Conflits et protestations paysannes dans l’ histoire d’ un village de Macedoine: (1900-1936)

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http://dx.doi.org/10.12681/grsr.569

To cite this article:

Conflict and peasant protest in the history of a Macedonian village, 1900-1936*

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The bey's elephant

A long time ago there was on the tsifliki a bey, owner of the tsifliki. He brought an elephant and let him free. Yes, but the elephant damaged the crops. The villagers came together. They started to say in the village square: «He damages our crops, this animal the elephant». At a certain moment, after a lot had happened, they decided to go to the bey to tell him to take the elephant away because he caused so much damage. One day they all assembled in the square—a lot of people—and departed. They started and reached Modi. From there on further... In the meantime some started to piss. Another one's tzarwouli loosened and he had to sit down to fasten it. Eh... somewhat further down in the plain another became afraid... he was thirsty. In the end, when they reached Tsertselouda, only five or six remained. Well, they continued. They had come close to the tsifliki, but just outside the tsifliki only one remained.

The bey, however, had seen them already from Kourtezi. A swarm of people on their way to the tsifliki. He said to the Albanians, whom he had as a guard: «Take your places on the walls and let us see what these people want and why they come down here». When he looked at them and saw only one, he said to the Albanians: «Put your guns down and go and have a look what this man wants». Eh... it was only one. They took him into the tsifliki. He (the bey) said to him—in Turkish he said this—: «What do you want, tzorbatzi?».

The tzorbatzis answered: «This animal», he said, «which you brought here... I beg you very much, my master, it is alone... and if it would be possible to bring another one so it will have company... so it will not be alone...» «Ah, is that all? I'll do it», said the bey. He offered him coffee there, he treated him, he took care of him and he showed him out. On his way back to the village they (the villagers) began to appear one by one. «Hey... what did the bey tell you?», the villagers asked him. «Eh... what he told me I'll tell you», he said, «but let's first go to the village». All again gathered in the village square and started to ask what the bey told him. «Well, friends, the bey told me that he will take...

* This article is based on eleven months of fieldwork (carried out in 1975-76 and financed by the University of Amsterdam) as well as on relevant literature, and—to some degree—regional newspapers. Archival material could not be used. The archives of the village from before 1950 were destroyed or lost, and archival material is similarly lacking at the regional level. Thanks are due to Rod Aya for correcting my English.

1. Thanks are due to Hugo Strötbaum for pointing out to me that this story was widespread in the Balkans and Turkey. It was usually told as one of the stories about Nasreddin Hoca. These stories often stress the cleverness of the main character. The version of the story published here is a transcription from a tape-recording. The storyteller had first told his story spontaneously in a local coffeeshop in the autumn of 1975. At neither occasion did he use the name of Nasreddin Hoca. These stories often stress the cleverness of the main character, but the need for common action. This was even more explicit in the coffeeshop situation. On this occasion the story was told in the context of a discussion about the need for peasant organization and the storyteller finished his story with the following sentence: «If you would have come along with me, we could have achieved something». The storyteller is well-adapted to local circumstances: it refers to landmarks in the village landscape ( Modi, Tsertselouda), illustrates the role of the tzorbatzis and symbolizes the conflict between peasants and herdsmen, which played a prominent role in village history. Other versions of the story can be found in Andric 1962, Maghiopoulou n.d., Onder 1971, Shah 1968.

2. Large landed estate (Turkish: çiflik).

3. Type of footwear.

4. Rich peasant (Turkish: çorbaci).
it», he said. Ah... the villagers were all happy and all waited till the bey would take the elephant away so they would be left in peace and he would not eat their crops anymore. After about a month the bey, instead of taking the elephant, brought another one. The people started to shout and the villagers said to him «Hey... you told him to take the elephant and he brought another one». «Well», he said, «you louts. We started out to go all together. On the way you got afraid. One fastened his tsarwouli, a second pissed, a third went away to drink water, a fourth one got fever, another again became ill and so you let me go all gone. What should I have told the bey? To take the elephant away? You think I am that stupid to tell the bey to take away the elephant so he would kill me? I told him to bring another one».

