

The «Vlach» *vojvoda* of Kozani Mancu Osman Agha:
A new aspect of the dispute of *Alēfrones* and
Dēmokratikoi in mid-eighteenth century Kozani

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Abstract

Η παρούσα εισήγηση αναδεικνύει μια νέα διάσταση στη διαμάχη Αληφρόνων και Δημοκρατικών μέσα από οθωμανικές πηγές που παρέχουν τα στοιχεία του βίου και της πολιτείας ενός μουσουλμάνου βοεβόδα της Κοζάνης ο οποίος πέραν του γεγονότος ότι υπήρξε ηγετικό μέλος της παράταξης των Αληφρόνων δια της συμμαχίας του με επιφανή μέλη της υπό διαμόρφωση φατριάς του Ρούση Κοντορούση ήταν, όπως εξάλλου μαρτυρά και το προσωνύμιο Μάντζου/Mancu/مانجو, βλαχικής καταγωγής. Επιχειρείται να εξεταστεί ο πολιτικός βίος του καθώς και οι λοιπές δραστηριότητες του, ως μία εκ των πλέον σημαντικών μορφών της ιστορίας της Κοζάνης στο δεύτερο μισό του 18ου αιώνα. Τέλος εξετάζεται ο χαρακτήρας της διαμάχης Αληφρόνων και Δημοκρατικών για την πρωτοκαθεδρία μέσα από μία κριτική εξέταση του ρόλου που έπαιξε ο Μάντζου Οσμάν Αγάς σε αυτήν και την ιστορία της Κοζάνης κατά το δεύτερο μισό του 18ου αιώνα.

Keywords: *Βλάχοι, Κοζάνη, 18ος αιώνας, Οθωμανική Αυτοκρατορία, κοινοτικές διαμάχες, προυχοντισμός.*

The eighteenth century was a period of radical transformation of Ottoman political landscape. The rise to prominence of provincial magnates has in the last three decades attracted the attention of Ottomanist historiography who came to interpret this historical phenomenon in a variety of ways. Nevertheless, despite this interest in examining the role of provincial magnates in eighteenth-century Ottoman realities, it is only the most prominent families and most powerful individuals who have heretofore been the subject of systematic research. This paper addresses this vacuum by discussing a minor Ottoman Muslim provincial notable, the *vojvoda* Mancu Osman Agha, and his role in the socio-economic and political life of the small Macedonian town of Kozani during the twenty years of his tenure (1760 – 1780). This paper discusses Mancu Osman Agha's career in both capacities that he enjoyed during his lifetime, namely that of a Muslim functionary and that of a leading member of the *Alēfrones* faction that was formed around the Christian Kozanite notable Roussis Kontoroussis and came to dominate Kozanite politics post-1750. What is more important for our discussion, however, is the fact that Mancu Osman Agha was, as his name testifies, of Vlach origins. Hence, this paper attempts to examine the political life of the man, in order to examine his role in the history of Kozani in the second half of the eighteenth century. This paper begins by briefly presenting eighteenth-century Kozanite realities, in order to set the stage and background for Mancu Osman Agha's career to unfold and highlight the tripartite division of power and authority in Kozanite socio-economic and political life. Next, we examine Mancu Osman Agha's identity and career in the light of the information we have extracted from available Ottoman documentation and extant bibliography. We then proceed to examine Mancu Osman Agha's role in the affairs of the Kozanite community and the part he played in the communal strife that characterises the history of Kozani post-1750.

The historical background: The small Macedonian town Kozani during the 16th – 18th centuries:

