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

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The bey's elephant[1]

A long time ago there was on the *tsifliki*[2] 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*[3] 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?*».[4] 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 distroyed 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 story-teller 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 and at both occasions he stressed not so much 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 story-teller finished his story with the following sentence: «If you would have come along with me, we could have achieved something». The story-teller 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 Andrić 1962, Maghiopoulou n.d., Önder 1971, Shah 1968.

2. Large landed estate (Turkish: *çiftlik).*

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 *tzarwouli,* 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 alone. 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., Dertilis 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.[5] 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 share-croppers, who lived in small settlements on the estate. These *tsifliki* settlements were much smaller than the free villages.[6] 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,[7] the Turks, and the Greeks. The *tsifliki* population consisted largely of Bulgarians and settled gypsies. Greeks usually lived only on small *tsiflikia* near the free Greek villages.[8] 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 *(kinotis)* 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 *dimojerontes)* 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 suggest. It was both in Slav and Greek speaking communities in the hands of the *tzorbatzides,* whose role has been excellently described by Malouchos:

> Local power (*kinotiki eksousia*) rested mostly in the hands of the class of *tzorbatzides.* In Macedonia *tzorbatzides* refers to the wealthier inhabitants of the village, who usually have the most landed property and, as a result, have some moveable 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 *tsifliki* would take hold of a communal pasture, the *tzorbatzides* persuaded the villagers to take hold

5. Palamiotou 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. *Tsifliki* settlements had an average size of 29 houses (based on data provided by Bradaška 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 Bradaška (1878) there were in the *kaza* of Serres 2569 houses inhabited by Greeks and 3251 inhabited by Bulgarians. Bradaška distinguishes three types of settlement: free villages, *tsifliki* settlements and other small hamlets referred to by him as *machalades.* 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 bribe 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[9] 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, anise, opium and wine (Palamiotou 1914: 131-36). It is likely that up to at least the 1870's many poorer villagers worked on the *tsiflikia* in the plains. During the winter, villagers would go to Doksato, an important Greek tobacco village near Drama, to participate in the manipulation *(epeksergasia)* 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 *tsifliki* economy and probably decreased their dependence on the local *tzorbatzides*. There were about seven *tzorbatzides* families in the village.[10] The position of the *tzorbatzides* in Ambelofyto fits perfectly the description by Malouchos quoted above. The *tzorbatzides* owned one or more span of oxen—an important criterion of social standing—and most owned forty to fifty hectares of land at the beginning of the century. Some had large flocks of goats and sheep and others were engaged in trade. The prototype of the *tzorbatzis* was a somewhat older man with a big moustache who did not work himself, but had his children and others work for him. Villagers acted in a very deferential way towards the *tzorbatzides:* they bowed for them and kissed their hands and when a *tzorbatzis* entered the village square or another public place, everybody rose. The relation between the *tzorbatzides* and the villagers may be illustrated by the following anecdote:

One day a *tzorbatzis* ordered a very poor villager to buy him a fish. The villager was allowed to keep the fish's head as a favor. From that moment on the *tzorbatzis* gave orders to the villager whenever he wanted. The poor man got fed up, managed to find some money to buy a fish, ate it and gave the head to the *tzorbatzis* in order to pay off his debt.

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 wealthier 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 seems to have precluded the more 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. Bradaška 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.

gave a better opportunity of saving money and obtaining land. It is remarkable that the Skodrades, who were known for their harshness, did not employ tenants and had few relations of spiritual kinship with other villagers.

Households were large. Married sons remained within the household. Even at the death of the head of the household the brothers were expected to remain together and when they separated they usually continued to cooperate. Related households were concentrated in the same quarter *(machalas)* of the village. There was a strong preference for marriage with fellow villagers and most relations of spiritual kinship also connected families within the village. Spiritual kinship was a relationship between families rather than between individuals. Sons inherited the status of marriage and baptismal sponsor from their father.[12] Though the relation between sponsor and sponsored could, as indicated, be one between families of unequal socio-economic status, in many cases it connected families of roughly equal standing. This applies especially to middle peasants.

The brotherhood and the tzorbatzides during the Macedonian Struggle (1903-1908)

Since the 1870's Macedonia had been a contested region. After the Ilinden uprising (1903) fighting between Slav and Greek bands became particularly fierce. In the region of Ambelofyto, the villages, most of which were purely or overwhelmingly Greek, were organized to participate in the struggle. Aleksandros Skodras, the powerful *tzorbatzis,* became responsible for the transportation and distribution of arms in the region. The village became the headquarters of *kapetan* Kourbezos. Shortly after Skodras had been entrusted with the transportation of weapons, a local brotherhood *(adelfotita)* was established by the teacher Sterjos Zabakis, a native of the village. Brotherhoods were common in the Greek villages of the region (e.g., Samsari 1971). Though many brotherhoods in the region had written constitutions, this was most likely not the case in Ambelofyto. Zabakis also founded a brotherhood in the nearby village of Aidonochori, where he had been a teacher for some time. The members of both brotherhoods were sworn in at a common ceremony in the monastery of that village.