Introduction

Recently Mouzelis stressed that Greece was the only Balkan country which lacked a strong peasant movement (1978: 89). Others have reached similar conclusions (e.g., Dertlis 1977: 110-11). One need not disagree to note that regional differences are neglected in such analyses. This results in insufficient attention to regions which have been more peripheral in the process of state formation. In this article I will attempt to analyze peasant political organization and protest in a village in such a region, shortly after its incorporation in the nation-state. The village, referred to as Ambelofyto, is situated in the southwestern part of the Serres basin in Eastern Macedonia.

The region and the village before the end of Ottoman rule

The Serres region of Eastern Macedonia consists of the valley of the Strymon river and the surrounding mountain ranges. The main concentration of population during this period was to be found in the free villages of the mountain foothills. The large estates (tsiflikia) were to be found in the plain. Most of these estates were owned by Turkish landowners (beys) and the agricultural land was mainly used for grain cultivation.

Large parts of the estates, especially of the lower-lying ones which were regularly flooded, were left uncultivated and rented to Albanian, Vlach, or Sarakatsani shepherds. The tsiflikia were cultivated by sharecroppers, who lived in small settlements on the estate. These tsifliki settlements were much smaller than the free villages. The peasants of the free villages were mainly smallholders. Many villagers did not have sufficient land of their own and also had to work on the estates in the plain, a situation considered by Malouchos to be characteristic for Macedonia (1924, no. 3:3). The main language groups in the region were the Bulgarians, the Turks, and the Greeks. The tsiflik population consisted largely of Bulgarians and settled gypsies. Greeks usually lived only on small tsiflikia near the free Greek villages. Greek speaking villages were mainly to be found in the southern part of the basin.

The free villages had a more developed community life than the tsifliki settlements. The Turkish authorities interfered little with the communal life of the villages. The local community (kinoti) had many tasks, notably the regulation of the use of communal pastures, the hiring out of fallow land to shepherds, the maintenance of school and church, the settling of disputes, and the representation of the village to outside authorities. The village elders (azades or dimojeronotes) were elected by all heads of families during the general assembly, usually on a specific day of the year. This meeting could also be convened by the local authorities whenever it was deemed necessary. Local government was, however,—at least towards the end of Ottoman rule—less democratic than official procedures would have led one to think. In the both in Slav and Greek speaking communities in the hands of the tzorbatzides, whose role has been excellently described by Malouchos:

Local power (kinoti ekousias) rested mostly in the hands of the class of tzorbatzides. In Macedonia the tzorbatzides refers to the wealthier inhabitants of the village, who usually have the most landed property and, as a result, have some movable capital which they invest in some business or lend to poorer villagers. This class rarely has a higher intellectual level than the other villagers. Judging from village popular tradition in Macedonia it seems that this class originated during the past century or, at the earliest, around the end of the eighteenth century. The tzorbatzides used local government, which they controlled, as well as the relations which they as representatives of the community developed with the Ottoman beys and the Turkish authorities to obtain greater economic power among the villagers. The constant pressure which the beys exerted upon the Christian villages during the nineteenth century contributed greatly to the development of this class. Holding, as we said, local power in their hands, they often used the fear for the beys or the real danger they represented to violate the rights of the villagers. When the danger existed that the bey from an adjacent tsiflikia would take hold of a communal pasture, the tzorbatzides persuaded the villagers to take hold

5. Palamotou gives a list of 56 tsiflikia in the kaza (administrative district) of Serres (1913). The tsiflikia listed have a mean size of 384 ha. ranging from 40 ha. to 1500 ha. It should be noted that the kaza of Serres covers a smaller region than the present prefecture (nomos) of Serres.

6. The average size of free villages in the kaza of Serres was 101 houses. Tsiflik settlements had an average size of 29 houses (based on data provided by Bradaska 1878).

7. I refer to the Slav-speaking population as Bulgarians since this has been and still is how they are referred to in the region.

8. According to the data of Bradaska (1878) there were in the kaza of Serres 2569 houses inhabited by Greeks and 3251 inhabited by Bulgarians. Bradaska distinguishes three types of settlement: free villages, tsiflik settlements and other small hamlets referred to by him as machulades. The distribution of Greek houses over these three types of settlement was 88%, 12% and 0% respectively, and for Bulgarian houses 47%, 45% and 8%.
of the pastures and to cultivate it themselves, supposedly to protect it against the bey. Thereupon they appropriated it and succeeded in obtaining property rights for the occupied land from the Turkish authorities. Before the villagers they justified these (and other) abuses by reference to the need to bitrate the Turkish authorities or in another way, while they excluded an immediate control over their actions. Not seldom the bishops were also used to cover up the methods of the tzorbatzides for the villagers (1922, no. 10: 14).