The origins of Kozani are still the matter of debate among historians who seem to totter between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century romantic founding myths, on the one hand, and their critical evaluation and rejection, on the

other. Nevertheless, lack of primary sources combined with a lack of in-depth knowledge of the medieval history of the area where modern Kozani stands has rendered our knowledge and perception of the origins of the modern town of Kozani hazy, to say the least. A detailed discussion of the founding myths of Kozani would fall outside the scope of the present paper. Suffice it to say that the Slavic etymon of its name (коза: goat / кожа: hide) might be an indication of Kozani's origins as a small settlement of Slavic-speaking livestock farmers. Be that as it may, and notwithstanding the existence of ancient Greek settlements in the broader area of Kozani (Karamitrou-Mentesidi, 1997, 203 – 231; Ziota, 2014, 31 – 48), the exact date of Kozani's foundation in its present location remains a mystery. One thing is certain that Kozani appears for the first time in written sources in c. 1500, the date of the compilation of the earliest extant Ottoman *tapu tahrîr* cadastre for the broader area under the administration of the old Byzantine castle-town of Servia, now called by the Ottomans Serfice (Kambouridis & Salakidis, 2013, 27 – 32, 532 – 535). Based on the data extracted from extant Ottoman cadastres, Kozani was during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a typical rural settlement, a small village of negligible size without any special characteristics presaging its later demographic and economic development that would render it the seat of a bishopric, a true lighthouse of education and culture with a famous school and library, and characteristics typical of an urban center. Until 1613, when the last extant *tapu tahrîr* cadastre was compiled, Kozani belonged to the judicial district of Serfice and still formed part of the *tîmâr* system. The fact that by mid-sixteenth century Kozani formed part of larger prebends, known as *ze'âmet*s may be an implicit evidence of Kozani's development and growing importance. During the seventeenth century there are few documents referring to Kozani.¹ These documents are excerpts from poll-tax and 'avârîz registers, which mention that Kozani paid its poll-tax and other taxes in the form of a prearranged lump-sum, known as *makṭû'*, which may be considered a form of communal *iltizâm* tax-farming arrangement for the payment of their poll-tax. This is an indication of the growing ability of the

¹ For additional information, see the following registers: BOA, MAD.d..00059, p. 180; BOA, MAD.d..15230, p. 2; BOA, MAD.d..15521, p. 23; BOA, MAD.d..15040, p. 3.

community of Kozani to self-government and self-administration, a condition that triggered the development of autonomous feelings and the emergence of a group of community leaders, who were held responsible by the state for managing the tax-collection procedures and the administration of their community's affairs. The earliest case of a community leader, known as *koçabaşı* in Ottoman Turkish and as *protoyeros* in Greek, dates from 1691 – 1692, when there is recorded in a detailed poll-tax register a certain Marko *protoğer* as the communal leader of Kozani.² At the same time, Kozani was during the seventeenth century a *hāṣṣ* prebend, which, as was the case with all the sultanic, imperial family, and vizieral *hāṣṣ* prebends, was farmed out on a short-term basis, in most cases with triennial contracts based on the *iltizām* tax-farming system. Yet, by mid-eighteenth century, Kozani would be fully incorporated into the new *mālikāne* system of life-term tax-farming. Kozani was between c. 1760 – 1796 administered by *voyvodas* who represented at a local level the absentee life-term tax-farmer, namely the granddaughter of Sultan Ahmed III (r. 1703 – 1730), Fatma Hanım Sultan (Lamprakis, 2017a, 44 – 82).

To sum up, the eighteenth century was Kozani's golden age. The turning points were the transfer of the seat of the bishopric of Servia from Serfice to Kozani in 1745 and the introduction of Kozani into the *mālikāne* life-term tax-farming system; emigration to Central Europe, commerce, and tax-farming were the two factors in the accumulation of wealth and the emergence of factional strife for the control of the affairs of the community. This is vividly seen in the erection of the large cathedral of Aghios Nikolaos in the centre of the settlement, along with the building of the *dēmoyerontia* (Greek: *δημογεροντία*), in which the notables and leaders of the community met for the handling of the affairs of church and community; the delimitation of the space of the common market (Greek: *Κοινόν Τζιαροσί*) which became the epicentre of the economic and social life of the community; the erection of the community school and library, which reveal the interest of the community not only in barren accumulation of wealth but also the cultivation of their spirit and that of the younger generations; and finally the erection of stately mansions

² The poll-tax register is preserved in the Prime Minister's Ottoman Archives in Istanbul and bears the archival number BOA, MAD.d..03421. For Kozani and the community leader Marko *protoğer*, see: f. 174.

