greek Bulgarian citizens were not equal before the law.

In November 1893, seven Bulgarian-Macedonian intellectuals got together in Thessaloniki to think of a way to liberate Macedonia from the sultan's yoke, and possibly the region of Adrianople.<sup>40</sup> They founded the «Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization», whose motto was "Macedonia to Macedonians." Three years later, the "External Macedonian Revolutionary Organization", or "of the Varhovists", was founded in Sofia, whose motto was "The whole of Macedonia and Thrace to Bulgaria."<sup>41</sup> The varhovists thought that, if Macedonia and Thrace became autonomous, the same would happen as in Eastern Romilia. Instead, the separatists of the Internal decided that, in the event of an issue of annexation of Macedonia and Thrace to Bulgaria, they would favor an autonomous Macedonia.<sup>42</sup> Instigator of the anthellenic movement in Bulgaria and Eastern Romilia was Nicola Genadiev, a minister of Stefan Nikolov Stambolov.<sup>43</sup>

Vogazles is of the opinion that, if the revolution had succeeded, the same would have happened as in Agathoupolis, Vasiliko, Ortakioi and elsewhere, when, during WWI these regions were annexed to Bulgaria, that is, when the population was forced either to get "bulgarized" or to immigrate through the imposition of heavy taxes, the occupation of Greek schools and churches, and the prohibition of the use of Greek language.<sup>44</sup>

The Thracian Organization was active in the years 1896 to 1903. The revolutionaries were divided into the law-abiding ones and the outlaws. The first were usually teachers and priests, while the latter were armed komitadjis, recruited and equipped mainly in Bulgaria. Their base was the area of Bunar Hisar, which was neighboring the region of Vyze of Agathoupolis' vilayet. During the first years, it attempted to wrest the 8-10 entirely Bulgarian villages from the Patriarchate and give them to the Exarchate.<sup>45</sup> The revolution of 1903 terribly failed by the Turkish army, while flocks of refugees from the area of Adrianople flooded the Bulgarian towns: "And, instead of having Hellenism uprooted, it was Bulgarianism."<sup>46</sup>

In 1906 Achialos was burned down and the Greeks were fiercely forced to leave, which resulted in the first massive migration to Turkey and Greece. The numbers exceeded the 30,000.<sup>47</sup> Vafeas writes:

"On Sunday July the 30<sup>th</sup>, crowds of Bulgarians from Burgas and its vicinity rushed to destroy, seize, mortify and appropriate churches and schools.... About noon ... the Bulgarians ... started to set fire. With petroleum and bombs they started to

40 Βογαζλής 1961, 16.

41 Ibid., 60. The Committee of 'varhovists' was founded in 1895 in Sofia, having united all the existing Bulgarian groups. See Υφαντίδης, 2000, 123.

42 Βογαζλής 1961, 20-22.

43 Ibid., 61.

44 Ibid., 31.

45 Ibid., 47-8.

46 Ibid., 50.

47 Παπαχριστοδούλου 1951, 83.





burn houses and shops... the people of Achialos ... suddenly see themselves surrounded by fire.... Many were burned alive inside the church and many houses... 1.200 Greek houses and shops were burnt down... the ones who survived ... left for Greece ...they built New Achialos close to Larissa."<sup>48</sup>

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of August, the Ecumenical Patriarchate's periodical "*The Ecclesiastical Truth*" in the article «*Ευλογία αριθμών*» (The Eloquence of numbers), presents facts about the community property that the Bulgarians appropriated: "113 churches, 5 dioceses, 145 priests, 12 monasteries, 14 monks, 66 schools, 186 teachers, 7,744 students. In the 9 prefectures of Bulgaria the Greeks were 81,923."<sup>49</sup> Papachristodoulou holds that the most accurate numbers are those that Patriarch Joachim provides in a memorandum to the Porte in 1906,<sup>50</sup> which affirms that the Greeks in North Thrace reached the 100,000, with 177 churches, 8 monasteries, and 66 schools. In contrast, the Bulgarian statistics reduce the number to 60,000, "because the uneducated Greeks and the Gagauz in Varna are regarded as Bulgarians."<sup>51</sup>

When in 1908 Bulgaria declared Independence and became a Kingdom, it officially included Eastern Romilia--a fact that was also recognized by the Porte the following year.<sup>52</sup>

## Agathoupolis

Agathoupolis lies at the northwest coast of the Black Sea and it is probably founded by Milesian settlers in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE. It sat in a naturally protected location, yet it had fortification walls. In 522 BCE it was defeated by the Persians and got liberated after the naval battle at Salamis. Until 341 BCE it was subjected and paying tributary to the Thracian Odrysian Kingdom and later it became part of the Macedonian State of Philippe II.