Brotherhoods usually had religious, educational and nationalist goals. The brotherhood of Ambelofyto, too, was established to enable poor villagers to attend school, to organize activities for the common good and to participate in the nationalist struggle. The brotherhood was also founded, however, to counter the power of the *tzorbatzides,* especially the Skodrades and their external allies such as Bishop Gregorius. The village teacher and others accused the Skodrades of selling arms for their own profit. In their opposition to the *tzorbatzides* and the bishop they were supported by *kapetan* Kourbezos, for whom Zabakis is said to have acted as a regional representative. Many other Greek villages were also divided into two hostile camps: «the bishop's friends and the bishop's foes» (Abbott 1903: 85) and, according to Bérard, internal conflicts often had the character of civil war (1897: 287). The bishop 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. Vasilis 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

12. In this and other respects spiritual kinship in Ambelofyto is more similar to the Slav than to the Greek pattern, as described by Hammel (1968).

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 sheepherding. 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 into 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 were transformed into a ruling class even more hated among the people (1922, no. 11: 15).

Control over the local power structure and support by the state machinery provided the *tzorbatzides* with firmer control as well over the fallow land which the communities used to lease to shepherds. This happened in a period when, partly as a result of increasing security on the land, they increased their flocks. Thanks to their superior power they did not need to care too much about damage caused to crops.

The state bureaucracy, including the judiciary and the police, was filled by people from «Old Greece» who had little knowledge of local conditions and tended to look down upon the local population. In the army, an old villager recalls, «they looked down upon us; they took us for Bulgarians». There were two exceptions to this. Teachers were often from the region itself and agricultural experts, though usually born elsewhere, had interest in and knowledge of the situation in the countryside. Malouchos, who had studied agriculture in Italy, is a good example.

Already before the Balkan Wars, Turkish landlords began leaving the area and sold their lands to big entrepreneurs, individual peasants or village communities. In Ambelofyto the Skodras family, and probably others, obtained land in this way. The Greek state took control of the land that Turkish *beys* had left behind when they fled the area during the Balkan Wars and forbade the sale of any land, lest it be sold to foreigners in this contested region. The lands under state control were leased at auctions to the highest bidders, usually people from «Old Greece». These leaseholders did not provide the peasantry with the services that the *beys* had customarily rendered them, such as help in the case of destruction of crops by floods. Consequently,

> (the leaseholders) were much more demanding than the *beys* 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, no. 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-

13. The total membership of the brotherhood is not known. It was at least twenty-nine: the twenty-seven arrested members, the village teacher and the youngest member of the brotherhood who was not arrested because he was only 14 years old. This may well have been the total membership of the brotherhood and it is unlikely that the membership was much larger. The youngest member of the brotherhood was the only surviving member during the period of my fieldwork. This man, who died shortly after my departure, was my main and most reliable informant on the brotherhood. I owe him much.

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, under the leadership of one of them, broke out, bought a map and returned to Greece, walking large parts of the distance. Upon return in the village this group introduced several innovations in dress (the bow-tie, the hat) and music. 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 biweekly, 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 *tsifliki*-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 *beys*, 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 (Mouseidou 1925; Vasilakopoulou 1927).

Ambelofyto was among the first villages where cooperatives were established in 1919. The agricultural expert Ganosis cooperated with Sterjos 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 Dragalevtsy: «Many of the older Dragalevtsy 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.

water sources, usually in the immediate neighborhood of the village. Around May, when the tobacco plants are sufficiently large, they are set out in the fields. Since formerly watering the plants required much labor, fields near water sources were preferred. In the first week of July tobacco picking starts. This lasts up to September or October. During these months the peasants have to get up at about three o'clock in the morning to go to the fields, and picking has to stop at about nine or ten o'clock. After returning home and, perhaps, a short rest, the peasants string the fresh leaves on long needles. All members of the family, except the smaller children, participate in this work. Afrertwards the leaves are shoved from the needles onto ropes to be hung in the sun to dry. This keeps the family busy for the rest of the day. After sufficient drying in the sun the leaves are hung in strings *(santalia)* in the house or in a shed.

During the winter, sorting and packing takes place. Before the war, this work was done very elaborately and carefully. Individual leaves of the same size and color were sorted into neat small bundles. Those who did this work were called *bastaltzides.* A skilled workman *(technitis)* then picked up the leaves, checked the work of the *bastaltzides,* re-arranging the leaves if necessary, and did the packing. There was about one *technitis* to every five *bastaltzides.* This process of sorting and packing is known as village manipulation *(choriki epeksergasia).* Though, in Ambelofyto, villagers participated in this work, much outside labor was used. Up to about the middle 1920's no one worked as *technitis.* These skilled hands were urban or semi-urban tobacco workers. The outside *bastaltzides* came largely from poorer villages in the mountains.