by the most prominent families of Kozani. As a result, Kozani obtained all those characteristics typical of a developed town that differentiate it from its past as a rural village of negligible size and importance. Without doubt, Kozani's economic, communal and political life underwent great changes that radically transformed Kozani from a backwater into a thriving and vibrant town, with all the advantages and disadvantages of this change being inscribed on the history of the community of Kozani between 1750 – 1820. As a result, administration of Kozanite affairs was organised in the form of a triumvirate who represented three distinct institutions of high prestige and exalted status, namely the local *voyvoda*, who represented and defended the interests of the absentee beneficiary of the *mālikāne* of Kozani before the local community and the state authorities and officials; the local bishop, namely the supreme ecclesiastical authority within the limits of the Kozanite community; and, the *qocabaşı* of Kozani, who was a layman elected by the community to administer the affairs of the community, whilst he was expected also to represent the interests of the community before the state and church officials. The triumvirate comprised the wealthiest, most prestigious, and most powerful elements in the Kozanite society (Lamprakis, 2017a, 107–108). The antagonism for controlling these institutions-*cum*-offices would lead in the formation of the two well-known factions, namely the *Alēfrones* and the *Dēmokratikoi*, that dominated political life in Kozani during the second half of the eighteenth century, and the subsequent outbreak of serious factional strife that divided Kozanite society into two rival camps and almost destroyed Kozani (Lamprakis, 2017a, 124 – 184; Lamprakis, 2019, 185-224). It is against this background that Mancu Osman Agha made his appearance in c. 1760 and it is thus to him that we now turn our attention.

Mancu Osman Agha: His identity

Mancu Osman Agha made his entrance into Kozanite politics in c. 1760, when he was appointed for the first time to the office of *voyvoda* of Kozani on behalf of the absentee *mālikāne* tax-farmer, Fatma Hanım Sultan. At the time of his first appointment, however, Mancu Osman Agha was a *bölükbaşı*, namely a Janissary captain-*cum*-commander of irregulars entrusted with security and implementation of law and order

in a locality (Pakalın, 1993, v. I, 242). Hence, from his very name emerge two distinct and yet inextricably correlated components, namely the appellation Mancu and the title *ağa*. To begin with, his full name is Mancu Osman, with the first word being, as I will argue presently, a vestige of his Vlach origins, whilst the second one is the widely known Arabic name ‘*Uthmān*. Now, the name Mancu comes from the Vlach word *mâ-ndzu/mîndzu*, which means the “foal” or “colt” (Ntinias, 1995, 169–170; Nikolaidis, 1909, 279). Hence, not as paradoxical for a high-ranking Muslim Janissary officer as it may appear at first glance, Mancu Osman Agha was a dual identity carrier; so much so that, as extant documentation reveals, not only did *he* use both appellations to sign documents and refer to himself, but also the Ottoman authorities in Istanbul accepted the fact and used them both when references were made to Mancu Osman or when he was directly addressed by the Porte in letters and other documents.³

The title *ağa*, on the other hand, betrays his membership of the Janissary corps. Nevertheless, it needs be clarified here that Mancu Osman Agha was not a typical *kapıkulu devşirme* byproduct. He was rather a “peasant Janissary”, namely a local Muslim by birth who one way or another succeeded in buying his admission to a Janissary contingent stationed at his homeland, after which he became a *yerli* (“local”) Janissary who managed to climb the hierarchy and be promoted to the rank of *ağa* and the grade of *bölükbaşı* (Radushev, 2008, 447–467.). Moreover, that Mancu Osman Agha was a Muslim by birth is proved from his patronym; in a document dated 1182 AH / 1768 – 69 CE which refers to a dispute between Mancu Osman Agha and the former *çocabaşı* of Kozani Ioannis Sakellarios, Mancu Osman Agha is recorded as the son of a certain Mehmed.⁴ From this we may conclude that Mancu Osman, although a Muslim by birth, he was of humble social origins, since his

³ As typical examples of such documents are the following three preserved today in the Prime Minister’s Ottoman Archives in Istanbul: BOA, C.ML..27345; BOA, C.ML..27436; BOA, C.ZB..5-209.