It was named probably by the general Agathon, after the death of Alexander the Great. Vafefs says that the Ionian settlers, after thanking Apollo for their good fortune and safety, called it Agathoupolis (the kind city). There is also a probability that it was built in honor of the goddess of 'Kind Fortune'. "Avlaiou Wall" was called by Vespasian, who built walls around 71 AD in honor of his predecessor emperor Vitelli Avlou. In 431 AD it was given again the old name of Agathoupolis.

In the Byzantine years, the city frequently struggled against the Bulgarians, especially during the rule of the Komninoi and Paleologoi. The historian Sathas, in his Medieval Library (*Meseoniki Vivliothiki*), refers to the campaigns against the Mysians, a nuisance to Agathoupolis, by the emperor Isaac II Angelos (1185-1195). In 1204 Agathoupolis was at Byzantium's border at the west coast of the Black Sea, when it went under the rule of Franks, and in 1256 under the rule of Bulgarians. Soon after, it was regained by Michael Palaiologos, and captured again by the Bulgarians, while, 30 years later, it struggled with

48 Βαφεύς 1948, 180-182.

49 Ibid., 85. See Vogazlis' letter to the Subcommittee of Greek-Bulgarian migration in Sofia: L' Hellenisme de la Bulgarie du Sud (avant Rumelie-Orientale et plus specialement de Philippopoli Sophia 1929, Chap. Huitieme pad. 86-89.

50 Protocol number 17 13/26 of July.

51 Παπαχριστοδούλου 1951, 90, 92.

52 Βαφεύς 1948, 168.



the rebellious Catalan mercenaries of Byzantium. During the years of Andronikos IV Palaiologos (1376-78) it appears to be a prosperous commercial city, protected by strong walls. When Mohamed II asked Karatza Pasha to take over and destroy all the fortresses, the ottomans, after a long siege, blasted the walls of Agathoupolis with loads of explosive powder. Many of its inhabitants escaped through the two underground passages or by sailboats, and found refuge in Constantinople, Vlachia and Russia.<sup>53</sup> When Mohammed II made an announcement promising that he will protect the lives and properties of Christians, some returned. For about 460 years, the city lived in peace, with the exception of some raids by Kirtzalis, Caucasians and Russians.<sup>54</sup>

Although Agathoupolis was a small town during the Ottoman occupation, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it developed into a prosperous one with 7.000-8.000 inhabitants, almost all of them Greek, with about a thousand two-floor and three-floor houses. The population, combined with Vasiliko, Kosti and Prodilofu villages, St. Stefanos and Kalantzaki, reached the 15,000 Greeks.<sup>55</sup> Agathoupolis was the seat of a bishopric of the Episcopacy of Adrianople, and in 1821 was upgraded to the Metropolis of Sozoagathoupolis with the metropolitan Anthimos, who later became Patriarch. According to the Ecumenical Patriarchate's records, at the beginning of 1878 the Metropolis of Sozoagathoupolis had 17,000 Greeks and 3,100 Bulgarians, and in 1907 had 9 churches, 10 priests, 8 schools, 11 male and 4 female teachers, 550 male and 150 female students. There was a six-year Urban Boys' School (Yfantidis says that in 1918 it was still new) and six-year Girls' School, with about 600 students.<sup>56</sup>