During the spring the tobacco was sold. In the 1920's large foreign companies increasingly came to dominate the market. The companies had a middleman in each tobacco district, who in turn had his representatives in the villages. Through the system of middlemen the companies were well informed about the local situation. The peasant was generally reluctant to sell at the prices offered and whole villages might refuse to do so. Refusing to sell was risky, however. It might result in lower, rather than higher, prices especially when the quality of the tobacco deteriorated.

When the tobacco companies had made their purchases they transported the tobacco to their warehouses *(kapnomagaza)* where the tobacco was unpacked, sorted in a much more differentiated way than in the case of village manipulation, and then packed again. The purpose of this second or commercial manipulation *(emboriki epeksergasia)* was not only a more differentiated sorting but also better preservation of the tobacco. Though labor was more differentiated than in the case of village manipulation, here also the main differentiation was between the *technitis* and *bastaltzides.*

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 *tzorbatzides.* 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 *Kinotis* 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 Sokratis Kotsoulas. Sokratis 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. Sokratis 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. Sokratis, 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. Sokratis 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 succeded 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 undertaking failed and the land was divided afterwards. At the same time the effects of the economic crisis began to be felt. The prices of tobacco, which had been rising up to 1929, began to drop sharply. Moreover, the loan for the purchase of the land had to be repaid. These events contributed to the political polarization of the village. The opponents of Kotsoulas, both inside and outside of the cooperative, were confirmed in their belief that collective cultivation was doomed to failure anyhow and criticized him for pursuing only the interests of himself and his followers. They also protested more actively against the dominance of the Agrarian Party in the local cooperative. A number of people left the cooperative and founded their own.

The origin of socialist ideas in the village is difficult to trace. Though war experiences will undoubtedly have played a role, the *technites* who worked in the village manipulation of tobacco were probably a more 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 wealthier peasants, though not a *tzorbatzis*. 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.[16] 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.[17] 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.[18] 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.

The Agrarians and the Communists were well organized locally and several participated in regional organizations and national meetings.[19] There was a local committee of the Agrarian Party and around 1928 an Agrarian Youth Organization was founded. The

16. No election results are available at this local level. In the Serres prefecture the Agrarian Party gained 7.2% of the votes and the Communists (E.M.E.A.P.) 3.7%.

17. According to Vouras a family could—presumably during the best interwar years—live off «the income of a five *stremma* (0.5 ha.) tobacco farm was sufficient to support rather comfortably a five-member peasant family» (1962:70).

18. In the 1930's the land reform was carried out. Locally the minimum amount of land for a family with one child was set at 3.2 ha. This was a relatively high standard compared to other communities.

19. One of the Communist leaders of the village, for example, attended an anti-fascist meeting held in Athens in 1936.

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[20] when they got almost 50% of the votes at the national elections (see Table I).[21]

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 refugees, especially after 1923, the available pasturage was much reduced. Competition increased and rents went up. Nevertheless, the Skodras family managed to maintain its access to the village fallow lands. Conflicts over damage to crops remained frequent. When the village opposition controlled the village council for a short period, the first measure it took was to forbid grazing in a certain area of the village lands.

TABLE I: *Election results at Ambelofyto for the national elections of 1928, 1932 and 1936 in percentages of the valid votes*

	Communist Party %	Agrarian Parties %	Liberal Party %	Rightwing Parties %
1928	—	—	26	68
1932	17	29	7	46
1936	49	5	2	44

Remark: There were no regional candidates at the elections of 1928 for the Communist Party and the Agrarian Parties.

Mass mobilization was increasing all over Greece in 1936 and took on a more and more threatening character. These events were closely followed in Ambelofyto and the Communist Party held frequent secret meetings, especially after the violent and bloody confrontations between strikers and police during the general strike in Thessaloniki of May of that year. The villagers involved, possibly on the instigation of the Communist Party, decided to go on the fifth of August with their oxcarts to Thessaloniki to participate in a mass demonstration. On the fourth of August, however, Metaxas seized power and proclaimed martial law. On the afternoon of the same day the leftist villagers assembled in a haybarn, armed with agricultural implements and prepared for a general uprising, expected to take place the next day. A messenger was sent to Nigrita to see what was happening there. When he returned to tell that nothing was going on the villagers went home.

Conclusion

Mouzelis, comparing peasant politics in Greece and Bulgaria, states:

> 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

20. I have not been able to obtain data on the local elections. It seems very likely, however, that party politics played a less important role in village elections. This is likely to have resulted in greater power for the Right in village politics.

21. The national average was 5.7 percent.

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 Peloponnesus 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». Ambelofyto, 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 Ambelofyto:

> ... 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 was 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 Ambelofyto 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.[22] This may not sound agreeable to fervent nationalists, but is less surprising for those who do not start from the assumpion 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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