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‘Venetian Reaya’

Greek Orthodox Zantiots in Cyprus in the Eighteenth Century

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Abstract This paper aims to study the ‘Zantiots’, Greek Orthodox Venetian subjects from the Ionian Islands, who settled in the port of Larnaca around the middle of the eighteenth century. Based on Italian, Greek and Ottoman sources from the State Archives of Venice, it explores the ways in which this group formed a distinct identity, straddling the limits between the *reaya* and the protégés. The paper also discusses other topics, such as Venetian and Ottoman perceptions of the Zantiots as a troublesome community, their assimilation into local society, as well as their role as social and cultural intermediaries.

Keywords Cyprus. Ionian Islands. Intermediaries. Larnaca. Levantines. Ottoman Empire. Venetian Consuls. Zantiots.

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1 Introduction

In 1757, the privateer ship of Captain Franco Janni, based at Port Mahon of Minorca and sailing under the British flag, arrived in Larnaca. One of the passengers who disembarked in the Cypriot port was Evangelista Peristiani, a native of the island of Cephalonia. Within a few months, Peristiani had managed to blend into local society by marrying Mariou, the daughter of the Cypriot Dragoman of Sweden Zacharias Gabriel, becoming the founder of one of the

most prominent Greek Orthodox families on the island.¹ Peristiani's migration to Cyprus was not an isolated incident, but formed part of a more general trend.

2 The Zantiot Diaspora

In the eighteenth century, people from the Ionian Islands, often collectively called 'Zantiots' – a term literally denoting the natives of the island of Zante, settled in major port cities of the Ottoman Empire, constituting an important yet little studied element of Levantine society. Their tendency for emigration was probably related to a combination of local factors, such as frequent natural disasters, agricultural decline, and heavy taxation. These hardships drove many daring and enterprising islanders to seek their fortune outside the Venetian domains.² As Venetian subjects, the Zantiots profited from the Capitulations and enjoyed favourable conditions for trade, as well as privileged fiscal and legal status in the Ottoman lands. (Stavrides 2012, 157; Seymour 2014, 78-9).

These factors led to the creation of trading networks of Zantiot merchants in Italy and in port-cities of the Levant. We meet several members of Zantiot families active in Venice, as well as in other Italian ports, where in the mid-eighteenth century they accounted for a sizeable part of the local Greek Orthodox communities.³ In the Ottoman lands the presence of the Zantiots was just as prominent. For example, a list of Venetian subjects residing in Thessaloniki in 1748 reveals 30 Zantiots, most of whom had only settled in the city within the previous year (Mertzios 1947, 338-9).

The Zantiot communities that settled in Ottoman ports in the eighteenth century stood at the limits between the Europeans and the local Greek Orthodox community. On the one hand, as Venetian subjects they were protected by the Capitulations, and were therefore legally indistinct from other European subjects living in the Ottoman lands. On the other hand, as many Zantiots had a Greek Orthodox identity, they were often regarded by Ottoman officials as an entity distinct from the other European merchants. Because they were assimilated to a larger degree with the local population and usually married into local families, the authorities regarded them as

¹ ASV (Archivio di Stato di Venezia), ACVC (Archivio del Consolato Veneto a Cipro), b. (busta) 1: "Nota dei Nazionali Veneti". See Stavrides 1999, 216.

² On conditions in the Ionian Islands during the eighteenth century, see Sphyroeras 1980, 212-18. See for example the reports of the *Provveditori* of Zante for the years 1738 and 1745 in Arvanitakis 2000, 413-18, 423-6.

³ See for example the cases of Livorno (Vlami 2000) and Trieste (Katsiardi-Hering 1986, 51-3).

indistinguishable from the Sultan's subjects and sought to associate them with the *reaya*. In one case, when a Venetian and a Zantiot were accused of fomenting disorder in İzmir in the eighteenth century, an Ottoman document distinguished between the two, describing the former as *derya Venediklū* (sea Venetian) and the latter as *Venediklū reayası* (Venetian reaya). In fact, even today scholars ponder over the actual juridical status of the Zantiots. Erica Ianiro writes that "by ancient statutes they were Venetian subjects, although their position was on the borderline with that of Ottoman subjects" and asks the question whether we could define the Venetian subjects from the Ionian Islands as "the most occidental Levantines" (Ianiro 2014, 233).

The practical consequences of this attitude can be seen in a 1752 ordinance (*ferman*) of Sultan Mahmud I (1730-54), in which he instructed the authorities of Cyprus to treat the Zantiots as regular Venetian subjects, suggesting that they were often not treated as such. According to the ordinance,

when some Venetian subjects resident in Zante and Cephalonia and other islands from the Venetian lands came to the island of Cyprus for trade and ordinary business, the cizye collectors did not trust the observed patent letters in their possession that they were Venetian subjects, and they did not refrain from threatening and imprisoning them and infringing their rights with demands for cizye.⁴

Although there were Zantiot communities in major port-cities like İzmir or Thessaloniki, which were more prominent from the point of view of Istanbul, in another Levantine commercial centre, such as Cyprus, they played a more vital social and cultural role, due to the island's size and relative isolation, as well as the presence of a sizeable and dominant Greek Orthodox community. Besides sporadic appearances of men from the Ionian Islands in the early seventeen hundreds, it appears that the main wave of Zantiot migration to Cyprus took place in the third quarter of the eighteenth century (Stavrides 2012, 152-4).