The main occupation of the approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the population was merchant shipping. Ships from 10 to 700 tones sailed in the Black Sea, in Propontis, the Aegean, the Mediterranean--from Beirut and Alexandria to Gibraltar, while the voyages lasted for six to nine months. A large number of the merchant fleet remained until 1914, when the forced emigration took place. Besides merchant shipping, riches came from the extended commerce of fish, grapes, crops, wood, coal, livestock, etc.<sup>57</sup> The exploitation of the vast forests, mainly of oak, was another source of wealth. Huge quantities of firewood, charcoal, and wood for house construction and shipbuilding were exported. Big tree trunks (more than ten meters long) were transferred to Rumania, where they were used for the infrastructure (constructing bridges, platforms, railway traverses). Viticulture also thrived and large quantities of exquisite wine were exported, especially before 1900. There were also two blacksmith forges and three tinsmith workshops.<sup>58</sup> Life in Agathoupolis was pleasant:

“The cafes and the taverns at the seafront were full of people.... Winter was an endless entertainment at the bars, where orchestras played music with violins, lutes, harmonicas, barrel organs, mandolins, zurnas ... they played the local demotic ... serenades, Greek dances, European waltz, quadrilles, mazurkas, even the feisty Panathenian, without the exception of amanes.... In the summer, they enjoyed

53 Γερμίδης 1972-1973, 291-93; Βαφεύς 1948, 86-87, 124, 232.

54 Βαφεύς 1948, 221.

55 Γερμίδης 1972-1973, 294.

56 Υφαντίδης 2000, 130.

57 Γερμίδης 1972-1973, 297; Βαφεύς 1948, 240, 231.

58 Ibid., 298-299, 301.



swimming in the sea... they also went for sailing. It was one of the most romantic thing to see.... In winter many went for sledding and hunting.... "Often, even the few Turkish officers longed for the yearly public dance festival, when they would also join in the merriment."<sup>59</sup>

Until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Agathoupoli, with its Greek population, lived a relatively quiet life, says Germides. But in the beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. bands of Bulgarian komitadjis appeared, organized by the Bulgarian Thracian revolutionary committee. The people of Agathoupoli formed their own armed forces. From 1911 on, the Greek revolutionary committee, led by captain Theodoro Abatzoglou from Vyze, operates mainly at Kosti.<sup>60</sup> In 1912 some members of the Greek committee robbed the post office in order to get money for the Greek revolutionary cause. As a result, many people were jailed, who were released four months later with the outbreak of the Balkan war.

In 1903 the Bulgarian-macedonian revolutionaries chose the day of the prophet Elias, the 20<sup>th</sup> of July according to the old calendar, "Ilin Den", that is "the day of Elias", to set their revolution under his protection. It targeted the areas of Agathoupolis, Vasiliko, Prodilofa and Kosti, where they burned down twenty villages and killed many Turks and Greeks.<sup>61</sup> The Bulgarian Committee organized more bands under the leadership of the archkomitadjis Dikov and Sismanov. In Agathoupolis the Greeks also formed more armed forces, mainly from Prodilofa and Kosti, whose arms were sent by trusty individuals from Constantinople.<sup>62</sup> When the Bulgarian komitadjis seized Vasiliko, Prodilofa and Kosti, on their way to Agathoupolis, under the leadership of Voyvoda Tsenov, took control of the roads, arrested the peasants at their farms and, when they reached the town, asked to meet with the Elders. Vafefs, who then was a young boy, remembers:

"It was the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1903, the day of the Feast of the Transfiguration, when the metropolitan church "the Assumption of Mary" was packed with the congregation. Baskets with the first grapes of the season were set before the shrine, which the priest would bless after the mass. I write validly, since I was there. The mass was half way through, before the doxology, when the worthy Christodoulakis Saroglou, a logothetes who sat next to the bishop, received hasty news. Suddenly I see him going quickly to the altar, from which, after the two priests agreed with each other, my father and priest (Fr. Georgios), interrupting the psaltes [church musicians], says: "*Dear Christians, we were just notified that Bulgarian Komitadjis ... are moving toward our town. It is thus our imperative duty to stop the liturgy and go outside the town, some to dig the ditch ... the ones who have weapons to arm themselves and position themselves for defense....*" As by a miracle, hundreds of arms were found ... the arrival of Komitadjis was prevented.... Eight days later ... they sent a message with a shepherd, that the archkomitadjis Angelov asked to meet with the worthy Christodoulakis Saroglou and some others ... in order to discuss. He asked if any Turks were hiding in the town, and to their negative answer, he requested that they let a group of Komitadjis enter ... in order to confiscate the

59 Βαφεύς 1948, 244-245.