Ambelofyto was, during the period under discussion, a relatively large free village in the southwestern part of the Serres basin. In 1913 it counted 710 inhabitants. Up to about 1900 the main products of Ambelofyto and the surrounding villages were wheat, barley, corn, cotton, beans, sesame, opium and wine (Palamiotou 1914: 131-36). It is likely that up to at least the 1870's many poorer villagers worked on the tsiflía in the plains. During the winter, villagers would go to Doksato, an important Greek tobacco village near Drama, to participate in the manipulation (epexergasia) of tobacco. When, towards the end of the nineteenth century, tobacco began to be cultivated in the Darnakochoria (Samsari 1971: 43), a group of Greek villages near Serres, a yearly seasonal migration started to some of these villages. During the early twentieth century tobacco began to be grown in Ambelofyto. The first licences for tobacco cultivation were issued in 1902 or 1903. Though before that year tobacco cultivation was forbidden by the Regie, the Turkish tobacco monopoly, some people had already grown some tobacco illegally. By 1912 tobacco had become an important crop in the village and the surrounding region (Palamiotou 1914: 131-32).

The opportunities offered by the expansion of tobacco cultivation in the region made the villagers less dependent on the decaying tsiflía economy and probably decreased their dependence on the local tzorbatzides. There were about seven tzorbatzides families in the village. The position of the tzorbatzides in Ambelofyto fits perfectly the description by Malouchos quoted above. The tzorbatzides owned one or more plots and one or more buildings. They were in charge of the maintenance of the village against intruders. The wealthiest and by far the most powerful family was that of the Skodrades. This family had established itself in the village during the early nineteenth century after it had fled the harsh rule of Ali Pasha in Thessaly. Apparently they soon managed to obtain a leading position in the community. In 1860 the family gave the village a school with seven hectares of land. This was to become one of the most important schools of the region. At least from the end of the nineteenth century it was this family which determined who was to be the village elder. The Skodrades were primarily herdsmen. Aleksandros Skodras, the most powerful tzorbatzis during the early twentieth century, once owned about a thousand goats and five to six hundred sheep. As herdsmen, the Skodrades guarded the boundaries of the village against intruders. Though there were probably no villagers without any land, differences in wealth were still important. The bottom stratum, an estimated forty-five percent of the village population, consisted of those peasants who had so little land that they had to work for others on a more or less regular basis. The top layer was formed by those who needed others to till their land or guard their flocks (about twenty-five percent of the population). In between was a middle stratum of peasants who did not need to work for others on a regular basis nor had other people work for them.11 The wealthiest peasants, and especially the tzorbatzides, farmed out some land on a sharecropping basis and/or had one or more people working as laborers on a yearly basis. According to older informants such workers had a particularly bad fate. They worked, as older villagers phrased it, «for a piece of bread» and were completely dependent on their masters who even could decide whom they should marry. The relation between a landlord and a peasant could also be reinforced by bonds of spiritual kinship. Such a relationship has been said to have produced some very exploitative relation between landlord and laborer and was associated with tenant-farming. Tenant-farming

9. The name of the village is a pseudonym, as are the names of villagers mentioned later on. Since the national identity of Macedonian villages is often questioned it may be useful to stress that Ambelofyto is listed as a Greek-speaking village also in Slav sources (e.g. Bradaska 1878); its Greekness is not disputed.

10. Given the somewhat vague criteria for distinguishing the tzorbatzides, informants differed somewhat in the names they provided. As a result no precise number can be given.

11. Since estimates by older villagers differ sometimes remarkably, I hesitate to link these categories to the amount of land owned. A preliminary estimate would be that the lowest stratum owned less than 2 ha. and the middle one from 2 ha. to 5-10 ha., and the top one more than this. The tzorbatzides were the wealthiest families within the last category. It should be stressed that not only the amount of land, but also the quality was important. The top stratum controlled the best land.
The members of the brotherhood were all young males. Sometimes, when asked why his family did not participate in the nationalist struggle. The brotherhood of Ambelofyto, too, was accused of being the main cause of division in the villages by supporting the tzorbatzides and of exploiting the peasantry. In the words of an old informant: «he was a man... let me not use the word scoundrel... in any case greedy in a morbid way». The bishop subjected the peasantry to heavy taxation and, if the peasants were unable or unwilling to pay, he confiscated their animals or brass kettles (kazania). Kourbezos at least once threatened the bishop in a personal meeting at a neighboring village to take action against him if he did not stop exploiting the peasants. He also planned to kill the tzorbatzis Aleksandros Skodras, but was restrained by the village teacher.