A 1765 document gives extensive prosopographical information on the nine Venetian subjects who maintained commercial houses in Larnaca at that time, six of whom were directly related to the Ionian Islands. Two of those, Niccolò Fottio, who originated from Ioannina but acquired Venetian citizenship by living for several years in Zante, and Emanuele Vassalo, an eminent member of the community also from Zante, who later served as Consul, arrived in the first half of the eighteenth century. Four Zantiots, Evangelista Peristiani, Elia

⁴ ASV, ACVC, b. 24, no. 43. See Stavrides 2016, 241. *Cizye* tax: capitation tax collected from non-Muslim Ottoman subjects.

Valsamachi, Paolo Vondiziano, and Zorzi Coedan (Choidas), all from the island of Cephalonia, were Greek Orthodox, who had arrived and settled on the island between 1757 and 1760, marrying local women and becoming prominent members of local society.⁵

These men were just the most distinguished of the Zantiots settled on the island at that time. In fact, the wave of Zantiot migration to Cyprus was a much more complex phenomenon that was not limited to a handful of families. A register, compiled by the Venetian Consulate in the 1760s, contains 59 names of Zantiot males living on the island. Very few of those names belong to prominent families, while the rest indicate people of less distinguished origins, like a gunsmith, a barber, and a carpenter, underlining the extent and variety of Zantiot migration.⁶

3 Troublesome Subjects

In several cases, the settlement of the Zantiots provoked the reaction of the local population in cities of the Ottoman Empire. Throughout the eighteenth century, Zantiots provoked or were in the epicentre of disturbances in the multicultural environment of İzmir. Already in the 1730s, following a series of riots initiated by Zantiots, the English, French, and Dutch Ambassadors successfully pleaded with their Venetian counterpart to deport their unruly subjects from the city (See Frangakis-Syrett 1992, 58). The disturbances in the great commercial port culminated in the great 'rebellion' of 1797, during which the Zantiots became targets of Janissary attacks. These riots caused the issuing of an imperial edict pronouncing the Zantiots and other Venetian subjects guilty of provocation and riotous behaviour:

being people of a savage rebellious description, habitually addicted to heinous practices which disturb the tranquillity of the natural Subjects and other Inhabitants wherever they may be, to the infringement of social order, and never failing to create much injury to the public by their quarrels and disturbances. (Clogg 1982, 120)

The Kadı 'judge' of İzmir also wrote:

Zantiots, Eskilavens,⁷ Cephalonians, Croatians, Corfians – Venetian subjects – had already been killing and injuring the Muslims (*ehl-i*

⁵ ASV, ACVC, b. 1: "Nota dei Nazionali Veneti". For the text of this source, see also Stavrides 1999, 215-18. On Emanuele Vassalo, see also Stavrides 2023, 9-11.

⁶ ASV, ACVC, b. 22, no. 147. See Stavrides 2012, 170-1.

⁷ By *Eskilavens* the judge denotes the Dalmatians (Slavonians), an equally if not more troublesome group of Venetian subjects (Tansuğ 2020, 403-4).

Islam) and the reaya in recent years, and they were always causing mischief (*fesad*) in the city. (Tansuğ 2020, 409)

In Cyprus, as in other Levantine ports, the Zantiots were regarded with suspicion, often presenting a convenient target for local discontent against Westerners. In August 1755, after a bloody brawl involving Venetian sailors, Ottoman officials in Larnaca managed to divert the rage of a local mob, from the Consulate, which was its original target, to the houses of the Zantiots.⁸

On 11 February 1757, a group of respectable Muslims of Larnaca, consisting of merchants and officials, visited the local Kadı to express their complaints concerning the recent settlement of a group of approximately seventy *Zandah kefereleri* 'infidel Zantiots' in the island, something they considered a novelty. The group indicated that a large part of the Zantiot community were not merchants, and demanded their expulsion, claiming that they had founded their own separate quarter and married daughters of local reaya, while they aided corsairs, providing them with supplies and information.⁹

Echoing these complaints, at around the same time, the Venetian Vice-Consul Zuanne Bizzaro wrote in a report that the Zantiots were at the root of all the Consulate's troubles and that he was the recipient of daily complaints about their behaviour. The Vice-Consul warned the *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*, the five 'wise men' that formed Venice's Trade Board, that if measures were not taken, sooner or later this group would involve the community in a great disturbance. Bizzaro's report also echoed the complaints of the Muslims by writing that the Venetian community in Cyprus was not restricted only to merchants, suggesting that the problems arose from the sheer quantity of the Zantiots settled on the island.¹⁰

But what disturbances did the Zantiots cause? Vice-Consul Bizzaro reports that their habit of walking in the streets at night without a lamp led to the arrest and imprisonment of two of them, whom he had to bail

⁸ ASV, CSM (Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia), b. 647: "Relazione individua" (20 August 1755). Stavrides 2015, 106; 2016, 67 ("et divertone l'aggressione dispersa in seguito verso le case de Zantiotti").

⁹ ASV, ACVC, b. 27, no. 54. Stavrides 2016, 274-6; 2012, 151-2.