60 Πετρόπουλος 1939-40, 225-226; Υφαντίδης 2000, 195.

61 Βογαζλής 1961, 15-16; Υφαντίδης 2000, 123-124.

62 Γερμίδης 1972-1973, 304.



public Turkish barns where salt was stored, as well as the archives of the ottoman tax revenues ... for wine, fish, alcohol, tobacco etc. He promised that nobody would be in danger ... also ... [he required] that they collect money from the community and give 500 gold liras in support of the Komitato.... Otherwise, they would burn down the city.... So it was."<sup>63</sup>

After the reestablishment of the Constitution and parliament in Turkey in 1908, the Kingdom of Greece expressed an interest in driving out the Bulgarian bands, and it sent a group of proven Greek army officers, with pseudonyms, as consulate staff at the Consulates of Adrianople, Saranta Ekklesies, Redestos, and Malgara. Under their supervision, teams of the Thracian division of Macedonian Komitato of Athens were formed almost everywhere in Thrace, which were called "Anagnostiria" (Reading Rooms). They were administered by local boards and, besides initiating more patriots, they were involved in the supply and transfer of weaponry and in the formation and sustenance of armed forces. Local Greek organizations, although called "Philo-Educational Societies" and "Charitable Associations", had actually turned into armed defense associations against the komitadjis.<sup>64</sup> Chairman of Agathoupolis' "Reading Room" was the bishop commissioner Papageorgios Polychroniades. Its members were the doctor Demetrios Saroglou, the brothers Danielides at Vasiliko, Nikiforos Danielides and Konstantinos Skordopoulos at Prodilofu, and Michael and Kiriakos Dountas and Marinos Marinelis at Kosti. D. Petropoulos writes:

"The Chairman, priest Papageorgios Polychroniades, was arrested by the Bulgarians after they seized the district of Agathoupolis in November 1913. After they cruelly tortured him, they slaughtered him at the banks of Resovos river. In 1913 the Bulgarian Committee forced the people at Kosti to surrender weaponry, money, and anything valuable. According to official archives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, after the Balkan War 1.580 Greeks were forced out of Kosti, while 810 were persecuted at Prodilofu."<sup>65</sup>

The Greeks cleared the area from the new Bulgarian bands. Konstantinos Koukides writes:

"Komitata were organized in all major cities. At Samakovo ... doctor Kirkos K. Kirkou presided the komitato ... to fight back dreadful enemies ... the archkomitadjis Sismanov and Dikov ... organized the local Greeks' resistance, which, due to their shared danger, the Turkish authorities also allowed. The Greek group had to guard an extensive region ... Agathoupolis ... Thynias ... Medea, Strantza ... Tyroloen, Louleburgas, Saranta Ekklesias and Samakovo."<sup>66</sup>

The good old days in Agathoupolis irrevocably ended with the declaration of the First Balkan War. From its outset, Agathoupolis was seized by the Bulgarians, along with almost all of Thrace, and stayed under their occupation for about eight months, until July 1913. During this time, the Bulgarian authorities, due to Bulgaria's alliance with

63 Βαφεύς 1948, 260-262; Υφαντίδης 2000, 124.

64 Γερμίδης 1972-1973, 305; Βαφεύς 1948, 269, 272-273; Βογαζλής 1961, 24.

65 Πετρόπουλος 1939-1940, 226; Υφαντίδης 2000, 195, 204.

66 Κουκκίδης 1958, 197, 203.



Greece, restrained themselves to minor requisitions and property seizures. In August 1913, Turkish armies regained almost all of Eastern and part of Western Thrace, along with the district of Agathoupolis, where the Turkish authorities returned. Finally, with the peace treaty between Bulgaria and Turkey, the Bulgarians settled permanently in Agathoupolis, which, along with its district, was permanently granted to Bulgaria. The Bulgarian authorities settled there in the 13<sup>th</sup> of November 1913. The Greek mayor was replaced, the Greek schools and churches were taken over, the priests, the teachers and generally the educated ones were exiled, and the Greek language was prohibited. The Turkish authorities of Eastern Thrace, according to the relevant agreement with Bulgaria, sent to Agathoupolis a thousand Bulgarian peasant families from villages of the area of Genna and Bunar-Hisar of the district of Saranta Ekklesies. The Bulgarian authorities placed them in houses that belonged to the Greeks of Agathoupolis, making thus their lives difficult. The Bulgarian families would eventually also occupy their stores and farms.<sup>67</sup>

