
THE YOUTH OF ALI PASHE TEPELENA IN THE ERA OF KLEPHTES AND ARMATOLOI

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Abstract: An important issue that we will address in this study is related to the youth of the Pasha of Ioannina. The youth of Ali Pasha Tepelena is related to the era known as the era of mountain hoodlums - a period that served for the development of Ali Pasha. Greek, foreign and Albanian historiography has its own views on this issue and the treatment perspective. As part of the hoodlum or so-called klephtes era, is the inevitable war between the armatoloi and hoodlums, otherwise known as the armatoloi - klephtes issue. According to scholars of the time, this conflict was a major factor that would spur the Greek Revolution of 1821. One of the groups ready for revolutionary war would have been the klepht and also the armatoloi, who knew war as well as the Turks, and who had often cooperated with each other, managing to coordinate their potential and energies in the best possible way, in the service of a nationalist movement. The Ottoman invaders created armatoloi to maintain peace and eliminate the klephts but this very mechanism did not work because it was the klephts and armatoloi who preserved the spirit of freedom and cooperated for the good of their peoples, against the same invasion. The Ottoman Empire, in order to minimize the importance of this police called armatol, which played a significant and influential role in society, established the police office for the mountain trails. In the years when Ali Tepelena took over Pashalic, the Balkan territories in general and the Greek and Albanian in particular, were dominated by anarchy and the power of famous thieves. It is for this reason that, the second half of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, are considered periods dominated no longer by law, but by lawlessness and anarchy. This reality is closely related to the activity of klephts and armatoloi. Albanians, being free peasants, brought to Greece with all their economic and cultural backwardness, very strong human virtues, such as the desire to live with honor, sincerity, love for man and mutual help, the passion to protect what they just had won. Considering their war against the Ottomans, the Albanian population was very close to the goals of the Greek population, although with different nationalities they waged a joint war against the Turks. This illegal population called klephts lived in caves and mountains, but thanks to their activity they did great damage to the Ottoman Empire, the population of these countries called them national heroes. Ali, having been a klepht himself, tried to control the robbers and klephts but more than hitting them, he used them as an instrument for his political and governing purposes, creating the institution of armatoloi, he could have had anyone under surveillance but above all the latter, the gunmen brought information about the movement of the klephts from all sides where they were moving. If an analysis is made of the European provinces of Turkey, it is noticed that local authority is primary, the local leaders had no influence from the sultan, given that the influence of the Ottoman power was fading at the end of the XVIII century, it is not for be surprised that the power of these local institutions was constantly increasing. His kind of illegal institution that was created between klephts and armatoloi, marked the greatest resistance to the Ottoman invaders, the popular movement served as a spark of fire for the Greek revolution of 1821. The role of Ali Pasha, consists in supporting and strengthening their role, since in his youth he had been himself a klepht and an armatol.

Keywords: youth of the Pasha of Ioannina, klephtes era, armatoloi, Greek Revolution of 1821

1. INTRODUCCION

Most Greek authors accept the fact that - at the age of 15 - Ali goes as a hoodlum to the mountains, to continue stealing just like his father before him.[1; 19] *"Ali aroused terror and fear with his armed units, all over Epirus and Thessaly. He stormed villages with rage, looting houses and destroying economies, killing anyone who tried to oppose him".*[2 ;11]

The motives of Ali's participation in the hoodlums movement are related to bravery and ambition, inherited from family tradition. His name has been heard all over Albania and Rumelia for his bravery and for his deed in support of the powerless against the powerful of the state. [3; 4-7]

Many authors, have seen the activity of this period as a first step in ascending to power, leaving behind the activity of looting hoodlums or a "powerful hoodlums", of which you can find in large numbers in the territories of the empire. [4; 27]

On the other hand, it is said that his career pushed Ali to turn into a hoodlum, because – in order to be affirmed in the military hierarchy of the Ottoman Empire –first he had to go through illegality. The Turkish state, powerless to confront the hoodlums, was forced to enter into an agreement with them, offering various functions to the rebel nobility, in order to bring them to the path of legitimacy.[5 ;17]

2. THE KLEPHTES MOVEMENT

In fact, robbery was considered a perfect mechanism, by which individuals could gain a dominant position in their regions. Zotos clearly comes up with the idea that, at that time, in Epirus and Albania, robbery was a favorite profession. For years, robbers were revered and supported in all Greek territories. It took a long time to enable the change of opinion of the people towards these robbers. [6 ; 22]