¹⁰ ASV, CSM, b. 647: no. 20, ff. 1v-2r. "L'origine dei disturbi che soffre questo Consolato, e la Nazione proviene dalla quantità de sudditi delle isole, che si trovano qui stabiliti, e per la vita loro facinorosa, che non mancano giornallieri richiami al Consolato contro di loro; essendo baldanzosi à maggior segno non incurandosi à qualunque avvenimento ... onde spero che la EE.VV. si degnarono di benignamente ponderare le circostanze stesse, e compassionare il mio povero stato, ponendovi qualche regollamento per l'avvenire, perche se questi sudditi continuarano sopra la Scala, temo che qualche giorno non produchino un gran scompiglio alla Nazione; perché se fosse la nazione ristretta nei soli mercanti delle case stabilite, sarebbe il consolato più quieto di tutti i altri, che qui s'attrovano". See also Ianiri 2014, 232.

out with his own money.¹¹ Even Bizzaro's successor, Consul Bernardo Caprara, asked the Cinque Savi not to issue permits to the ships of the Zantiots who were living on the island and had formed families with local women, in order to limit the number of "vagabond Venetian subjects", who were flooding the area, giving rise to daily unrest.¹²

These accusations suggest illicit activities by the community. In fact, around this time, as the complaint of the Muslims cited above also indicated, the Zantiots were among the most formidable corsairs in the Eastern Mediterranean (Seymour 2014, 77), offering important services to Venice, but also to Britain, as privateers at the time of the Seven Years' War (1756-63). There is mention of several Zantiot privateers in the area, like Luca Valsamachi, probably related to Captain Elia Valsamachi, who settled in Cyprus at around the same time.¹³ It seems that Greek Orthodox corsairs were often supported by their local coreligionists, as in the case of corsair Nicholas Palaiologos who, being pursued by a French frigate, sought help from the people of the port of Larnaca, in 1757.¹⁴ As we have seen above, it was also in that same year, during the course of the Seven Years' War, that Evangelista Peristiani landed in Larnaca from a privateer ship, sailing under the British flag and originating from Port Mahon of Minorca, a base of Greek Orthodox privateers.¹⁵

Zantiots were also seen as responsible for the spreading of epidemics, since they often sought to avoid the sanitary controls of the ports and were reluctant to show the necessary health certificates to the authorities who required them. According to a 1794 report of Consul Angelo Rosalem, a captain from Cephalonia coming from Thessaloniki appeared in his Consulate to present his credentials, but when asked about his health certificate, he said that he had forgotten it on the ship. When the captain appeared again on the following day without his certificate, admitting that he did not have one and claiming that he was not obliged to present such a document, Consul Rosalem, worried that his visitor may have been infected, asked him

11 ASV, CSM, b. 647, no. 20, ff. 1v-2r. "Caminano di note senza fanale, onde la Patuglia ha fin'ora incontrato due de medemi, che li messe il Commandante in prigione nei ferri, e mi ha convenuto liberarli, e pagar del mio circa piastre vinticinque, perche con li Turchi nulla si ottiene senza dennaro".

12 ASV, CSM, b. 648, no. 14, Consul Bernardo Caprara to the Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, 20 December 1765.

13 See Ioannou 2002, 123. He may be identified with privateer 'Lucas', who sailed under British flag and whose activity is described by Svoronos (see Svoronos 1996, 160). On Elia Valsamachi, cf. ASV, ACVC, b. 1: "Nota dei Nazionali Veneti". Stavrides 1999, 216; 2012, 195. On the Valsamachi family, see Koudounaris 1997, 73-80.

14 ASV, ACVC, b. 17, no. 137r-v. Ioannou 2002, 124.

15 ASV, ACVC, b. 1: "Nota dei Nazionali Veneti". Stavrides 1999, 216. On the use of Port Mahon as a base for Greek privateers, see Svoronos 1956, 335-8; 1996, 158, 160 fn. 265.

to leave the Consulate. The latter's refusal to comply obliged the Consul to resort to the aid of his Janissary to remove him. This was certainly an isolated event, however, Rosalem tied it to an earlier instance, when another captain from Cephalonia was responsible for infecting the entire coast of Karaman, Syria, and Cyprus, resulting in the loss of his status as a Venetian subject.¹⁶

As is suggested by this episode, the Venetians were sensitive about the illicit behaviour of some of their subjects and attempted to dissociate from them. The Consulate tried to keep its distance from unruly subjects, and after an incident in İzmir in 1751, it claimed that the Zantiot perpetrators were not true Venetian subjects, but simple Ottoman reaya, who were using the name of Venice in order not to pay their *cizye* taxes (Ianiro 2014, 231).

Problems also arose with the Zantiots' coreligionists. According to Vice-Consul Bizzaro's 1757 report, at the church of St. Lazarus in Scala, a group of Zantiots verbally abused the priests and a group of local Greeks, and the Consul had to humiliate himself before the Bishop of Kition to prevent him from reporting the incident to the authorities.¹⁷ Apparently, the behaviour of certain Zantiots was deemed provocative by many local Greeks, who complained to the Consul.¹⁸ The Cephalonian doctor Zorzi Coedan, for example, provoked local sensibilities by associating with two Maronite widows of "scandalous behaviour", eventually leading to his excommunication by the Archbishop of Cyprus.¹⁹ When Evangelista Peristiani attempted to help his two brothers become established in Cyprus, one being a seller of victuals and the other a captain, Consul Bernardo Caprara expressed his reservations, saying that *this behaviour is making the locals jealous, and especially these Greeks who fomented all the past against the said Islanders*.²⁰ The subsequent fortune of Peristiani's brothers is indicative of the fact that emigration from the Ionian Islands to the Levant often resulted in financial failure. According to Consul Caprara, the Peristiani brothers, who had come from

16 ASV, CSM, b. 653, Consul Count Angelo Rosalem to the Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, 4 October 1794. Ianiro 2014, 233.

