

Chapter 7

EXILE OF THE GUARDS

WITH the daily increase of the inhabitants of the community there came about the following startling incident, caused by them, which brought about their punishment and deprived them of the exemptions and other privileges they had cherished.

The great freedom which the inhabitants were given by the government made them very bold, changed their attitude by lowering their zeal for their responsibilities as guardsmen and aroused in them a longing for their previous life—that of the revolutionaries. They had followed the mail for a long time, knew the amount of money transported, and were tempted by it. They attacked the mail carriers one day near the locality of the hot springs of Apollonia and the path which leads to Hortiati, killed them, and stole the mail bag and everything else of value the mail carriers had.

However, they were discovered and arrested. They were exiled to Prousa in Asia Minor, and served their sentence in the prison there.

With the passage of time, an army camp was started at Prousa and the prisoners were used as laborers, each according to his trade, among which were the exiled prisoners, experienced in lime production, who were employed to make lime needed for the army camp.

After the job was finished, because of their good conduct and industry they were given, in addition to their regular rations, a special one once a week, the so-called chaftaliki, consisting of meat. Sometime later they were given an imperial pardon for the remainder of their sentence.

Freed finally, they returned to their country to flags and gun salutes, renamed Prousalides by their friends and relatives, a name which ever since is given to a countrymen of ours who returns from abroad.

They had been released from their government jobs as guards of the aqueduct and the post office and, as a result, they forfeited all the privileges and other benefits which they had abused by robbing the mail and killing the mail carriers.

This must have happened around 1780 or earlier since, as related above, from that year taxes, which up to that time had been unknown, had begun to be imposed on Asvestohorion.

After the imperial pardon, the leader of the exiles who had taken part in the hold up, went to Constantinople and then returned to Asvestohorion wishing to sell the guardhouse, which it appears, had become personal property with the passage of time, since it was used as his domicile as leader of the rest of the guards who had worked with him.

This guardhouse, the first of the five, located where the park is today and called the Captain's Koula under the leadership of Tartoufas, had been destroyed and there was later erected another one as a dwelling for the various leaders and those taken into forces of the guardhouse. This one was called Konaki, or the director's house, and was decorated, it is said, by 12 balconies.

This is the building which still remains today and is the Girls' School. It was used as a school after being completely renovated.

This building was sold by the returned leader of the exiled group to the Mourtzinos family for the price of 900 piasters. However, since this building was not suitable as a dwelling because of its peculiar construction and size, it was sold to the progressing community which converted it into a school to replace the church narthex, where the people of Asvestohorion had learned their first letters.

Here in the narthex of the church, which was built in the year 1867, taught our educated townsman, Rev. Papavasilios Rousides, father-in-law of George Christodoulos Gegas.

The Rev. Papavasilios, who died in 1913 during the cholera epidemic, was aided in his work by Stogianos Malliaras, called the Teacher, who later worked as deacon of the church until his death.

In later years, and especially since 1870, the management of the Girls' School was undertaken by our townsman, Anastasios Economides, called from Salonica in 1870, where he directed the Central City School successfully. He was a graduate of the Education School of Athens and he changed the method of instruction at the Girls' School to a cooperative method of instruction.

There will be more discussion about our schools in the second part of this book.

After the time of the hold up, most of the inhabitants, finding themselves without work, began thinking about finding a new way to earn a living. About this time it was observed that new settlers from Agrapha of Central Greece began to arrive.

Chapter 8

ARRIVAL OF AGRAPHIOTES

IT was not only the neighbors who fled here as already stated, looking for help and protection who contributed to

the increase of the population of the community of the guards.

Even before the Greek Revolution, since the year 1812, the period of Ali Pasha, many Greeks from Central Greece, and especially those from Agrapha, near Thessaly, came to settle at Asvestohorion.

These people, fleeing the wrath of Ali Pasha, and unwilling to bear his tyranny and oppression, left their homes, settling in various localities in Macedonia in groups where they found refuge.

They led a patriarchal life and their influence on the original settlers from the point of view of culture, ethics, and traditions was truly great and beneficial.

They engaged in various occupations. They were tailors, dyers, decorators, shoemakers, as well as professionals and they continued working in our town without migrating like the first settlers of Asvestohorion, as will be related below.

Their settlement was made on the south side of the church, along the rivulet called Vlachikos Laccos, where there also existed a spring, and where lies the present house of James Gikas, and the ruined and destroyed house of Harilaos Polyzogopoulos, who inherited it from his relative of Agrapha by the name of David.

This David, from the first years of his settlement with his family in Asvestohorion used to travel to Odessa, Russia, where he took the name of Davidovitz, went back and forth and did business, as some of his relatives recall, just as did the repatriate American, Evangelos John Peltekis. He died in Odessa in the year 1904.

The people of Agrapha were distinguished by their dress, by their ethics and traditions, and were characterized and called Vlachs.

