

UNIT VI

Thessaloniki in the late Byzantine period⁶

The city of Thessaloniki has many names: ancient Thessalonike, Roman Thessalonica, Slav Solun, Venetian Salonicco, Turkish Selanik, Hebrew Slonki and even Salonica to the British. For all these peoples it appeared to be the strategic or commercial key to the Balkans. The city lies near to where the Vardar river crosses the Egnatian Way before debouching into the Aegean Sea. The river, which rises deep in the Balkans, brought Slav traders each 26 October to the fair of St Demetrios, patron of Thessaloniki and-through the Thessalonician-born evangelists, Sts Cyril and Methodios-of all Slavs. The Egnatian Way runs from the Adriatic coast to Constantinople, so linking Old and New Rome at Thessaloniki. (A516)

The Slavs found Thessaloniki was the key which they could not turn. Even the most aggressive of Serbian tsars, Stefan Dusan (1331-55), was unable to take the long-desired city of St Demetrios. By contrast its shallow harbor and October fairs were of limited charm to Italian traders; when offered the key to Thessaloniki in 1423, they accepted without enthusiasm. By then Thessaloniki had developed another reputation. As the second city of the Byzantine and (eventually) Ottoman empire, its relationship with the capital in Constantinople was always uneasy. Even when ruled by a secondary member of the imperial family, Thessaloniki gained a local identity

⁶ Taken and revised from: Anthony Bryer, "The Roman Orthodox World (1393 - 1492)" in Jonathan Sephard (ed.): *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp.856- 860.

as a sort of city-state of its own, with a recognizable if inchoate local leadership, often headed by the archbishop.

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The fourteenth-century urban and peasant uprisings of western Europe were paralleled in Byzantium. In western terms, revolutionary Thessaloniki became a 'commune' from 1342 to 1350. In truth, its urban and artisanal mass was only just critical enough to claim local self-determination behind the great walls of the city, with a still-shadowy political ideology labeled 'Zealot'. But Thessaloniki did not forget those heady days. Its commune was a hardly surprising response to outside pressures: civil war in Byzantium, the Ottoman entry into Europe and the threat of Dusan, all compounded by the Black Death. Yet in Thessaloniki these years are marked by some of the finest surviving late Byzantine decorated churches and by the career of the last great father of the Roman orthodox church: Gregory Palamas. Palamas was archbishop of Thessaloniki from 1347 to 1359. His doctrines were confirmed by the Roman orthodox church in the next century and remain the vital spiritual ideology of the Slav orthodox in particular. The essentially mystical theology of Palamas maintained that the unknowable essence of God could be approached by revelation rather than reason, and hence was in direct opposition to the Aristotelian scholasticism of the western church. On the nearby monastic commune of Mount Athos, Palamism was given expression by hesychasts whose spiritual connections with the political Zealots were both obvious and obscure.

The Ottomans first besieged Thessaloniki from 1383 to 1387. Local leadership was divided between its government, the future emperor Manuel II Palaiologos, and its archbishop, Isidore Glabas (1380-4, 1386-96). Manuel told his subjects to defy the Turkish ultimatum. On St Demetrios' Day 1383 Glabas warned his flock to mend their ways, just as St Paul had twice written to the Thessa-

Γλαβας

duly = δεδωκός / αὐτοδίδακτος / με γυμνάζω, ὁμοῦ ὡρα (f.w)

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lonicans on hope, discipline and ^{πρόδοσις} premature thoughts of the end of the world. Thessaloniki ^{δεδωκός / ἐπίσημος} duly fell in 1387. In 1393 the archbishop ventured back to his ^{(ἐπίσημος) ἐδωκός} see. He found that the world there had not ended. Indeed, Ottoman occupation was more ^{υποφερτός / ἀνεκτός} tolerable than Manuel had threatened. Sultan Bayazid I had granted the citizens special favors and had left the infrastructure of Byzantine local government and its officers largely in place.

The fact was that the Ottomans could do no other. Vastly outnumbered by people they conquered, their problem was manpower; there were too few Muslims to go round, and of those too few Turks. The solution was obvious. While the conversion of an orthodox Christian to Islam could be swift and relatively painless, it takes longer to turn a Roman into a Turk. Yet there were ^{ὀλιγοήμεροι τρέφοι} short-cuts. In a ^{κήρυγμα} sermon delivered in occupied Thessaloniki in 1395 Archbishop Glabas ^{ἐκτέλεσεν τὸν νόμον / μεθόδοις / ἡσέο / τὴν ἀγίαν / βυζαντινὰν μεθόδοις} reported on an expedient which may date from the first substantial Ottoman ^{ἰσχυρὰ / βύσταξ / καθεστὺς / ἐκτελέσει} establishment in Europe, at Gallipoli in 1354. It is called *devshirme* (recruitment) in Turkish and *paidomazoma* (harvest of children) in Greek. This 'child ^{ὁρμαὶ / ὁρμαζομένη / ἡλικία / ἡλικία} levy' took Christians for training in the Ottoman administration and, especially, in the 'new army' (Turkish *yeni cheri*, root of the English word janissary). Girls could ^{ἀνδραγαθία} aspire to the harem. It was such converts who were the most eager for further conquest. Their advancement, especially after the battle of Ankara in 1402, led to tension with the old Anatolian Turkish leadership, which was ^{ἐκτελέσει} to come to a head in 1453.