In some other Greek sources, we see that this profession of robbers is known as the klepht movement. [7; 82]This movement was honored and respected as an important profession of that period. It manifests itself as a prestige, as an extraordinary value of special persons, who were protectors and leaders, but also righteous people. On the other hand, this lifestyle will provide the klepht with a better life. The territories under the control of the Ottoman Empire, ruled by Istanbul, were obliged to recognize the fame and success of the klefts, whose success was worth much more than a title given by the Sultan, because they had his security and support.[8,67]

These gang klepht or hoodlums were presented to the society of that time in the form of heroes. The insurgents had some sort of relationship with their gang, much like the commander's relationship with his army. For years, many residents helped and supported the klepht.[9,19]

The mastery of hoodlums or klephtes, has been the mastery of praiseworthy and admirable heroes and heroines. This consciousness was not formed in vain. The people of the mountains had a morality of their own accepted by society. Not only did they not rob the poor, but they helped, gave justice to the powerless, became defenders against the powerful; respected the woman and made others respect her, especially widows and unsupported; arbitrated on blood issues and on collective or personal disputes, defended poor people against kidnappers.[10;48]

The Greek scholar who has dealt most with this issue, clarifies the terms and conditions the bandits presented, along with the role or purpose they had, differentiating the word "lestes" from the term klephtis. According to him, klepht were popular figures in their local areas. They symbolized the resistance to the central authority in Constantinople, a stable position even later, in the post-revolutionary efforts, during the period in which the new state was being created in Greece. [11; 278-292]

A publication of the Greek National Army Staff states that the initially formed army consisted mainly of Greek and Albanian klepht from the Ionian Islands or elsewhere, previously used for Western services and more recently for their role during the revolution.[12; 3-4, 9-11]

Thus the ideal soldier of the Greek peasants during the revolution, as other authors show, was not a regular soldier or officer, but a klepht or *armatoloi* famous in the traditions of folk songs, an expert in guerrilla affairs. Also known as an Albanian fighter, in the form of guerrilla warfare, involving rapid movements, shooting and hand-to-hand combat.[13; 131-156]

Mean while, in foreign historiography, the appearance of Ali in the mountains is presented as a suitable way to regain the territories that once belonged to him and were administered by his family. [14; 23] So he was to be put in charge of the Albanians with whom he would achieve much success, against his enemies and his mother. In eighteenth century Albania and mainland Greece, social rank and political power were considered a just reward for the hoodlums. Indeed, piracy was seen as a perfect mechanism through which individuals could gain dominance in their regions. [15; 59]

The historian Mazower, a good connoisseur of the Balkans, on this issue shares the opinion that “... *the hoodlums were neither bandits, who put themselves at the service of society by despoiling the rich, nor national heroes. They represented the symptom of terrible poverty as they struggled to get out of the quagmire of poverty. The robbery of sheep or goats was, in their eyes, seen as a truly heroic task, more so than other enduring ways to make a living.*” [16; 52]

While Jelavic shares an opposing view, where he points out, among other things, that hoodlums offered an alternative to the individual who lived under the heavy yoke of the landlord or the state. Although such people were treated as heroes in folk songs and legends, by the eighteenth century, they had become a problem for all Balkans. [4; 69] Forming small squads during the hot season, from St. George's Day (April 23) to St. Dimitri's Day (October 26), they made bold attacks, plundering the rich and powerful, whether Muslim or Christian ones.[17; 311]

In Anscombe's original edition, “*Albanians and Mountain Bandits*”, tries, from the outset, to make clear the distinction between hoodlums called gangsters and ordinary thieves, for whom he uses the term “*Brigands*”.[18; 87-113]

Large independent and nomadic gangs such as those of Ibrahim Manavi and Ali Zoti (not our Ali but originating from an important family in the Ioannina district, who had clashes with other families over power. Ali emigrated and became an important figure for the mountain hoodlums), or other figures, were of great concern to Istanbul, where most of these hoodlums were Albanians. This fact posed another problem, because many of their soldiers were also Albanians. There were instances where the soldiers' troops fought resolutely against the hoodlums. But there were times when the soldiers joined them, when they were unhappy, usually because of wage arrears, which consequently increased desertions among their ranks. [19; 70]

For this incident, we also have new documents from Ali's Archive, summarized in a colossal scholarly work by historian Panayotopoulos and his team, which shows that there were cases where *armatoloi* turned into hoodlums, consequently being recalled by local authorities to return to their first role. This fact is presented in document nr.90. [20; 157]