⁴ BOA, TS.MA.e. 1075 – 70: *Çozana mukâta’asını sâbık voyvodası Osmân Ağa bin Mehmed*.

father was not distinguished by any title(s) that could support the hypothesis of an illustrious parentage or an affiliation with prominent institutions, such as the Janissary corps. Another important aspect of Mancu Osman Agha's identity is his place of origin. In his probate inventory, on the one hand, which was compiled shortly after his death in 1780, he is recorded as permanent resident of Serfice; yet, in other documents touching on his activities in Kozani as its *voyvoda*, he is also recorded as permanent resident of Kozani.⁵ Yet, from his probate inventory, which *inter alia* contains a record of his immovable properties, it becomes apparent that Mancu Osman Agha's focus and interest lay in Serfice and its surroundings. This is indicative of his being a native of Serfice or a village in its surroundings. Corroborative to this assumption is the fact that his son Halil Agha, who would emerge in the 1790s as Tepedelenli Ali Pasha's most faithful instrument in the promotion of the latter's interests (Lamprakis, 2017b, 129-91), chose for himself the sobriquet *Serficeli*, which means "the one from Serfice" or even more accurately perhaps "one who is a native of Serfice".

Thus, to sum up, Mancu Osman Agha was a native Muslim of Serfice or its surroundings. We may assume that his father, Mehmed, was a convert to Islam, perhaps a Christian Vlach, who converted to Islam for economic and taxation reasons. Mancu Osman Agha was thus born to a poor family of converts to Islam. He soon entered the Janissary corps and managed to be promoted to the rank of *ağa*, first, and then to the grade of *bölükbaşı*. He was thus a prominent figure in the local society with strong links to the leading group of local Janissaries and with high-ranking Janissaries in Istanbul. His being a member of the Janissary corps thus facilitated his upward social and political movement and enabled him to access first-hand information about tax-farming opportunities in his locality and secure, therefore, the most lucrative post for himself. Although we lack solid information as to the initial stages of his Janissary career, we know that he entered Kozanite politics in 1760 when he was appointed to the post of the *voyvoda* of the *malikâne* Kozani,

⁵ BOA, AE.SABH.I.190-12680: *Serfice sükkânından bu def'a fevt olan Mancu Osmân nâm kimesne*. BOA, C.ML..27345: *kozana sükkânından Mancu Osmân nam kimesne*.

namely the long-term administrator of the most promising tax-farm of his locality, which was the steppingstone to emerge as the most influential and powerful figure in Kozanite affairs. He kept this post for the remaining twenty years of his life. Despite all this, he retained the memory of his, and his family's Vlach origins, by adopting as sobriquet the Vlach word *mandzu/mîndzu*, which he used as an inextricable part of his name and identity until his death in 1780.

Mancu Osman Agha: His career as *voivoda* of Kozani and his role in factional strife and communal disputes

As was mentioned already, Mancu Osman Agha was the *voivoda* of Kozani for twenty years. From the very onset of his career as *voivoda*, he got deeply involved in the administration of the affairs of the Kozanite community and, unavoidably, the factional strife that was rife in the life of the community and its members. I have discussed elsewhere in a detailed manner the disputes that mark the period of Mancu Osman Agha's tenure and the part that the latter played in them as a leading figure of the "Faction of Thessaloniki", the forerunner of the *Alēfrones* faction (Lamprakis, 2019, 185-224). I will thus abstain from repeating the events; I shall rather discuss the character of communal factionalism in Kozani during the second half of the eighteenth century and Mancu Osman Agha's involvement therein as inextricable part of the general trajectory of Kozanite communal life.