In 1914 Bulgarians dismissed all the Greek priests and teachers and obliged all the Greeks to send their children to the Bulgarian schools; if not, there was penalty and imprisonment.<sup>68</sup>

Under the orders of the local authorities, from early in the morning on Friday 11 July 1914, Bulgarian heralds were announcing that in three days two ships will arrive from Greece, bringing Bulgarian refugees, whom the Greek government forced out of their villages. Outraged by their expulsion, they threatened to slaughter all the region's Greeks, whose lives the Bulgarian government was not able to protect. To save themselves, they all had to leave immediately for Greece within three hours. Then, a second massive migration flow started.

Greek notables asked for help from the Bulgarian authorities, but to no avail, since all the telephone communications were deliberately cut off. Instantly, the frantic exodus of the Greeks began. They boarded on their sailing ships, leaving behind all their movable and immovable properties. The Bulgarian authorities told them that their ships had been confiscated as war loot, and to be allowed to leave with them they had to pay their price. The owners of the ships had to collect money and buy them again. The first nine ships set sail with about 1.200 people. When they arrived at Constantinople, the Ecumenical Patriarchate offered the necessary provisions. Then they left for Thessaloniki. Another group of about 1.800 people followed. About 10,000 from Agathoupolis scattered in Piraeus, Volos, Mytilene, America.<sup>69</sup>

The conditions under which the Greeks of the surrounding villages--Kosti, Prodilofo, Vasiliko, Kalantzaki--were forced out were also hard: "beaten and robbed" on their way to Agathoupolis, they embarked on the Bulgarian steamboat *Bulgaria*, which transported and "literally dumped" them in Constantinople, after having paid six to ten gold lyres for each person. The Ecumenical Patriarchate took care of the 1.200 individuals, who

67 Βαφεύς 1948, 241.

68 Βογαζλής 1961, 9, 39. He also mentions what Baron Kalay, the Austrian representative in the Committee that composed the Organizational Law for Eastern Romilia, had said: "the Greek schools are far more in number than those of the other two nations together [Turks and Bulgarians]."

69 Γεppίδης 1972-1973, 306-8; Βαφεύς 1948, 270-271.



then embarked the Persian steamboat *Persepolis* that took them to Thessaloniki, where they stayed for about 6 years in huts.<sup>70</sup> Some had stayed in Constantinople and others had fled to Varna and Burgas. Stilpon Kiriakides writes:

“... here we will present an extract from the description ... of the hygienist of Thessaloniki, doctor Ieromnimonos, who visited those who came with the Persian steamboat *Persepolis* ... which transported these refugees, with its water depository drained by the thirsty and hungry passengers.... All of the refugees were in a state of desperation and horror, staying hungry for days and nights.... After the general examination and after interviewing all of them, it is inferred that the Bulgarian komitadjis ... attacked these Greek villages and committed all the abominable and criminal acts. They murdered many, they injured others, and in various ways they abused with guns, knives and butts. They forced them out from their homes and shops, seizing all their movable and immovable properties, and they chased them out of their villages. At night other hordes of komitadjis attacked and stripped these poor refugees. They grabbed the women and young girls, whom they defiled in front of their husbands and parents, with whom they clashed; these women disappeared, and the fate of them is unknown. One of those who arrived here, Nikolaos Georgakis, about 45 years old, died today in the steamboat just as soon as it arrived at Thessaloniki, due to the hardships and the exhaustion. Eleven others ... had injuries by knives, guns, lances, clubs, and others had burns at several parts of their bodies, caused by lamps and candles ... there are about twenty others, mainly women, who bear minor injuries from knives and lances at several parts of their body.”<sup>71</sup>

Bulgaria capitulated at the Macedonian front in October 1918, and, because the Bulgarians were afraid that the Greek army may also get Agathoupolis' region, along with Eastern Thrace, and in order that it would not be possible for the exiles to make future claims, they burned it to the ground on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October. Only twenty seven houses and the new building of the Civic Boy's School survived.<sup>72</sup>