It was probably in 1905 or 1906 that an important event took place which clarifies the relation between the brotherhood and the tzorbatzides.

When Vasilis Karajannidis, a member of the brotherhood, left a meeting of the organization in the shop of another member, he met on the village square two tzorbatzides, got into an argument with them and shot one in his hand. The tzorbatzides informed the Turkish authorities, accusing the brotherhood of organizing armed resistance. Twenty-seven members were arrested. When Sterjos Zabakis, at that moment teacher in another village, learned this, he immediately went to Aidonochori to inform the brotherhood there and gave himself up to the authorities in order to influence the course of events. In jail he managed to get into contact with the other members and it was decided that Vasilis Karajannidis would take the blame and that the others, when released, would look after his family. So it happened. Vaslis was sentenced and remained in jail until 1913. In 1907 kapetan Kourbezos was dismissed as a result of his conflicts with the bishop. Kourbezos advised Sterjos Zabakis to leave the area. Sterjos went to Athens where he stayed under the protection of a bodyguard, to return to the area in 1908.

Two incidents which some villagers still remember and which must have occurred during about the same period, further illustrate relations in the village.

One day Aleksandros Skodras maltreated a laborer who worked for him. The village priest—not a member of the brotherhood but very much one of their company—intervened on behalf of the laborer. As a result he was hit in public by Aleksandros. The news was soon known and «the village got mad».

Petros Petridis, a member of the brotherhood, needed some papers. He went to the house where the village council was assembled. He did not bow before the tzorbatzides as custom required (den ekane metania). In retaliation the tzorbatzides refused to give the papers unless he would bring his wife so they could entertain themselves with her. Petros refused. He nevertheless managed to get his papers arranged.

The members of the brotherhood were all young males. Sometimes, when asked why his family did not...­
participate in the brotherhood, an informant would answer: «because we did not have young men in the family». Of the twenty-six persons, whose membership could be established with relative certainty, seven came from the top stratum, fourteen from the middle and five from the lowest stratum.13 When this is compared with the relative size of the different strata, it is clear that the middle peasants were most strongly represented in the brotherhood, followed by the top stratum. Only a few poor peasants participated. Their low degree of participation was undoubtedly due to the fact that becoming a member of the brotherhood meant challenging the power of the tzorbatzides. The poor peasants, being too much dependent on them, could not afford to act in such a defiant way. The participation of members of the upper stratum in the brotherhood can be clarified by reference to the position of the Skodras family. The Skodras family specialized in goat and shepherding. Many of the male members of this big family spent their formative years in the mountains with the flocks and their intellectual level was lower than that of the more wealthy peasants and shopkeepers, who looked down upon them as uneducated brutes. Some of these peasants, two belonging to tzorbatzides families, became members of the brotherhood.

Incorporation in the Greek nation-state, the wars and the cooperative movement (1913-1923)

When in 1913 the region became part of Greece, the general assembly was abolished. Local elections were not introduced during the first decade of Greek rule and the Greek administration usually selected the tzorbatzides as local representatives. Malouchos describes the influence of the incorporation into the Greek state on the position of the tzorbatzides as follows:

The tzorbatzides profited from the total ignorance of the Greek administration regarding the internal situation in the communities and embraced the authorities. They easily took the official communities as their own hands. They strengthened their benefits—unjustly obtained under Turkish rule—regarding agricultural land, pastures and moveable capital, using the force of law which Greek society provided them. And because their role was not questioned they continued to apply themselves to the exploitation of their fellow-villagers with arbitrariness and violence. They constituted real tyrants of the villages. Whereas formerly they had to fight against the beys and the Turkish authorities, who often acted on the same level in their relations with Christians, they now were releaved from this pressure and became in most cases the worst exploiters of the peasantry, hated by them like the lawyers and pettifoggers who, like a grasshopper plague, alighted in Macedonia from «Old Greece» (Malouchos 1924, 4: 5).