While the biography of our country shows that the great-grandson of Muço Hyso and son of Veli Pasha, Ali bey, did not begin the path of his career as a street thief, as claimed by the legends that are written in most literatures that talk about the life of Ali Pasha. He grew up and was educated like all other boys in the feudal districts of his time. Ali, receiving the education that a pasha son could receive, being influenced by his relatives and especially by his family friends, who had bound their income through this house, was soon put in charge of the formations of military personnel, of his own province, so as to be requested by the various governors of the Sanjaks and especially of the Vali of Rumelia. [21; 215]

Slowly the sound opinion was spreading about Ali, the former klepht in Ali the savior. The role of the propaganda of his people, in Zagori, Epirus and Thessaly, that only Ali could put an end to the anarchy, theft and murder that reigned in those countries.

The terrorized inhabitants begged the intervention of the central government to appoint a neat man and this was Ali. No one but Ali could save the homeland. [6; 25]

But we also have a case from 1803 where the order is given for the local government officials to have a strict control in the areas of their crossings, Ali is reluctant to close the passage of the mountains under his control. [19; 84]

This can evoke many interpretations, the author himself explains that a kind of strategy of Ali, although he had often had to fight banditry, in this case he preferred that the tribe and followers of his defeated rival, along with others who they lost estates or property in his favor, it was better to go elsewhere, to rebuild the fortune, than to stand around its territories.

3. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN KLEPHTS AND ARMATOLOI AND THE IMPACT ON THE GREEK REVOLUTION

The Ottoman invaders created *armatoloi* to maintain peace and eliminate the klephts but this very mechanism did not work because it was the klephts and *armatoloi* who preserved the spirit of freedom and cooperated for the good of their peoples, against the same invasion. The Ottoman Empire, in order to minimize the importance of this police called *armatol*, which played a significant and influential role in society, established the police office for the mountain trails.

Bagally explains this problem very well as well, stating that "...an important event in the clash with the Ottoman state and the isolated regions was when the Empire established this office, that of *Dervendigbashi* (title established by the Ottoman Empire for the guardians of road crossings) to keep arms under control..." [22; 7]

Ali's entire experience as a klepht would help him climb the career ladder. He was already familiar with the nuts and bolts of how thieves could be controlled and how important were their followers, the *armatols*. Ali Pasha, as a former klepht who later became an *armatoloi*, was well aware of the potential of the current resistance, not only of the klepht but also of the *armatoloi* [15; 62], which moved not only from robbery to police functions, but also in the opposite direction. One of the fundamental issues in Greek history is the question of the armed forces and their relationship to Ali Pasha. Puqouville points out that the forces that took part in the movement for Greek Independence were a mixture of Greeks and Albanians. It was the klephts, who had filled the mountains, and prepared the Greek people with the idea of freedom. [23; 235]

Scholar Panayotopoulos, also researching the vast wealth of archival documents, admits that the *Armatoloi* Institution, established in the last two or three decades before the Greek Revolution, is closely and directly related to Ali Pasha himself and the way he governed the province he had in his possession. Not surprisingly, this institution was formed in the very areas where the boundaries of Ali Pasha's dual power extended. Undoubtedly, Ali chose to maintain the status of supervisor of paths and roads in order to keep an eye on both the kleft and the law enforcement agencies that followed them, namely the *armatols*. In this way, Ali managed to establish peace and order in the city of Ioannina and throughout the territory he controlled, while strengthening his political power. [24; 52]

4. CONCLUSIONS

One of the issues that causes the most debate among scholars regarding the Greek Revolution is the Klephtes-Armatoloi issue, because it includes both ideological and patriotic or popular burdens. The involvement of the armed forces in the revolution of 1821, their contradictory behaviors as well as their codes of interconnection, remain debatable to this day. What we must say is that the career of the Pasha of Ioannina and his immediate rise to power, according to many studies, is linked to his past. First, it is considered the part of his past life as a hoodlum or klepht, and then it is related to the period of his services as a police officer or armatoloi, in the area of Zagoria and furthermore to the time he was holding the position of road superintendent, simultaneously holding the position of Pasha of Ioannina. [24; 53]

Thanks to his beginnings of service in the High Gate, at the head of military units, and thanks to his skills, support and friendships, it did not take long to acquire great fame and fortune.

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