We could assume that during his long tenure Mancu Osman Agha had developed patronage affiliation with many local prominent Christian magnates and notable personalities. Moreover, we could assume that Mancu Osman Agha had established his own household in which he gathered all those local personalities that were bound to his cause through patronage and protection or sharing common interests. Based on the sources at our disposal, Mancu Osman Agha's household comprised three concentric circles with Mancu Osman Agha at their centre. Within the inner circle we should place a) Mancu Osman Agha himself, b) his three sons, c) his unnamed wife, whose origins are otherwise completely unknown to us, d) his nephew, Abdullatif, who was Mancu

Osman Agha's confidant and most trustworthy agent, and e) Mancu Osman Agha's *şarrāf*, who, despite the fact that he was not a member of his family, was a pivotal figure because he provided Mancu Osman Agha with the necessary funds to finance his activities. Within the middle circle we should place Mancu Osman Agha's close associates and collaborators, who comprised Muslims and Christians of local origins, the most prominent of which were the Bishop Ignatios and Rousis Kontorousis, and members of his faction, who were Mancu Osman Agha's direct associates. Within the outer circle we should place personalities outside the local scope, who were only coincidentally related to Mancu Osman Agha, owing to the latter's relationship with the Janissary corps and his being an agent and *protégé* of Fatma Hanım Sultan, and thus member of *her own* extensive household. Thus, based on this scheme, we may conclude that Mancu Osman Agha's extended household was an amalgam of various prominent local Kozanite households which were bound together not by virtue of their religious affiliation, but rather commonality of long-term interests and collaboration for the domination over the triangular scheme of power described above (Lamprakis, 2017a, 150 – 155).

As becomes apparent from the detailed examination of the disputes in which Mancu Osman Agha became involved during his tenure as *voivoda* of Kozani, he was always supported by, and in support of the local bishop and the Christian *ķocabaşı* who belonged to the "Faction of Thessaloniki". It seems highly probable that after the transfer of the seat of the bishopric, there occurred a series of noteworthy changes in the Kozanite society, since new church officials and dignitaries, always an elitist element in any Christian locality and society, came to Kozani and contested the pre-eminence and primacy of the older local élite. Since the latter part of the seventeenth century, Kozani had been under the domination of a group of people who as the eighteenth century went on emerged as powerful elements in the local society, through their commercial activities in Hungary and the Habsburg dominions in Central Europe. We could assume, therefore, that these people, who had comprised the Kozanite élite long before the ecclesiastical élite had moved to Kozani, reacted against the potential threat of losing their privileges and

being superseded by a new élite, which was forming around the newly established bishopric.

Hence, the initial formation of two factions, shortly after the transfer of the seat of the Bishopric to Kozani and prior to Mancu Osman Agha's appearance, that clashed for supremacy and control of the ecclesiastical and communal affairs of Kozani, one of which was the "Faction of Thessaloniki". As two extant Ottoman documents inform us, the "Faction of Thessaloniki" centred around the bishop of Kozani and his entourage, whilst their opponents gathered around the then *koçabaşı* of Kozani Ioannis Sakelarios.⁶ The former exerted pressure and censured repeatedly the *koçabaşı* accusing him of maladministration and embezzlement of communal funds, which even led in one case to the interference of the Patriarch in Istanbul to calm the spirits down. Such events led to the outbreak and consolidation of bilateral factionalism, which is the situation in which a political culture is dominated by two rival factions with no third available. According to her definition, membership of these factions is not exclusive to élites, but such factions rather dichotomise the society and they are inclusive corporations, rather than elitist exclusive organisations that incorporate élites, notable members of the community, as well as common people (Hathaway, 2005, 31–39). We should remember that prior to Mancu Osman Agha's appearance Kozani was *not* a *mālīkāne* tax-farm and the third component of the triumvirate, as was described above, namely the *vovvoda*, was absent. Hence, with the appearance of Mancu Osman Agha, the situation got increasingly complicated and led to the consolidation of the triumvirate of administration of communal, ecclesiastical and financial affairs of Kozani. Put otherwise, the conversion of the tax-farm of Kozani into a *mālīkāne* and the introduction of the *voyvodaship* into Kozani led from a bipolar/bilateral scheme of antagonism (ecclesiastical vs lay/communal authority) to a triangular configuration of power and authority that was collectively represented by the three individuals who occupied the respective posts, namely the bishop, the *koçabaşı* and the *voyvoda*.

⁶ These two documents are again preserved in the Prime Minister's Ottoman Archives in Istanbul and bear the following archival numbers: a) BOA, TS.MA.e.889-7, dated 1171 AH / 1757 CE and b) BOA, S.MA.e.1052-24, 1178 AH / 1764 CE.