The last years of Turkish rule until 1923 were a period of almost uninterrupted war, which had an important impact upon Ambelofyto. The end of the Macedonian Struggle brought only a few years of relative peace. In 1912 the first Balkan War broke out. About ten villagers fought that year in the Ottoman Army. During the second Balkan War some of the major battles were fought in the Serres region. Ambelofyto was partly destroyed and the villagers fled to the mountains. During World War I the river Strymon formed part of the front-line. From August 1916 to March 1918 the inhabitants of Ambelofyto were evacuated and distributed over a number of villages in the mountains to the west. Villagers took part in the expedition to South Russia against the Bolsheviks in 1919. They state that as prisoners of war they were well treated since the Russians regarded them as victims of Great Power politics. From 1921 to 1922 villagers par-
ticipated in the Greek campaign in Turkey. Many males were under arms for years at a stretch. War experiences of this period were still a topic of village conversation during my fieldwork. The most remarkable story is that about twelve men, who, as soldiers of the Fourth Army Corps, had been taken to Germany as prisoners of war.

As a result of the official neutrality of Greece, its uncertain position due to the conflict between the pro-German king and the anti-German leader of the Liberal Party and the surrender of the Fourth Army Corps by its royalist commander, the villagers were not treated as normal prisoners of war, but rather as «guests», as one of them phrased it. During their stay in Germany of more than two years they participated in the war economy and had some freedom of movement. When the war ended eleven of them decided not to wait for official regulations and, of their own accord, bought a map and returned to Greece, walking large parts of the distance. On return in the village this group introduced several innovations in dress (the bow tie, the hat and musc). The leader of the group, Nikos Fakis, organized with others a dance club to teach people European dances «in order to change the relations between men and women», as Nikos phrased it in 1976. The group also established a sports club.

The war had forced people out of their local community. Through this, they learned about other customs and ideas and gained some independence. Many of those who had returned to the village refused to accept traditional family authority and settled on their own, thus accelerating the breakdown of the old family structure. The returnees were also less inclined to act in the deferential way towards tzorbatzides and spiritual sponsors as custom required.

Greek nationhood had not brought what most people in Ambelofyto had expected of it. The state's support of the tzorbatzides, the nature of the state bureaucracy and the wars in which they had to participate and which brought them little besides death and destruction made them feel more rather than less exploited. «They held us as a colony», said an informant, referring to the interwar period. At least some began to wonder if Ottoman rule, which had allowed them some local autonomy, was not to be preferred.14 Their experiences made the people of Ambelofyto more susceptible to the new ideologies of the time.

After 1913 agricultural experts became active in Macedonia, usually as state employees. Of particular importance for Central and Eastern Macedonia was the group around Malouchos. Malouchos was strongly interested in local self-government under Turkish rule and believed that the Greek administration neglected the local community. He accused administrators of lack of knowledge and interest in the countryside. He devoted himself to the study of rural problems and the organization of the peasantry. He also published a bi-weekly, called Kinotis.15 Malouchos established the first cooperatives in a few villages east of Thessaloniki and followed their development closely for a period of three years. The policy was to establish cooperatives first in free villages and afterwards in tsolfiki-settlements. To Malouchos and the people around him the cooperative movement was an attempt to restore the democratic self-government of the local communities corrupted by the tzorbatzides and undermined by the state. The cooperatives thus had to fight the tzorbatzides, and it was believed that «cooperatives governed by the tzorbatzides (were) condemned to failure» (Anagnostopoulos 1922, no. 10:7). Malouchos stressed that, though the cooperative movement was initiated by the state itself, many struggles were necessary, both with its «social enemies» (the lease-holders of the big estates, the beyis, the tzorbatzides and the herdsmen) and with the state organs (police, tax officials, et al.) (Malouchos 1924, no. 6:12). The almost continuous state of war and the consequent destruction and absence of many young men were hardly conducive to the organization of cooperatives. In the Serres prefecture only four cooperatives were founded—in free tobacco villages east of the Strymon River—just before World War I. During the war no cooperatives were established and the movement really started in 1919 in the tobacco villages of the region. During the 1920's many cooperatives were organized, and the cooperative movement was well developed in the Serres region (Mousseidou 1925; Vasilakopoulos 1927).