17 ASV, CSM, b. 647, no. 20, ff. 1v-2r. "La Domenica dietro alla medema, si radunorono tutti li sudditi nella Chiesa Grecca della Marina, et ivi si attaccarono in parole con li Papà, e Greci della contrada, che fui costretto umiliarmi al Vescovo, e supplicarlo, che non facesse alcun ricorso al Governo, per proddurmi nuovi imbarazzi".

18 See for example, ASV, ACVC, b. 20, no. 113 and Stavrides 1999, 214-15.

19 ASV, ACVC, b. 1: "Nota dei Nazionali Veneti". Stavrides 1999, 212-13, 217.

20 ASV, CSM, b. 650, no. 225, Consul Bernardo Caprara to the Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, 18 August 1777 ("lo che dà gelosia alla gente del paese, e massime questi Greci fomentatori di tutto il passato contro detti isolani").

Cephalonia with their "numerous families" in order "to procure their maintenance" were in a "deplorable state".²¹

It is an open question why the Zantiots appear to be such an unruly group in the Levantine ports during this period. One possible explanation may be the precarious financial position of Venetian Consuls in the Ottoman dominions (Ianiri 2014, 78-81) which may have diminished their power, rendering them incapable to control their subjects. This went hand in hand with the ebbing fortunes of the Republic of Venice during the same period, however, it does not appear to be a credible explanation. Despite the Republic's diminished international stature in the eighteenth century, the Venetian Consul in Cyprus enjoyed prestige in local society and influence with the Ottoman authorities, as evidenced by his frequent exchanges with the island's officials and with the Governor himself, who often went out of his way to satisfy his demands by protecting his subjects and punishing abusive officials.²²

The sheer numbers of the Zantiots seem to provide a more plausible explanation for the discontent of local society, the high levels of criminal activity associated with them, and the inability of the Venetian Consulate to control them. This meant that they included not only affluent merchants, but also people from all walks of life that were more likely to resort to violent crime, while their numbers rendered them unmanageable from the point of view of the Consulate.

After the 1797 riots in İzmir, the British Ambassador expressed a more general sentiment about this group, highlighting the fact that the problems they caused arose from their great numbers, as they formed the main body of Europeans living in the Ottoman lands:

The Levant, in almost every part, is thronged by a very disproportionate quantity of refugee Venetian subjects of the most discreditable description: Slavonians, Zantiotes, Kefaloniots, & c. which forms in a manner the groundwork of the Frank colonization of the different ports; and earn a precarious livelihood by very equivocal means. While their number and disposition render them almost unmanageable [...] and an object of jealousy and awe to the indigenous inhabitants. This nuisance has been calculated to approach at least 10,000 in the three cities of Constantinople, Salonica, and Smyrna, or their environs.²³ (Clogg 1982, 90)

21 ASV, CSM, b. 650, no. 241, Consul Bernardo Caprara to the Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, 6 October 1778.

22 See for example the dismissal of the *Ağa* of Scala in 1768, following the complaints of Venetian Consul Bernardo Caprara, cf. ASV, ACVC, b. 21, no. 23. Stavrides 2023, 129-31.

23 On the disturbances, see also Frangakis-Syrett 1992, 61-5; Ianiri 2014, 229-31; Tansuğ 2020, 401-25.

Even the more powerful British Consuls, at the zenith of the power of the British Empire in the nineteenth century, could not *easily legislate for that other group of Ionians, the flotsam and jetsam of Ionian society: the pedlars and petty traders, the thieves and vagabonds, the pimps, tarts, tavern-keepers and bagmen. For they, too, were scattered throughout the ports and townships of the Levant* (Seymour 2014, 80). In fact, out of the 2,776 subjects registered in the British Consulate of İzmir in 1836, 2,369 were Zantiots, with similar percentages in other Levantine ports (81).

All these, however, did not mean that all Zantiots were marginal within the local Venetian community. The lists of Venetian Consuls in Larnaca in the eighteenth century include at least three Zantiots, Liberal Calogerà from Corfu (Ianiri 2014, 154), Bernardo Caprara from Cephalonia, and Emanuele Vassalo from Zante, while Zantiots also served as Consuls in other ports, like Demetrio Coidan, a Cephalonian nobleman, who served as Venetian Consul in Thessaloniki in the mid-eighteenth century (262), and Giovanni Panesi of Corfu, who served as Vice Consul on the island of Skopelos (264). Their activity often went beyond the limits of the Venetian community, as they sometimes established contacts with other European powers, as in the case of Zantiot Giorgio Canale, a man whose name appeared on a 1751 arrest warrant issued in Venice, which Consul Girolamo Brigadi failed to enact, since Canale was working as a Chancellor of the Consulate of the Two Sicilies (232).

4 Levantinisation

One of the main preoccupations of the Consuls was the 'levantinisation' of many merchants through marriage (Ianiri 2014, 133). Before the arrival of the Zantiots, European merchants residing on the island had financial dealings with the reaya but did not easily form close family ties with them. Catholic merchants sometimes married local reaya women usually coming from the Maronite community. However, particularly the French, who were more centralised in the control over their merchants, took extra care to avoid the permanent settlement and assimilation of their subjects into local society, with a series of ordinances, limiting even the duration of their residence in the Levant (Stavrides 2012, 168).

