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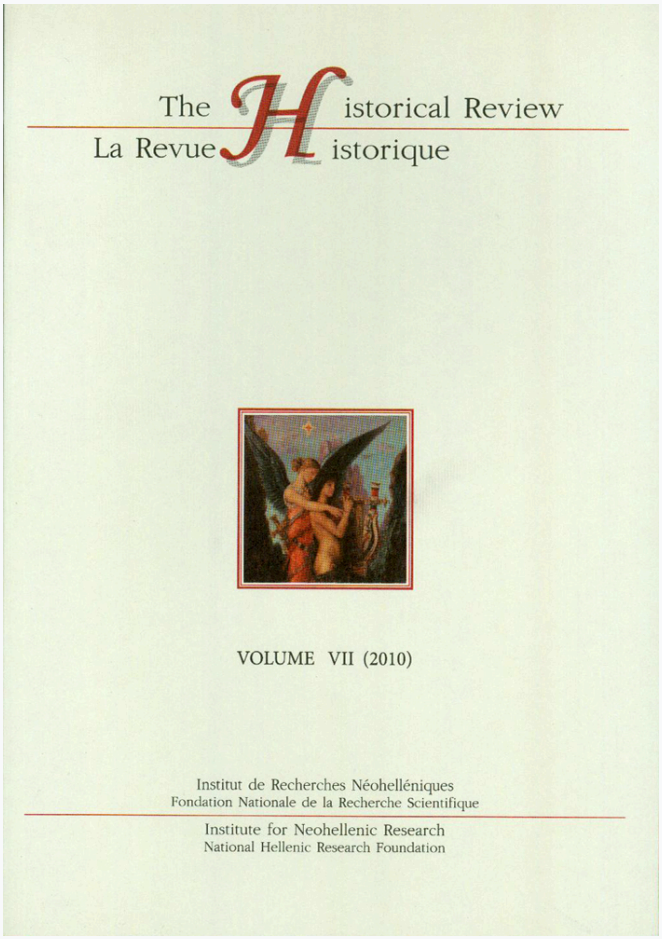

Manos Perakis, Το τέλος της Οθωμανικής Κρήτης. Οι όροι της κατάρρευσης του Καθεστώτος της Χαλέπας, 1878-1889

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Manos Perakis,
ΤΟ ΤΕΛΟΣ ΤΗΣ ΟΘΩΜΑΝΙΚΗΣ ΚΡΗΤΗΣ. ΟΙ ΟΡΟΙ ΤΗΣ ΚΑΤΑΡΡΕΥΣΗΣ ΤΟΥ ΚΑΘΕΣΤΩΤΟΣ ΤΗΣ ΧΑΛΕΠΑΣ, 1878-1889 [The end of Ottoman Crete: the circumstances of the collapse of the Halepa regime, 1878-1889], Athens: Vivliorama, 2008, 447 pages.[1]

Crete is first and foremost a representative Mediterranean paradigm, in the Braudelian sense, with crop cultivation characterized by variety, complementarity, and intensity in the exploitation of land, as was the case in the entire Mediterranean region, with agricultural products that sustained the income and the nourishment of its population. The economic parameters described and analyzed generally in the Mediterranean region focus primarily on cultivation, trade, piracy and migration. Cyprus and Sicily are indicative examples of large Mediterranean islands that offer comparable economic and social characteristics and dimensions to those of Crete. Large islands that grow crops primarily for the purpose of nourishment and clothing, these same islands have also created local urban élites.

Manos Perakis comprehends well the agricultural production of Crete during the second half of the nineteenth century, and he chooses in his book to address the political and social conditions of the Halepa era, which characterized the island's economic life in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The analysis contributes material and perspectives and evolves around a central issue of Greece's modern history, the history of the large and self-sustained island of Crete, with a rich agricultural production (olive oil, wheat) and an important geo-strategic position in the Mediterranean from Antiquity to the present. Within the conventional dates of book's title (1878-1889), Perakis identifies the Halepa era as perhaps having begun in 1868 with the Organic Law and coming to a conclusion in 1898 with the end of the Ottoman administration and the departure of Ottoman troops.[2]

[1] This text was presented at the meeting on late Ottoman Crete on the occasion of the publication of the book, organized by the Society of Cretan Historical Studies and the Eleftherios K. Venizelos National Research Foundation and held at the Historical Museum of Crete (Heraklion, 29 April 2009).

[2] S. Kuneralp, *The Final Stage of the Cretan Question, 1899-1913,* Istanbul: Isis, 2009.

The book is distinguished first of all for its analytical approach to the sources, since it draws fully on the local and, in part, consular archival collections with methodical meticulousness. This approach is apparent throughout, as well as in the section that is usually regarded the most joyless – namely, the appendices. There one will find included in full the main provisions of the Halepa Convention, and what I consider exceptionally interesting and useful: the names of the governors-general [*γενικοί διοικητές*] of the island, none of them Cretans, as well as those of the Cretan representatives for the period 1879-1889. The frequency of family names in the local councils and the Cretan National Assembly by year attests to the prominent position that a number of families enjoyed. For example, the Kondylakis family, which counted among its members the well-known writer and journalist Ioannis, appears to have steadily held onto the one Christian seat for the eparchy of Viannou in the Assembly for the entire decade. Likewise, Eleftherios Venizelos, the future prime minister of Greece, was elected plenipotentiary for the eparchy of Kydonias in 1889, while his brother-in-law, the lawyer Konstantinos Mitsotakis, had held the same seat in 1879 and 1880. Crucially, the prominence of these Cretan "political" families coincided with the evolution of parliamentary institutions and the reconfiguration of economic patterns on mainland Greece.