Ambelofyto was among the first villages where cooperatives were established in 1919. The agricultural expert Ganosis cooperated with Sterios Zabakis, the village teacher, and Nikos Fakis, the leader of the returnees from Germany, in organizing the cooperative. Many of those who became active in the cooperative came from brotherhood families. The relationship between the cooperative and most tzorbatzides families, especially the Skodrades, soon became tense.

An intermezzo on tobacco

In order to understand the political changes to be discussed in the next section it is necessary to look at some aspects of tobacco cultivation and manipulation (epeksergasia).

The agricultural cycle of tobacco growing starts in February. In this month tobacco is sown in carefully prepared beds (chaslamades), which are located near

14. Sanders noted before World War II a similar phenomenon in the Bulgarian village of Dragalety: «Many of the older Dragalety residents, with whom I talked looked back upon Turkish rule as preferable to their present lot... The Turks did recognize the traditional form of village government by elders... and let the heads of the zadrugas, or large joint families, run village affairs to their liking» (1949: 64-65).

15. My attention was drawn to this periodical because it had been read in Ambelofyto. It was published only from 1922 to 1924. It contains some of the best analyses of rural conditions in Macedonia at that time.
Around the turn of the century commercial manipulation took place only during four months (from March till June). With the expansion of production the number of tobacco workers increased. Though the increasing production also led to a lengthening of the period of manipulation, there always remained a peak period (March-June), while during some months —December and January and often October and November—there was no work at all (Mavrogordatou and Chamoudopoulou 1931: 83; for the earlier period: Müller 1912: 334). This resulted in a higher mobility of labor. During periods of seasonal unemployment tobacco workers would look for other work. Rural manipulation, which took place during the slack winter period, offered one possibility. The high mobility of the work force prevented the development of a personal relationship between employer and employee (Mavrogordatou and Chamoudopoulou 1931:84) and probably contributed much to its high degree of organization. During the last years of Ottoman rule the tobacco workers were already known for their leftist ideas and so well organized that employers opened up new manipulation sites in other cities or small towns (Müller 1912: 335) in order to avoid the demands of unions. One of these new centres was Serres. In the later 1920's tobacco plants were opened in Nigrita, a regional centre near Ambelofyto, probably for similar reasons.

**Party politics and revolutionary ferment (1923-1936)**

The degree to which party politics had entered the village prior to 1923 is difficult to judge. According to one informant the opposition between Venizelists (Liberal Party) and royalists (Popular Party), characteristic of Greek politics in the interwar period, had entered the village already during the last years of Ottoman rule and was related to the conflict between the brotherhood and the zorbatzides. Insofar as party politics affected village life, this was (at least till 1923) the most important axis of conflict. In 1922 the initiative was taken in Thessaloniki for the foundation of an Agrarian Party and in 1923 the goal was achieved. There was a close relation between the Agrarian Party and the cooperative movement. The initiative for the foundation of the Agrarian Party was taken by the Panhellenic Union of Agricultural Cooperatives and its first program required the strengthening of the cooperative organization of peasants. Often the same people were active in both movements. The question whether this constituted politically sound strategy was continuously discussed, at least in the Serres region. There were also ideological similarities. Like the cooperative movement, the Agrarian Party stressed in the first article of its program the need for local self-government and demanded the return to the local communities of pastures and forests, taken over by the state.
In Ambelofyto the Agrarian Party ideology was introduced by progressive agricultural experts and found ready acceptance among part of the population. Nikos Fakis, the leader of the group which returned from Germany, spread the ideas of the cooperative movement and the Agrarian Party by selling *Kinitos* and a regional periodical of the Agrarian Party. Nikos, whose family had been poor during the period of the Macedonian Struggle and had not provided members for the brotherhood, had up to that time been a supporter of the Popular Party. The local leadership of the Agrarian Party, however, drew heavily upon the brotherhood families, as the following case illustrates.