Marriages of foreign subjects with local reaya were frowned upon by the Ottoman authorities, as they contributed to the growing number of people protected by the Capitulations and to the decrease of cizye paying reaya families. Thus, even though there was no direct reference to the problem in the Capitulations, the Ottomans repeatedly attempted to limit this practice, by declaring that all Franks who married subjects of the Sultan would become

reaya themselves (Stavrides 2012, 161). This was explicitly stated in a sultanic order dated 1 Safer AH 1176 (21 August 1762), which commanded that *all the Zantiots and other islanders who are Venetian subjects are regarded like all the other reaya, and are subject to the harac*. In a report from December 1765, Consul Bernardo Caprara indicated that there were several Zantiots bearing patents by the Cinque Savi that fell under that category, the most prominent among them being Niccolò Fottio, Evangelista Peristiani, Elia Valsamachi, and Evangelista Angelato. The latter three were natives of Cephalonia who kept shops at Scala and were married to reaya women.²⁴

This meant that many Zantiots, who had been established in Cyprus and married local women but did not carry a patent of the Cinque Savi, were left unprotected. In November 1765, several of them sent a petition to the Venetian Consul, claiming that they had always been protected by the Venetian Consuls and Ambassadors “come veri sudditi” (like real subjects). However, in the past four years had begun “the insatiable avarice of the Turks”, who attempted to impose on them the payment of the *cizye* tax.²⁵ The “sinister agitations and insults” the Zantiots suffered from the Ottoman authorities were forcing them to relocate back to their homeland, and they were imploring the Consul to grant them “the mercy merited by true subjects”, so that their children would not remain “a prey to the Barbarians”, but would become his faithful subjects, ready to offer their services to the Doge.²⁶ With these entreaties, they offered the Consul the sum of three hundred piastres to distribute to Ottoman officials so that they would leave them in peace. The petition was signed by twenty-five Zantiots, twenty of whom were living in Larnaca or Scala, four in Limassol, and one in the village of Kalavassos. Their signatures were classified by place of origin, indicating that twelve of them were from Cephalonia, five from Zante, four from Santa Maura, three from Paxoi (*Paxò*), and one from Corfu.²⁷ The tone of the petition reveals that these Zantiots felt that they were regarded as a distinct entity by the Consulate itself, which did not afford them the protection expected by “true Venetian subjects”.

In fact, it appears that often Venetian Consuls may have treated with contempt most of the Zantiots established on the island, regarding them as socially inferior. In a letter from 20 December 1781,

24 ASV, CSM, b. 648, no. 14, Consul Bernardo Caprara to the Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, 20 December 1765.

25 ASV, CSM, b. 648, no. 14, Petition of Zantiots to Consul Bernardo Caprara, 13 November 1765.

26 ASV, CSM, b. 648, no. 14, Petition of Zantiots to Consul Bernardo Caprara, 13 November 1765.

27 ASV, CSM, b. 648, no. 14, Petition of Zantiots to Consul Bernardo Caprara, 13 November 1765.

for example, Consul Emanuele Vassalo indicated that Evangelista Angelato from Cephalonia did not have an established commercial house, referring to him disdainfully as "semplice bazzariotto" (simple bazar merchant), suggesting that he was not worthy of the Consulate's protection. He informed the Cinque Savi that throughout the island, in addition to Angelato, there were 72 more Zantiots that were regarded by the Ottomans as reaya and were subjected to the cizye tax, most of them being married to local women, implying that their large numbers made it impossible for him to protect them from the arbitrary behaviour of Ottoman officials.²⁸

It should be made clear that levantinisation was not a problem associated exclusively with the Zantiots. In June 1777, Governor Haci Baki Ağa wrote to the Venetian Consul, claiming that the marriage of Venetian subject Carlo Mantovani with a reaya deprived him of the privileges granted by the Capitulations and placed him in the ranks of the subjects of the Sultan. Therefore, Mantovani had to choose between becoming a reaya or divorcing his wife. Consul Bernardo Caprara reacted to this by replying that there was no such provision in the Capitulations, and that, moreover, the friendly relations between the Doge and the Sultan would not justify such an action.²⁹ As a favour, the *Muhassıl* Haci Baki, no doubt also prompted by his own debt towards Mantovani, finally pardoned the Venetian merchant, warning the Consul that he should take care to avoid similar situations in the future.³⁰

The somewhat flimsy loyalty of many Zantiots may be seen in the final affront to their Venetian identity, occurring just a few months after the dissolution of the Republic, in a period of political transition for Venice (Panciera 2014, 140-5). On September 23, 1797, the new Venetian Consul Giacomo Caprara wrote to the Cinque Savi that a group of eleven subjects, ten of whom originated from the Ionian Islands, whose names included such prominent Zantiots as Costantino Peristiani and Panagin Angelato, had solemnly renounced their Venetian allegiance, receiving French citizenship, a move that he regarded as ungrateful and insulting to Venice as they

destroyed the decorum and honour of their nation, immersing it in dejection and degradation, and with scandalous example exposed

28 ASV, CSM, b. 650, no. 33, Consul Emanuele Vassalo to the Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, 20 December 1781.

29 ASV, ACVC, b. 22, no. 30. Stavrides 2023, 206-8.

30 ASV, ACVC, b. 22, no. 24. Stavrides 2023, 211-12.

the motherland to the derision of other nations, to the scorn of the ill-intentioned, and to the contempt of these Turkish people.³¹

This was certainly a prescient and self-serving move, as within a month, with the Treaty of Campo Formio, the Ionian Islands would come officially under French rule, if only for a short time. It is indicative, however, of the solidity of the Venetian allegiance of many Greek Orthodox Zantiots.

