

## THE LORD OF PATRAS

Every reader of the Cretan epic *Erotocritus* must have been surprised by the wildness and fierceness of «The Lord of Patras». Such qualities seem appropriate to the infidel Karamanian, but wholly inappropriate to a Greek. The Greeks are only too prone to accuse each other (usually most unjustifiably) of lying, dishonesty and treachery but not of wildness and savagery. It is always the civilized vices that they attribute to their fellow Hellenes. Xanthoudides' explanation that the fierceness of Dhrakokardhos was required as a foil to that of Spidholion seems weak and unsatisfactory, and surely my friend Mr St. Alexiou is on the right track in suggesting that the Lord of Patras is a Turk<sup>1</sup>. Long before I read his article I was convinced that Dhrakokardhos was a barbarian, but I had thought of another nation rougher and fiercer than the Turk but always renowned for its splendid courage (in which Dhrakokardhos also was preeminent)—, the Albanian nation. After further reflection I am inclined to think that perhaps Alexiou's interpretation is the better, but I feel confident that one of the two must be right.

Before we venture to suggest whether the Lord of Patras was more likely to have been a Turk or an Albanian we must consider the period when the poem was composed and the political circumstances preceding it.

The standard publication of *Erotocritus* is of course the splendid edition by that great scholar the late Dr Stephanos Xanthoudides to whom all students of Cretan literature are so greatly indebted. A useful summary and evaluation of the manuscripts, however, is contained in a recent article by Gareth Morgan, entitled «French and Italian Elements in the *Erotocritus*» («Kretika Chronika» Vol. VII, No 2, p. 201 foll.).

Morgan points out that, as Cartoian had first remarked, «*Erotocritus*» derives its plot and even much of the phrasing from a French romance entitled «Paris, et Vienne» of which the earliest manuscript is dated 1438, and the earliest printed Italian

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<sup>1</sup>) 'Ο χαρακτήρ τοῦ Ἑρωτοκρίτου «Kretika Chronika» VII 3 (1952) p. 351.

translation of it dated 1482. Morgan compares parallel passages from the French and Italian versions to similar ones in *Erotocritus*. He concludes that «if the poet of the *Erotocritus* used those versions of the «Paris et Vienne» known to us, his poem can only have come from a comparison and simultaneous manipulation of two models, French and Italian ...If, however, a single model was used it would almost certainly have to be a manuscript of an Italian version, unknown to us, intermediate between Groups I and II. The date of this manuscript would be before 1482; and all the probabilities would indicate that the *Erotocritus* was written not long after this date, and before any wide distribution of the printed text».

Let us then consider briefly the circumstances of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries A.D. bearing on the possibilities of the existence of a barbarian «Lord of Patras».

The Albanians are an old people who must have been living in the Balkan highlands in classical times, but their literature is modern and philologists are even divided on the question whether they are descended from the ancient Illyrians or from the Thracians. We do not hear of them under their modern name until the Byzantine period and they made little impression on the neighbours until the thirteenth century A. D.

The chieftains who signed allegiance to Charles of Anjou in December 1274 include Greek, French and Italian names but others that are purely Albanian such as Thopia, a descendent of whom founded a short - lived dynasty at Durazzo.

In 1358 Nicephorus, Despot of Ioannina, was defeated and killed near the river Achelous by the Albanians who seized his land and divided it into two Albanian principalities. That of Achelous with Angelokastro (the later Vonitsa) as its capital was assigned to Gija Bua Spatas son of Pierre Bua. The second comprised of the districts of Arta and Rogus was assigned to Pierre Ljocha, head of the Mazaraki and Malakassi tribes, who besieged Ioannina from 1367 to 1370. Ljocha died in 1379 and the two Albanian principalities were united under the rule of Gija Bua Spatas who achieved a peaceful solution of the quarrel with Ioannina by marrying Elene the sister of its Serbian defender Thomas Preljubovic. Bua Spatas now pushed south and captured Lepanto which was still controlled by the Angevin dynasty of Achaia. The Angevins summoned the Knights of St John to their

aid and their grandmaster Don Juan Fernandez Heredia recaptured Lepanto but was defeated and himself taken prisoner by Bua Spatas when he had attacked Arta. Spatas sold the Grandmaster to the Turks who later freed him in exchange for the town of Patras in 1381 (or 1382?).

The Albanians were still casting covetous eyes on Ioannina and in 1381 Thomas Preljubovic hired some Turkish auxiliaries to defend himself against another Albanian Gijn Zenevisi, who controlled the districts of Vela and Hopa. Preljubovic was assassinated in 1385 and his widow Angelica married a Florentine nobleman Esau Buondelmonte, who became despot of Ioannina and with Turkish aid from Sultan Murad I succeeded in repulsing Bua Spatas. The latter constructed two galleys (the first Albanian navy!) and sunk Buondelmonte's ships on the Lake of Ioannina in 1388. In 1395 Bua Spatas married his daughter to Gijn Zenevisi and in 1396 he defeated Esau and his Turkish allies near Driskos.