The most important peasant leader during the interwar period was Sokrats Kotsoulas. Sokrats came from one of the most educated families in the village. His father, Warsamis, had gone to Athens during the latter part of the nineteenth century to study medicine, but soon returned to the village. Warsamis was the first villager to wear European style trousers. From this he took his nickname. Warsamis had cooperated with the village teacher in the leadership of the brotherhood. He was killed by the Bulgarians in 1913. Sokrats followed three years of high school in Serres. He was a member of the cooperative from the start. Soon he became active. He represented the cooperative at the foundation of the Union of Cooperatives in Serres. Sokrats, who first belonged to the Liberal Party, became the leader of the Agrarian Party and was put up as a candidate for parliament at the elections of 1926. He further acted as president of the village cooperative, director of the Union of Cooperatives and, briefly, as village president. He tried out various new varieties of grapes and planted olive trees, still the only ones in the village. Sokrats never acted as a baptismal or marriage sponsor. This was probably due to his opposition to the church. He initially refused to have his children baptized, but was forced to do so under the Metaxas dictatorship.

The main goal of the local cooperative during the 1920's was to buy land. In this it succeeded in 1929, when the cooperative bought part of a *tsifliki* (112 ha) located below the village. After heated debates, in which Kotsoulas played a dominant role, it was decided in 1930 to reclaim and cultivate the land collectively. The first harvest of barley was very poor, the underground economy set in, many poorer villagers had gained an economic independence which removed the main obstacle to joining the village opposition. They became even more aware, however, of their dependence on impersonal markets. In cities and towns in the region, such as Serres and nearby Nigrita, the unemployment rate among tobacco workers was rising rapidly and strikes were frequent. The people of Ambelofyto were well aware of this.

The Agrarians and the Communists were well organized locally and several participated in regional organizations and national meetings. There was a local committee of the Agrarian Party and around 1928 an Agrarian Youth Organization was founded. The important factor in the dissemination of socialist ideology. Most of the early adherents of the new ideology were among the first to cultivate tobacco in the village. As in the case of the Agrarian Party, members of the brotherhood families played a crucial role in the emerging communist movement. Also in this case its main leader, Stavros Zettas, came from a brotherhood family. Stavros was one of the wealthiest peasants, though not a *tsorbatzis*. He had little education, but was known for reading a lot. He traded in wood, which justified his regular visits to Serres, and became one of the three regional candidates for parliament on the Communist ticket in the 1926 elections.

It may be assumed that the Agrarian and the Communist Party had gained some strength by 1926, when the village provided a candidate for parliament for both parties. It was only during the later 1920's and early 1930's, however, that these oppositional parties obtained a large following. During the 1920's, as a result of the rising tobacco prices, more and more land was devoted to tobacco cultivation and tobacco became virtually a monoculture. Families which previously had not been able to live off their plot of land and had to supplement their income by working for others, now became independent. There was very little outmigration. People did not aspire for jobs in the urban bureaucracy and would have had little chance if they tried, given the predominance of people from «Old Greece». This made them less dependent on state patronage. Furthermore, the purchase of land by the cooperative had made more land available. So, when the crisis set in, many poorer villagers had gained an economic independence which removed the main obstacle to joining the village opposition. They became even more aware, however, of their dependence on impersonal markets. In cities and towns in the region, such as Serres and nearby Nigrita, the unemployment rate among tobacco workers was rising rapidly and strikes were frequent. The people of Ambelofyto were well aware of this.
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Communist Party worked in secret. Its adult members were organized in cells of three persons and members were not supposed to know the total membership of the village. Youth were organized in the Communist Youth Organization and its meetings were secret. The Agrarian Youth Organization became dominated by the Communists after some years and functioned thereafter as the first step towards membership of the Communist Party. Both youth organizations organized lessons on the principles of Marxism, such as the concept of surplus value, taught by the local communist leaders as well as by outside Party functionaries, whose names were kept secret.

From the late 1920’s the plane tree on the village square had become the centre of heated political debates in which the leaders of the opposition predominated. It became known in Ambelofyto and the surrounding villages as the «Popular University» (Laiko Panepistimio). The youths, especially, became involved in the left-wing movement. Young men who stood aloof were not considered modern (ekselissimi) and had difficulty in being accepted by many of their age-mates. The evening walk (wolta) could almost take the character of a political demonstration. Political songs filled the air alternated with slogans like «down with the war».