The problems arising in the eighteenth century from the presence in the Ottoman Empire of a sizeable Greek Orthodox community claiming that they were not subjects of the Sultan seem to prefigure one of the major mid-nineteenth century issues of international relations. After the establishment of the Kingdom of Greece, many citizens of the newly founded state, mostly former Ottoman subjects who had managed to obtain Greek passports, flooded the island, claiming that they were not reaya. This provoked the reaction of the Ottoman authorities and proved to be a perennial thorn in Greek-Ottoman relations, especially in the 1830s and 1840s (Georgis 1996, 133-71).

5 The Case of Evangelista Peristiani

An exemplary case of the ambiguous status of Zantiots, often resulting from their own activities, was that of Evangelista Peristiani, a merchant from Cephalonia who married a Cypriot reaya woman. A 1765 document listing Venetian subjects notes that Peristiani was residing with his mother-in-law and his sisters-in-law, having become a *Rajà del Gran Signore*.³² The reference itself is puzzling and contradictory, since it describes Peristiani as a subject of the Sultan, even while including him in a list of Venetian subjects who held permission by the Cinque Savi to open a commercial house, highlighting the ambivalent position of the Zantiots, even in the eyes of their own Consuls.

"Being of a restless nature and mingling everywhere", throughout the 1760s and 1770s, Peristiani became the cause of several complaints by locals towards the Venetian Consul who, by way of punishment, prohibited his appearance in the Consulate until he would moderate his behaviour. As a result of this, in 1774, Peristiani

31 ASV, CSM, b. 653, Consul Giacomo Caprara to the Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, 23 September 1797. "Svenarono [...] il decoro, e l'onore della propria nazione, immergendola nella deiezione e nell'avvilimento, e con scandaloso esempio, esponendo la Patria alla derisione delle altre nazioni, allo scorno de mal' intenzionati, ed al disprezzo di questa Turca Gente".

32 ASV, ACVC, b. 1: "Nota dei Nazionali Veneti". Stavrides 1999, 216.

accused Bernardo Caprara to the Cinque Savi for withholding his protection from him, while the Consul argued that he had already renounced that protection voluntarily sixteen years previously.³³

To resolve this controversy and to defend his position, Peristiani decided to go to Venice and present his case in person to the Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia. Since he did not enjoy the support of the Venetian Consul, he resorted to French Consul Benoit Astier, who wrote a letter of recommendation on his behalf, indicating that Peristiani had to go to Venice to clear his honour and reputation of the false accusations against him. Astier certified that, according to his information, since the time of his establishment in Cyprus, Peristiani enjoyed the reputation of a man of honour and probity and that he was a victim of envious people of his nation, while the French and foreign merchants, and even a few honourable Venetian ones, regarded him with esteem and friendship.³⁴ The Bishop of Kition Makarios I (1737-76) also wrote letters of recommendation on Peristiani's behalf, acknowledging that in the past he had erroneously attributed to him scandalous behaviour and had reported him to the Consul, recanting his previous statements.³⁵

In 1776, the Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia informed Consul Caprara that Peristiani had appeared personally before them and filed a complaint that, although he resided in Larnaca for several years, exercised "un onorato commercio" (an honourable trade), and was in possession of all the required documents, he was deprived of the protection of the Venetian Consulate. In an official letter they issued, they gave instructions to the Consul to restore Peristiani to Venetian protection and to provide him with a document certifying his innocence, in order "to dissolve any ambiguity that might have stained his reputation and honour and to remove those sinister and unfavourable impressions".³⁶

In his reply to the Cinque Savi, Consul Caprara indicated that this was a result of the voluntary actions of Peristiani himself, who had renounced his status as a Venetian subject to obtain a greater portion of the inheritance of his father-in-law Zacharias Gabriel. According to Caprara, instead of applying to the Consulate,

33 ASV, CSM, b. 649, no. 177, Consul Bernardo Caprara to the Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, 6 December 1774.

34 ASV, ACVC, b. 1: "Miscellanea di Atti provenienti da Magistrature Venete con oggetti specifici", no. 86, 20 September 1775.

35 ASV, ACVC, b. 1: "Miscellanea di Atti provenienti da Magistrature Venete con oggetti specifici", no. 88, 9 September 1775.

36 ASV, ACVC, b. 1: "Miscellanea di Atti provenienti da Magistrature Venete con oggetti specifici", no. 7 ("per sciogliere qualunque ambiguità che potesse avesse machiata la di lui riputazione ad onore e per togliere quelle impressioni sinistre e sfavorevoli").

Peristiani, together with his reaya *cognato* 'brother-in-law' Antoni, applied to the Ottoman authorities, obtaining an order of the *Mufti* of Nicosia to the Kadi of Larnaca "di proteggere li due ricorrenti come sudditi ottomani" (to protect the two applicants as Ottoman subjects), and to take Gabriel's property from the hands of the Franks and divide it according to Ottoman inheritance laws. This resulted in the Kadi appearing publicly in Peristiani's house, an action that caused consternation to the Venetian Consul, who considered it an insult to the Venetian *nazione*. Thus, Caprara indicated that Peristiani had voluntarily renounced his Venetian citizenship, declaring himself a reaya of the Sultan when it was convenient for him to avoid being subjected to Venetian laws.³⁷

Although Caprara's account is probably a heavily biased version of the story, as there was an ongoing enmity between him and Peristiani, we may assume that it reveals a fundamental truth about this liminal group: Zantiots often took advantage of their ambivalent position, attempting to have it both ways, chameleon-like changing flags and allegiances according to their interests. That is, their position at the limits between the Europeans and the reaya, far from being an unmitigated liability, could also prove to be an advantage in certain cases, allowing them a certain degree of flexibility, as they had the opportunity to move between two worlds.