The historical given in the post-Tanzimat period (1839-1876) is the persistent weakening of the administrative model of the Ottoman Empire, a process which had already begun before the Berlin Congress of 1878. This decline was particularly evident at the periphery of the empire, as in the case of the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1878, and the intensification of tendencies towards self-rule in particular island regions, such as Samos and Crete. An immediate foreign policy issue regarding Crete in this period, and specifically after the Berlin Congress of 1878, was the expansion and strengthening of the British Empire into the Eastern Mediterranean in competition with Russia and Austro-Hungary.

The political issue at stake during the entire period preceding the Halepa Convention was the unification of Crete with Greece. The convention, which effectively led to the self-governance of the island and later to its unification with the Greek state, provided specific privileges that can be summarized as follows: the appointment of a Christian governor-general; the establishment of a National Assembly; the creation of a Gendarmerie; and the granting of special taxation privileges. However imperfect such privileges as political rights were to the Cretans, and as imperfect as their functioning was at a

national level, they were nonetheless adequate enough for defining the national and political independence of the island in relation to Greece.

The island's economy followed its own "fateful" entrapment in agricultural cultivation characterized by the methods and financing means typical of the old regime: small Christian properties and a lack of financial institutions. The production of soap, yarn and fabric had been bettered in the international markets and can only be characterized as complementary and marginal. For this reason, Perakis correctly emphasizes that "commerce, production and services played an important role only at a local level: mainly in the three large cities (Heraklion, Chania and Rethymnon)", as happened also in other corresponding Mediterranean instances.

On the other hand, the management of the island's public finances had as its objective the maintenance also of the ethnic and religious equilibrium, since, after 1840, the equal proportion of Christians and Muslims on the island shifted in favour of the former, resulting in the progressive emigration of Turkish-Cretans to Asia Minor. Throughout the period, the immediate domestic issue was the handling of, what was now, a Muslim minority.

Crete's hybrid system of governance bears similarities to that of Samos. The Samian State of 1830-1834 and, following that, the independent Principality of Samos (1834-1912) manifest points of comparison with the Halepa era's supervised independence. Samos' history of seasonal migration to neighbouring Asia Minor, for the purpose of supplementing agricultural income, and overseas migrations in periods of crisis are phenomena that have been observed in all Mediterranean agricultural regions. Samos' economy was always oriented towards the agricultural countryside and commerce, while wine-making and leather-tanning were the main manufacturing activities from the nineteenth century, later accompanied by tobacco production. Samos remained a poor agricultural island, with a relatively large population density when compared to regions of mainland Greece. Although a few prosperous seaside urban towns did emerge under the cultural influence mainly of Smyrna, Istanbul and Alexandria, it had a deficit economy that often functioned within a system of economic and demographic exchanges at the limits of the balance of nature within the Aegean region with Asia Minor as its main axis.[3]

[3] For a model of inter-Aegean movements from an anthropological perspective, cf. E. Papataxiarchis, "Male Mobility and Matrifocality in the Aegean Basin", in *Brothers and Others: Essays in Honour of John Peristiany*, Athens: EKKE, 1995, pp. 219-239.

A significant difference lies in the time horizon, which in the case of Samos is nearly a century (82 years) compared to the one decade of the Cretan case. Still, the main differences arise, not from the differing historical extent of the hybrid system of government, but mainly from the geographic and demographic characteristics of the two islands. Perakis notes Samos' small agricultural hinterland, which is apparent from the island's taxation system, with its large proportion of indirect taxes in comparison to Crete and Cyprus. Samos, with an area of 470 square kilometres and roughly 54,000 inhabitants at the end of the nineteenth century, that is, 114 inhabitants per square kilometre, lived off of its complementary economic relationship with neighbouring Asia Minor, which lies at a distance of 1.5 to 12 kilometres away. The Cretan census of 1881, which Perakis discusses in some detail, recorded a total population of 279,165 across an area of 8247 square kilometres, that is, 33 inhabitants per square kilometre, an exceptionally sparse area, with no geographic alleviative outlet in times of crisis. The issue of the self-sufficiency, as well as the geographic isolation of Crete, had already created serious problems in managing the structural crises of the local economy in the post-Byzantine period.

An important parameter of comparison between the two islands of Crete and Samos is the exercise of power by the Orthodox Greco-Ottoman élite of Istanbul, beginning with the Photiadis family, who provided the first governor-general of Crete, Ioannis, the deputy Prince of Samos, Alexandros, and the Prince of Samos, Konstantinos. The last was succeeded by an emblematic political figure, Alexandros Karatheodoris (1833-1906), who remained in his post until 1894, departing under strong popular pressure and dissatisfaction.[4] The following year, he was appointed governor-general of Crete (1895-1896). The question remains as to what degree Samos' semi-independent regime or the Halepa era shaped political institutions with bourgeois democracy as their model. Here, another new realm for research opens up, namely, the exercise of political power of a hybrid nature between European and Ottoman models in the island region of the Mediterranean, a policy shaped by the Orthodox Greco-Ottoman élite of Istanbul.

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[4] I. Vakirtzis, *Ιστορία της Ηγεμονίας της Σάμου, 1834-1912* [Samos 1912] [History of the independent Principality of Samos, 1834-1912], GAK Samos, Athens 2006.