When in 1932 Stavros Zettas, the Communist leader mentioned earlier, died, a political speech was delivered at his grave and a red flag was hung from the church tower. As a result a number of villagers were arrested, subjected to torture and interrogated. From this moment on, if not from 1929 when the first anti-communist law—the so-called idionymo—was passed, the spy (chafies) or police informer became a familiar figure in village life. The strength of the Communists, however, continued to increase and reached its peak in 1936 when they got almost 50% of the votes at the national elections (see Table I).20

The strength of the Left notwithstanding, the Right continued to dominate the village throughout the pre-1936 period as a result of its control of the village council, its system of spying and its relations with the state apparatus. The question of village pastures illustrates their power. As a result of the settlement of conflicts the peasant masses—thus diverting their attention from their desperate economic situation (1978: 93). Why is it that peasant politics in Greece, the dominant classes managed to contain peasant discontent and to keep the peasantry within the «safe» boundaries of bourgeois political debates. In fact, the Greek bourgeois parties, profoundly split during the inter-war period over the issue of the monarchy, succeeded in drawing into this essentially intra-bourgeois conflict the peasant masses—thus diverting their attention from their desperate economic situation (1978: 93).

In Greece... the dominant classes managed to contain peasant discontent and to keep the peasantry within the «safe» boundaries of bourgeois political debates. In fact, the Greek bourgeois parties, profoundly split during the inter-war period over the issue of the monarchy, succeeded in drawing into this essentially intra-bourgeois conflict the peasant masses—thus diverting their attention from their desperate economic situation (1978: 93).

In Bulgaria, on the other hand, «the major political cleavage took a 'peasant masses versus bourgeois' form» (1978:93). Why is it that peasant politics in Ambelofyto does not conform to the dominant Greek pattern and seems more similar to the Bulgarian case?

A first point to note is that Macedonia became part of Greece almost a century after it had been established as an independent state. The state bureaucracy was represented by people from «Old Greece» who looked down upon the Macedonians and, having doubts about their ethnic origins—even if they did not speak Slav—questioned their loyalty to the nation. The peasants, on...
the other hand, distrusted the state which supported the local powerholders. They had few relations that could serve as a link to the centers of power. In this respect the situation differed radically from such regions as the Peloponnese and the Cyclades, where peasants had some access to the state apparatus, as well as a tradition of migration to the capital. The village formed a relatively closed community not only because of the virtual absence of outmigration, but also because relations of marriage and spiritual kinship were largely confined within the village boundaries. Communal institutions that had characterized the Ottoman period were not yet completely destroyed or forgotten. As a result, grievances were far less absorbed by the prevailing social structure than in «Old Greece». Ambeloufo, during the period discussed, provides a better example of radical solidarity—i.e., institutional arrangements which facilitate the spread of grievances—than of conservative solidarity (Moore 1966:475-577) or dependent integration (Mouzelis 1978:139).

Besides the late incorporation in the nation-state, the nature of the local community and the effects of the wars, the implications of tobacco cultivation should be stressed. Tobacco cultivation made the poorer peasants more independent of local powerholders. It brought them into contact with urban workers and thus with town—and city life. This relation with the city was, however, very different from that in most parts of «Old Greece». It provided them with few patronage links and related them rather to the urban workers movement. The cultivation of tobacco made them more aware of their dependence on impersonal markets. The relation between tobacco as a crop and the penetration of communism in the countryside can also be noted in the following quotation from Jackson on the Communist Party of Bulgaria:

The trends in membership from 1921 to 1922 offer some clues to the appeal of the Party in the countryside. In the fifteen districts into which Bulgaria was divided, Party membership increased most rapidly... in the south-central tobacco-growing district of Plovdiv, in the highly nationalistic Macedonian district of Petrich (which is also a tobacco-growing district), in the grain-producing Vratsa district in the Danubian lowlands, and in Sofia district where the capital was located (1966:171).

His explanation for this distribution could have been written for Ambeloufo:

... it was a desperation born of their dependence on the market rather than their relative status within the peasant class. It seems likely under the circumstances that they were drawn to communism because of the strongest voice of protest against the inhumane, impersonal whims of the market, not because it had an attractive agrarian program (1966:171). The late integration in the nation-state, the common experience of nineteenth century Ottoman rule and the shared memory of local autonomy are some of the factors which make peasant politics in Ambeloufo more similar to the Bulgarian than to the typical Greek case. Slav and Greek villages in the region seem to have had much in common, even in such aspects as spiritual kinship. This may not sound agreeable to fervent nationalists, but is less surprising for those who do not start from the assumption of the autonomy of culture.

22. See note 12. Mosely already remarked in 1953 that he was struck by the absence of ethnic or national differentiations in family structure within the same regions of the Balkans (1976:66).

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