At the several places where they took refuge, the people of Agathoupolis lived with the dream of repatriation, which still seemed plausible, since Bulgaria and Turkey belonged to the defeated of WWI. But their dream fell to pieces when Agathoupolis was burned down and when Eastern Thrace was given to Greece without the province of Agathoupolis, which was occupied by Bulgaria and was not considered part of Eastern Thrace.<sup>73</sup>

In 1920 the Allies allowed Greek forces to occupy Eastern Thrace in order to protect the Greeks from persecutions by the Turks, and Greek authorities were appointed. The people from Agathoupolis then living in Thessaloniki and organized in the Association of Thracians “The Unredeemed Agathoupolis”, received the permission to found a New Agathoupolis at Thynias at the Black Sea, few kilometers south of the old one. Loggers from Kosti settled in the woods of the Samakovo area, and started to cut down trees and to work for the required building timber. Within few weeks, about 600 square meters of processed wood was completed.

70 Ibid., 308. Also Πετρόπουλος 1939-1940, 227.

71 Χατζηγεωργίου 1967, 26-27.

72 Γερμίδης 1972-1973, 308; Βαφεύς 1948, 279.

73 Ibid., 309.



But the catastrophe of Asia Minor resulted in the loss of Eastern Thrace as well, which was given to the Turks.<sup>74</sup> During the third migration flow in 1924, refugees settled in Alexandroupolis, Thessaloniki, Athens, Piraeus, Mytilene, and Evia. In 1926 some owners of merchant ships, along with a group of about a hundred other families, all from Agathoupolis, with Pan. Kiriakides presiding, founded the New Agathoupolis at Eleftherochori in Pieria, which developed into a coastal tourist center, “but not also into a shipping center...”<sup>75</sup>

As Eleni Spathari-Begliti states, “the most vigorous part of Hellenism, in numbers and in economic terms ... is left out of the national borders.”<sup>76</sup>

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74 The agreement of Moudania, 11/10 1922. Villagers from Kosti inform Δ. Πετρόπουλος that in 1920 some of them returned to Thrace, at Bunar-Hisar and other villages in Vyze, but not to Kosti, which was occupied by Bulgarians. During the catastrophe in 1922, they scattered again in several villages in Macedonia.

75 Γερμίδης 1972-1973, 309.

76 Σπαθάρη-Μπεγλίτη 1997, 49.



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## Η ΒΟΡΕΙΑ ΘΡΑΚΗ – ΑΝΑΤΟΛΙΚΗ ΡΩΜΥΛΙΑ ΕΜΕΙΝΕ ΕΞΩ ΑΠΟ ΤΑ ΕΘΝΙΚΑ ΣΥΝΟΡΑ

### Συμπεράσματα:

Τον 19<sup>ο</sup> αιώνα, οι Μεγάλες Δυνάμεις διαμοίρασαν τα εδάφη της Οθωμανικής Αυτοκρατορίας στα Βαλκάνια, όπου δημιουργήθηκαν νέα έθνη-κράτη. Η Βόρεια Θράκη (η περιοχή ανάμεσα στην οροσειρά του Αίμου και την οροσειρά της Ροδόπης), όπου ζούσαν Έλληνες, Βούλγαροι και Τούρκοι, διεκδικήθηκε σθεναρά από τη Βουλγαρία. Αντίθετα, οι Έλληνες πολιτικοί φάνηκαν μάλλον κατώτεροι των περιστάσεων, και δεν την συμπεριέλαβαν στις διεκδικήσεις τους όταν τους δόθηκε η ευκαιρία, ειδικά στο Συνέδριο του Βερολίνου το 1878. Οι Έλληνες της περιοχής αναγκάστηκαν να την εγκαταλείψουν, αφήνοντας πίσω τους τις εύρωστες οικονομικά, εμπορικά, και πολιτιστικά ελληνικές πόλεις, όπως η Αγαθούπολη, η Αγχίαλος, η Σωζόπολη, η Φιλιππούπολη, και να σκορπίσουν σε διάφορα μέρη της Ελλάδας και του κόσμου.

### Λέξεις Κλειδιά:

Βόρεια Θράκη,  
Ανατολική Ρωμυλία,  
Αγαθούπολη.