In 1399 the Despot Esau collected an army from the districts of Zagoi, Malakassi, Mazaraki and Mt. Papinges and marched against Argyrokastro, but was defeated and captured by Gijn Zenevisi and ransomed by his family for 10,000 gold pieces on the intervention of the Venetian governor of Kerkyra. Gijn Bua Spatas occupied Ioannina in 1399 and died the following year. Of his two sons Paul Bua Spatas (1400 - 1407) ruled over Aetolia and Acarnania and Morikios Bua Sgueros (1400 - 1418) over Arta.

Later the Albanians passed over into the Peloponnese and we hear of an Albanian chief named Pierre Bua (1459 - 1489), whose son Nicholas lived at Nauplia, and a more famous condottiero Morikios Bua, who left Nauplia, when it was ceded to the Turks in 1540, and served under Francois I at the capture of Genoa and later under Venice.

This historical background is not unfavourable to my original theory that the Lord of Patras in Erotokritos was an Albanian, but it is perhaps even more favourable to Mr Alexiou's theory when we remember that Patras was handed over to the Turks in 1381 or 1382 as a ransom for the return of the Grandmaster of the Knights of St John, Don Fernandez Heredia.

The political atmosphere of the Erotokritos would therefore seem to agree with a period about 1400 A. D. when Patras had been recently handed over to the terrible Tur, kbut when the me-

mory of the Karamanian raiders was still fresh and vivid. This of course is merely the historical setting chosen by the poet who might have lived fifty, a hundred or two hundred years later. Indeed there are good grounds for believing that the poet Vincenzo Cornaro probably composed the epic between 1635, the date of his smaller work, «The Sacrifice of Abraham», and 1646 the date of the beginning of the siege of Candia by the Turks.

I would therefore follow Politis' suggestion that the poet was deliberately archaising his political setting, but only so far as to suggest the atmosphere of the time when «Paris et Vienne» was written, when tournaments were still practised, Karamanian raids still remembered, and the Turkish occupation of Patras an event of yesterday.

Can Pistophoros be a punning reference to Constantine, who in 1445 was still only heir apparent to the Emperor of Byzantium?

It is, of course, quite impossible to make sense of many of the references. Some are merely fictional characters with classical names, notably Herakles the King of Athens, who is paralleled by Shakespeare's Theseus, Duke of Athens, in the «Midsummer Nights' Dream» and it would be absurd to attempt to identify either of them with any individual member of the Acciaiuoli family.

It is the general local colour, not the individual details, which seem to reflect the conditions in Greece during the fifteenth century alike in Shakespeare's play and in Cornaro's epic.

For the Albanians of Epirus this period was still more significant, since it was in 1443 that George Kastriotis, later known as Skanderbeg, left the Turkish court and on the 2nd March 1444 he summoned his famous conference of Albanian chiefs at Allessio to concert measures for resisting the Turkish power: some eight or nine years previously George Arianites Comnenos Thopia<sup>2</sup> had cut up a Turkish army between Lake Ochrid and Elbasan.

Perhaps Mr Alexiou will deliver judgement on whether the Lord of Patras was Turk or Albanian. We are at least both convinced that he cannot have been a Hellene<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>) Whose daughter later married Skanderbeg.

<sup>3</sup>) Of course supporters of Cyprian independence, among whom I



It is possible, however, that the setting in Erotokritos reflects rather the political atmosphere of about 1445, when Murad II and his son Muhammad were preparing to attack Constantinople, and their veteran general Turakhan had just occupied Patras, as a preliminary to invading Messenia. Venice still held not only Crete but also the fortresses of Nauplion, Mothone and Koroni in the Peloponnese, and the island of Cyprus while Athens was under Neria II Acciaiuoli and Naxos still under the Crispj family. Macedonia, however, was still in Turkish hands, though Murad had evacuated Servia after the peace of Szegedin in 1444. Moreover we are approaching the time of «Vlad the Impaler» who ruled over Wallachia from 1456 to 1462 A. D., a man who in cruelty lived up to his horrible nickname but who was a doughty general and even defeated Muhammed the Conqueror, when the latter tried to invade his country, and his name is suggested by Vladistratos the King of Vlachia in the Erotokritos. It is true that Vlad the Impaler only ascended the throne the year that Constantinople fell, but the discrepancy in the dates is slight enough for Cornaro to have ignored it, or alternatively he may have thought that Vlad ascended the throne a few years earlier.

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count myself, may suggest that the barbarism of Dhrakókardhos proves him to have been an Englishman.