The result was that these two factions, as well as their successors after c. 1785, namely the *Alēfrones* and the *Dēmokratikoi*, took the character of mixed-membership, cross-confessional groups wherein both Muslims and Christians aligned their common interests and, by forming long-lasting alliances, endeavoured to overpower and annihilate their adversaries. Such cases were the alliance formed between Mancu Osman Agha and Rousis Kontorousis, which proved the cornerstone of the establishment of the faction of the *Alēfrones* as a successor to the “Faction of Thessaloniki”, and the alliance between *teberdār* Isma‘il Agha, Naslıcalı Ebu Bekir Bey, and Georgios Avliotis, which ushered in the establishment of the faction of the *Dēmokratikoi* (Lamprakis, 2017a, 146–169). These two factions were founded because of the antagonism among local Muslim notables for the control over the tax-farm of Kozani and the post of *voyvoda*. Yet, these antagonisms concurred with intra-communal strife among local Christian notables for the post of the local *koçabaşı* and the subsequent control over the Kozanite community. The situation was further aggravated by the interference of the local bishop Ignatios, whose administration was characterised by cronyism and nepotism, in communal affairs, with the most striking case being the *Hacı Oğlu* event, when the bishop, collaborating with his chief secretary (*protosyngellos*), the *koçabaşı* of Kozani, and the two *voyvodas* of Kozani, namely Mancu Osman Agha and *yazıcı* (“the scribe”) İbrahim orchestrated in 1774 the issuance and spread of counterfeit coinage that greatly damaged the economic life of the community and led to the outbreak of popular uprising (Lamprakis, 2017a, 129 – 146; Lamprakis, 2019, 195–217). The two factions developed their own mechanisms of influence and clashed violently and without restraint, in both ideological and physical terms.

From all this, it is apparent that eighteenth-century factionalism and strife in Kozani was a by-product of antagonism between two blocs that vied for supremacy, control of the administration of the affairs of the community and the *mālikāne* tax-farm of Kozani. The names *Alēfrones* and *Dēmokratikoi* might point out a potential ideological gulf between the two factions in the way that communal affairs should be administered. After all, one cannot overlook the ideological and political domination

of Kozani by a traditional elite that comprised an alliance between the church, represented by the bishop and his retinue, and a group of well-to-do merchants. Hence, the disparaging appellation *Dēmokratikoi*, that was given by their opponents to Georgios Avliotis' supporters, might be an indication of a younger and more radical element in Kozanite society that claimed for itself by whatever means it happened to come by a saying in the affairs of the community and the people. As I have argued elsewhere, this might also reflect the influence that the ideas of the Enlightenment might have exerted on this element, who thus organised their actions not only based on personal interest and wealth, but also on a frame of ideological clash between two incompatible worldviews (Lamprakis, 2019, 217 – 218). Be that as it may, Mancu Osman Agha was at the forefront and a key element and leading figure of the *Alēfrones* faction and thus his choices and actions were of paramount importance in the socio-economic and political life of the Kozanite community.

Epilogue

Mancu Osman Agha was, until I had the chance to discover in the Prime Minister's Ottoman Archives in Istanbul several documents that pertain to his activities, an unknown figure in the history of Kozani. This should not come as a surprise, since reliance of local historians, among whom the most prominent is Panagiotis Lioufis, on oral traditions and the eradication on their part of all those elements that did not fit well in their romantic views and perceptions of the, allegedly, "religiously and racially unsullied" history of their hometown, has led to the literal obliteration of so many important figures in the history of eighteenth-century Kozani. Hence, unless other similar discoveries of documentary evidence are made in the future, a large part of the cultural, religious, linguistic and political diversity of the Kozanite society during the period of the Ottoman domination has unfortunately been lost in the sands of time and vicissitudes of human passions and prejudices. Nevertheless, there is still hope since modern historians, liberated from socio-cultural and political shackles, that converted them into mere mouthpieces of barren nationalisms, can still re-evaluate the extant sources, critically review old

approaches and, hopefully, assisted by new discoveries re-write the history of their homelands with a view to scientific veracity and accuracy.

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