With the support of the Cinque Savi and Archbishop Chrysanthos (1767-1810), Peristiani was readmitted into the Consulate's protection in 1778. In July of that year, the Chancellor of the Venetian Consulate Salessio Rizzini issued a document confirming that Peristiani was a Venetian subject, warning any friendly vessels not to confiscate a quantity of cotton he was sending to Saida.³⁸ A posthumous inventory of his property (1781) refers to him as a "suddito Veneto" (Venetian subject), indicating that he had kept this status until the end of his life (Rizopoulou-Egoumenidou 1998, 11). The fact that this inventory survives in two copies, one in a codex in the Greek Orthodox Archbishopric and another in the Venetian archives, is telling of Peristiani's ambiguous status, as both an Orthodox Greek and a Venetian subject.

In a letter of February 1st, 1781, written shortly after Peristiani's death, Archbishop Chrysanthos wrote to Consul Emanuele Vassalo

37 ASV, CSM, b. 650, Relazione del Console Veneto in Cipro fedel Bernardo Caprara, Cipro 1777 (February 1778) ("dalla qual sudditanza egli da se solo erasi abdicato, dichiarandosi raia del Gran Signore allorché si trattò di non voler essere soggetto alle leggi di questa Serenissima Repubblica rapporto all'eredità Gabrielli sudetta").

38 ASV, CSM, b. 650, Estratto dal Libro Bollato Lettera B della Veneta Cancelleria in Cipro a carte 272, 20 July 1778.

that "the late Peristiani carried some vain and harmful opinions".³⁹ Here Chrysanthos probably refers to the various scandals, in which the Zantiot merchant was involved, and commends Consul Vassalo for taking under his protection Peristiani's orphan son and daughter, *heeding the Apostle's command not to return the evil done to oneself*,⁴⁰ suggesting that Vassalo himself may have had cause for dissatisfaction with Peristiani's behaviour.

After Evangelista's death, his son Costantino, even though born in Cyprus to a reaya woman, continued to lay claim to Venetian citizenship and in 1781 the Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia asked Consul Emanuele Vassalo to assist and protect him "come suddito Veneto" (as a Venetian subject). The Consul assured the Cinque Savi that he would furnish him with all the assistance and protection possible, although Peristiani *has been born here to a reaya woman, and he holds a shop in the bazaar, in which he daily sells at retail personally, like the other reaya shopkeepers*.⁴¹ This was another case indicative of the ambiguity between Ottoman and Venetian citizenship, as well as of the stance of Venetian Consulates in the Levant, which tended to treat Venetians who became reaya as regular subjects, that is, as persons bureaucratically dependent on the Consulate.

6 Social and Cultural Intermediaries

Despite their 'levantinisation', the Zantiots of Cyprus remained socially and culturally European, retaining an essentially western outlook and continuing to live as though in Western Europe, albeit in a Levantine environment. This is evident in their housing, their costumes, their intellectual world and even, perhaps, towards the end of the eighteenth century, their political ideology, sharing to a large extent many similarities with that other locally grown variety of displaced Westerners, the Levantines.

A glimpse of an affluent Zantiot household is provided by the inventory of the furniture and equipment of Evangelista Peristiani's residence, compiled posthumously in 1781. The house consisted of several rooms, including a 'grand hall', containing eight statues,

³⁹ ASV, ACVC, b. 20, no. 145, 1-12 February 1781 ("ὁ ἀποθανὼν ἔφερε μεθ'ἑαυτοῦ τινὰς γνώμας ἀνωφελεῖς καὶ ματαίας ὡς ἔσται τοῦτο δηλὸν τοῖς πᾶσι"). See also Louizos 1972, 310.

⁴⁰ ASV, ACVC, b. 20, no. 145, 1-12 February 1781 ("μὴ ἀπόδωτε τινὶ κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ").

⁴¹ ASV, ACVC, b. 15, Copia lettere pubbliche del Consolato Veneto di Cipro che principia al dì 8 Feb. 1776, no. 35, 4 May 1782. Also, ASV, CSM, b. 651, no. 35, Consul Emanuele Vassalo to the Cinque Savi, 6 May 1782 ("sia nato qui da donna raina, et tenghi bottega in Basaro, nella quale in persona giornalmente vende a minuto, come gli altri bottegaj Rajà").

and a 'small hall', as well as the private quarters of the owner's son. The large number of chairs and armchairs, tables and wardrobes gives an idea about the size and character of the house (Rizopoulou-Egoumenidou 1998, 23-4). Certain items reflect the family's quality of life, which differed from that of most Cypriots.⁴² Mirrors, paintings, and statues, as well as silverware, ivory cutlery, china plates, crystal bottles, and cups for hot chocolate were items to be found only in the most affluent households and reveal a way of life resembling that of the bourgeois class of Western Europe, while the presence of portraits of ancestors indicates a consciousness of family continuity (12-32).