In the beginning, and for sometime, the two groups opposed each other and avoided inter-communion and assimilation between them. Indeed, it is said that the strangers of

Agrapha, because they were called Vlachs, called all the original and the older settlers Paisans, either from Pasvant, a Turkish word which means guard of the night, or from the French Paysan, which means peasant, thus indicating they considered themselves of a higher social standing.

In competition with the Paysans who had organized a society, the Memorial, with the philanthropic purpose of helping poor members, those from Agrapha established the Brotherhood, a society with the same purpose.

With the passage of time, however, there followed a complete fusion of the two groups. The two philanthropic societies were merged into one, the Men's Philoptochos Society, which lasted until the year 1906. They renovated from the bottom the existing hall of the nunnery, and their future was a common one for the ensuing years.

From the settlement of the Agraphiotes there began a new period for the town. These refugees from Agrapha, also true Greeks, who had settled down for good, contributed in a big way towards the survival of the Greek language, even though they learned perfectly the common language idiom. They exerted a great force on the original inhabitants from the point of view of civilization. They learned and transmitted their practiced professions to their older countrymen, even exerting a change in the dress of the inhabitants, especially that of the women, which they called Vlachic; and the former, so-called Paysanic dress was eventually replaced completely. For a long time, since they did not emigrate like the first inhabitants, but remained in the village, working in the professions and trades, they handled by themselves the running of the community, the school and the church, where they placed the icon of St. Seraphim (whose feast day was also celebrated at Pharsala and Kardhitsa), which they had brought with them from their country and which is still to be found at the right entrance of the church. These are some families from Agrapha which I remember:

The Papaeconomou family, two of whose brothers, Anastasios and Athanasios Economides, as well as their first cousin, Gregory Palamas, Metropolitan and Director of the Great School of our Nation, the families of John Hatziantoniou, Asterios Polyzopoulos, Nicholas Samaras, John Morpha, James Gikas, John Papakyriakou, Dionysios Papakyriakou, James Deina, Gregory Hatziantoniou, George Giannakakis, Nicholas Psaltis, John Paskalis, Athanasios Hatziasteriou, Mourat, Mingos, Davidovitz, Malliaras and many others whose names I forget.

As we see, the community first named Neohorion and then Asvestohorion (Kirets-Kioi as a result of the beginning of the production of lime) in this wild and woody area where there were built the five Koulas or guardhouses, was first settled by some who hailed from Central Greece, others from Mani, and others from Thessaly—about whom we have sketched the following:

1. The Turkish government's selection from the more experienced fighters and combatants for the personnel of the guard, with the exclusion of the Paysans. At that time most of these mountain fighters were from Central Greece;
2. The remaining families who are descendent from the first settlers who came from Mani and later from Thessaly, Pindus and Agrapha or from the exiled fighters in Asia Minor;
3. The transmitted usages, ethics and traditions of these people;
4. The dress of men and women, which was like that of the inhabitants of Central Greece;
5. Their spoken language which from the first day of the establishment of the community was Greek; and

6. The prevailing tendency to emigrate which is a unique characteristic of the Greek.

Chapter 9

PRODUCTION OF LIME

AFTER their government service as guards had been terminated the inhabitants of Asvestohorion, most of whom had engaged in that occupation since their arrival, faced the problem of unemployment and everyone started thinking about finding another way of earning a living. It was they who turned to the production of lime.

They did not attempt the tilling of the soil because of the paucity of the land which limited productivity. Land cultivation was engaged in only by a few families who produced a few crops for personal use and not for bartering for other goods.

Thus they began to produce asbestos, which was first sold in Salonica and only by the ancient method of transporting the lime on muleback.

In addition to the difficulty of transportation, other problems were the lack of a means of communication and the production of lime by the kiln method using branches and shrubs as fuel.

With the production of asbestos, the Turks renamed Neohorion Asvestohorion or Kirets-Kioi. Lime has been the chief product of Asvestohorion since then.

It is not clear how the inhabitants learned the production of lime, but when one takes into account the existing ancient memorials and other buildings for which it was used, there must have been considerable lime produced in ancient times.

Because of a lack of communication there was no wide distribution and sale of lime to far off lands which would have expanded the business and secured the well being of those engaged in lime production and, as a consequence, the laborers and transporters barely earned a living.

A modern communication system would have helped immensely in selling lime to far off places and in greater quantities; and the greater production would have required more workers.

It would have provided greater profits to the lime producers of that period who, lacking foreign competition, would have been able to expand their business, but instead they competed with each other and thereby harmed themselves as well as the economy of their community.

The lack of a spirit of cooperation unfortunately brought about depressed conditions because the product was sold in the market of Salonica at prices lower than the cost of production, and it was only through adulteration, common at that time in everything, that they were able to make a small profit.

Unfortunately, even in later years we find our lime-producing countrymen always divided and competing at a time when the economy was progressing and Salonica was being built and renovated.