In the ^{ἐκτελέσει} aftermath of Timur's victory at Ankara, Thessaloniki ^{ἐκτελέσει} reverted to Byzantium in 1403. Once again its archbishop provided characteristic leadership. Archbishop Symeon of Thessaloniki (1416/17-29), urged his flock to keep firmly Roman and orthodox. An ^{ὀρμαὶ} ardent hesychast, he sought to restore the identity of the city in the face of Venetian and Ottoman pressure. But in Constantinople

Manuel Palaiologos was, at the age of seventy-three, more cautious: in 1423, unable to defend Thessaloniki against the Ottomans, he invited the republic of Venice to do it for him. Actually, the Venetians were initially welcomed as no great friends of the pope of Rome, but found the place expensive to defend and the locals doing deals with the Turks. The real end came with archbishop Symeon's death late in 1429. The Ottomans entered a demoralized city on 29 March 1430; the Venetian captains had slipped away, the icon of Hodegetria was smashed and 7,000 Thessalonicians were taken captive.

What happened next is partly revealed in Ottoman *tahrir defters*, tax and census registers. Short of manpower, the Ottomans targeted

cities such as Thessaloniki, first to Islamize, and then Turkicise. Outside the walls the overwhelmingly peasant population could await assimilation. Sultan Mehmet II had a declared policy of demographic manipulation, today called 'ethnic cleansing', which has good Byzantine precedents. Forcible deportation and resettlement, along with recruitment and natural erosion by conversion should soon have made Thessaloniki the second Ottoman city of the empire. But this did not happen. The place recovered slowly after 1430, within walls enclosing about 285 hectares, which in medieval Mediterranean terms could encompass a population of 30,000 or more.

Δ In 1478 the city had a Muslim population of 4,320, but its Christian element, with 6,094 souls, was still in an absolute majority with 59 per cent of households. By c. 1500 the Christian population had grown to 7,986 but, with 8,575, the Muslim population had doubled to reach, for the first and last time, a simple majority of 42 per cent of the inhabitants of Thessaloniki. But around 1500 a third category was introduced, if incompletely recorded: 3,770 Jews. By 1519, 15,715 were registered: 54 per cent of the population of Thessaloniki,

an absolute majority which they maintained until the ^{ημε-ρεσιν αὐταῖς} semi-conversion of many to Islam together with their false Messiah, Sabbatai Zevi (1625-76), after 1666.

^{68εραπ(η) (68α/απαβίωσις)} ^{εδρα} ^{οξυφ} The conversion of the major city of the Balkans, from the staunchly Roman orthodox see of Archbishop Palamas, Glabas and Symeon, first into a Muslim stronghold and then into the largest Jewish city in the world, all within four decades, needs explanation. In the past, Byzantine emperors had in turn invited western Christian powers and Ottoman Turks to fight their wars for them against orthodox Serbs and Bulgarians, and regretted the ^(68α/απαβίωσις) expedient. Now ^{ημε-ρεσιν αὐταῖς} the Ottoman state was faced with a greater, demographic, war. If Thessaloniki could not be turned Turk, a third urban element could be introduced. Before 1430 there is evidence for a few Greek-speaking and Karaite Jews in the city, not even registered in 1478. But after their conquest of Granada in 1492, the catholic ^{ημε-ρεσιν αὐταῖς} sovereigns, Ferdinand and Isabel, expelled their Spanish (Sephardic) Jews. Bayazid II welcomed them via Constantinople, largely to settle in Thessaloniki. It was the greatest ^{εὐαγγελισμὸς} forcible deportation and resettlement of all. Ottoman demographic strategy meant that Thessaloniki did not have a Roman orthodox majority until after 1912, when it fell to Greece, once more to become a second city. ✓

ex: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6.

EXERCISES

✓✓ 1. Give the term:

1st & 2nd paragraphs

- A gathering of people held at regular intervals for barter and sale of goods. ^{exchange goods for other things rather than for money} traders
- ^{any Christian priest} A parson corresponding in some respects to a father; a protector. evangelist