The same may be said about the costume of the Zantiots. Pictorial, as well as documentary evidence, points to the fact that the costume of the members of this group was indistinguishable from that of contemporary Europeans. On two icons from the church of Chrysopolitissa in Larnaca, apparently donated by Zantiots, we can see men wearing European costumes in the classic eighteenth century style, with full-skirted knee-length coats, silk stockings, and powdered wigs, one of whom is, in fact, wearing a sword on his waist, indicating a member of an affluent westernised social class (Michaelides 2005, 90, 197). The fact that the men depicted are Greek Orthodox is clear by both the style of the icons and the church in which they are to be found. Inventories of the personal belongings of Venetian subjects also indicate that they possessed a clearly European wardrobe, although at this time, as in most Levantine ports, European women used to dress *alla turca* (Hadjikyriakos 2016, 153-63).

The inventory of the merchandise of Peristiani's shop is also indicative of the social and cultural impact of the Zantiots on local society. The various goods sold there included luxury items, textiles, lace, mirrors, furniture, as well as crystal salad-bowls, liqueur glasses, silver clocks, eyeglasses, snuffboxes, pens, paper, paintings, and books. All these were European products, mostly from Venice, made available to the local Ottoman subjects by Peristiani, whose shop served as a meeting-point between the local reaya and European culture (Rizopoulou-Egoumenidou 1998, 39-41).

We may get glimpses of the intellectual world of the Zantiots through the inventory of books that Peristiani imported to Cyprus, among which we find dictionaries, grammars, historical works, and even popular literature in Greek. Given the high percentage of illiteracy at the time, Peristiani's books were probably addressed to the higher clergy and the nascent bourgeoisie of the island (Rizopoulou-Egoumenidou 1998, 41-3). The lists of subscribers of

42 See for example the testimony of Alexander Drummond, who wrote that "the inhabitants are kept so wretchedly poor, that they cannot indulge their taste for luxury and extravagance" (Cobham 1908, 282).

several secular works of the time, like the *History* of Archimandrite Kyprianos, printed in Venice in 1788, include the names of Zantiots of Larnaca, such as Costantino Peristiani and the Dragoman of the Venetian Consulate Pierachi Corella (Kyprianos 1788, 405). Although in the nineteenth century many Zantiots showed a clear nationalist orientation,⁴³ in the absence of relevant writings, their eighteenth-century political ideology is much harder to fathom. The portrait of Empress Catherine of Russia, found among the possessions of Evangelista Peristiani, is of particular importance, since after the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774), the Tsarina assumed the protection of the Greek Orthodox subjects of the Sultan, thus becoming for them a symbol of liberation. Peristiani's Russophile political orientation may have contributed to his son's subsequent appointment as Consul of Russia, but we do not know to what extent it was shared by other Zantiots at the time (Stavrides 2012, 191, 193).

7 Zantiots in Cyprus in the Nineteenth Century

The marriages of Zantiots into local families created a separate class, which dominated the island socially and economically, side by side with the corresponding class of European merchants (Katsiaounis 1997, 241-4). Excepting the centralised French, by the beginning of the nineteenth century European Consuls often came from Zantiot families, like the Consul of Britain Antonio Vondiziano and the Consul of Sweden, Norway, and Russia Costantino Peristiani, two of the most influential personalities in early nineteenth-century Cyprus. Zantiots gradually blended into local society, and their unions with local women provided the core of the Greek Orthodox bourgeoisie, and the social, economic, and cultural leadership of the community in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

After the Napoleonic Wars, the Ionian Islands became a British protectorate and therefore the burden of supervising and protecting the Zantiots in the Ottoman lands was passed on to the British Consuls. In 1852, the British Consulate of Larnaca found that 143 out of its 150 registered protégés were Zantiots (Seymour 2014, 82). Two registers of the Greek Consulate drafted at the time of the transfer of the Ionian Islands from British to Greek sovereignty in 1864 record 207 names of Zantiots then living in Cyprus divided into 59 families, that included people of all social strata, from merchants

⁴³ See for example the case of Dr. Pavlos Valsamachi (1802-1889) from Cephalonia, who was one of the members of an embassy to the Governor of Greece Ioannis Capodistria (1828-31) in August 1828, bearing a petition asking for his aid in the liberation of Cyprus (Protopsaltis 1971, 91-7).

and doctors to peasants and beggars (Koudounaris 1976, 87-106). These mid-nineteenth century consular registers testify to the continuing presence of a group of people originating from the Ionian Islands, who retained a distinct character and status due to their extraterritoriality, while becoming an integral part of local society.

The first Zantiots arriving in Cyprus in the mid-eighteenth century sparked far-reaching social, economic, and cultural changes on the island. Common language and religion helped them integrate with the local Greek Orthodox community, not only through commercial dealings and cooperation, but also through social contacts and marriages. The members of the Zantiot bourgeoisie transplanted to Cyprus brought with them western cultural and social characteristics, which, through close relations and intermarriage, were appropriated and assimilated by the higher class of the local Greek Orthodox community, affecting the social, economic, and cultural history of the island. The systematic arrival of Zantiots in the middle of the eighteenth century marks the beginning of the formation of a local Greek Orthodox bourgeoisie in Larnaca, a development that would profoundly influence the island's society and culture in the subsequent two centuries.

Abbreviations

ACVC = Archivio del Consolato Veneto a Cipro

ASV = Archivio di Stato di Venezia

b. = busta

CSM = Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia

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