5. A Leap of Faith: Disputes over Sacred Space

Published by

Yosmaoglu, Ipek and Frederick White.


For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/67161
CHAPTER FIVE

A Leap of Faith: Disputes over Sacred Space

The stupidest peasant sighed for a life of quiet and the departure of the Turks. But the means, the courage, the instinct of mutual help had first to be trained. The leaders had to inspire the peasants with the same courage and faith which the schools of the Exarchate had already created in the minds of the educated class. They had to weld the isolated Macedonian villages, which regard the district beyond their own valley as a foreign land, into a conscious nation.

—Henry N. Brailsford, Macedonia, Its Races and Their Future, 1906

Until recently, the historiography of the Balkans viewed the relationship between religion and nationalism as straightforward and even self-evident, and mostly treated it as such. The millet system and the endurance of the Orthodox Church were seen as the saving grace of Balkan nations, which kept them “free for their national awakening, in which Orthodox affiliations, linked up with the medieval background, played a very conspicuous part.”¹ Likewise, textbook explanations attributed the emergence of the national churches in the nineteenth century simply to the resuscitation of their forbears, which “were historically national churches and symbols of a nation’s sovereignty.”² Although there was certainly a connection between the forging of national identities and religion, this connection was historically determined as the result of a process too complicated to be reduced merely to an equation of church membership or declared church affiliation with national identity.³ More

---


³. Paschalis Kitromilides asserts that “religion came last in the struggle to forge new national identities and did not become a functional element in national definition until the nation-states had nationalized their churches.” Kitromilides, “Imagined Communities,” 59.
recent interpretations of this link have cautioned against accepting a binary opposition between “religious and secular values” and call particular attention to the cross-hybridization of religious and post-Enlightenment secular notions of collective belonging. In this chapter, I look at the link between religion as a marker of national identity and an enabler of nationhood from a different perspective, which suggests that the most important element that consolidated this connection in popular conception, specifically among the rural populations, was the politicization of religion and religious identity after they became inextricably linked with violence.

In the previous chapter, we saw that religion still played a major role as a reference for people’s conceptions of collective identity and that, for many of them, this was something that differentiated them not from other Orthodox Christians in their vicinity but from Muslims. When H. N. Brailsford took a few local boys from a village near Ohrid to the “ruins of the Bulgarian Tsar’s castle,” the boys, proving right every prejudice the journalist entertained about them, failed to give the correct answer to the question, “Who built this castle?” Despite repeated prodding and hints by Brailsford, including the words “Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks,” the boys’ final answer was: “They weren’t Turks, they were Christians.” Brailsford, not quite as frustrated as the Ottoman census clerk who had to register people who insisted on being “Christian” as one of the official categories, nevertheless attributed the boys’ (and, more generally, the Bulgarians’) lack of historical and national consciousness to the fact that “[t]heir ecclesiastical autonomy was more completely suppressed” than that of the Greeks. In other words, Brailsford saw national identity (as some still do) as a concept that simply could lay dormant for centuries, safely entombed within different church traditions, only to be woken up when the time was right. Religion, therefore, was important, but only insofar as it preserved the core identity of a nation, not in and of itself.

It is interesting to contrast this view of religion as an incubator (and religious difference as derivative of national difference), which follows logically from primordialist understandings of national identity, with that of Benedict Anderson, who sees religion as “the basis of very old, very stable imagined communities not in the least aligned with the secular [colonial] state’s authoritarian grid-map.” The stabilizing influence of religion on local communities could not easily be dismissed by colonial authorities, who in the end had to contend with it through regulation and subordination, rather

In contrast, Skopetea attributes a stronger role to religion in the creation of Greek nationhood in post-revolutionary Greece; Ellé Skopetea, To “Protypo Vaseileio” kai é Megalé Idea, Opseis tou ethnikou problématos stén Ellada, 1830–1880 (Athens, 1988), 119–34.

6. According to Brailsford, even the Serbs were luckier in this respect for various reasons, but “[Bulgarians] were within easy striking distance of the capital.” Ibid., 99–100.
than complete eradication. Sacred spaces such as temples, mosques, and schools fell outside the topographic order of the colonial state, an anomaly that facilitated the transformation of these spaces into “zones of freedom and—in time—fortresses from which religious, later nationalist, anticolonials could go forth to battle.” That religion was easily transformed into a basis for anticolonial liberation struggles because of the spatial and spiritual autonomy it provided to the colonized is a hypothesis that seems to stand in close conceptual proximity to primordialist accounts of the role of the Orthodox Church as the vault where the core of national identity was kept and, later, as a base from which the fight for national independence was launched. By contrasting the categories introduced and imposed by the colonial rulers with an already existing and “stable” marker of identity, namely, religion, Anderson accords religion a privileged position in the resistance against colonial regimes.

Sumit Guha has justifiably criticized Anderson’s stance with regard to the role of religion as an innately suitable anchor for anticolonial struggles. Most significantly, Guha contends that “Anderson does not consider how religious identities were socially reproduced and propagated—as they must have been to survive”8 Before throwing out the baby with the bathwater, however, we must take note of the conclusion to Anderson’s argument, which is that the resilience of religious markers compelled “frequent endeavours to force a better alignment of census with religious communities by—so far as possible—politically and juridically ethnicizing the latter.”9 More than the myriad possible premodern, precolonial, and prenational identity markers generated by a complex web of social and political networks that, according to Guha, were neglected by Anderson in favor of religion, the key notion that is relevant here is the “ethnicizing” of religious identity—a process that is not derivative of preexisting categories of collective identity but, rather, imbues those preexisting categories with new meaning. This process also explains the dramatic changes with respect to the meaning of religious difference in Ottoman Macedonia at the turn of the twentieth century.

Singling out religion as the primary marker of collective identity is not to replace one form of primordialism with another. Nor do I privilege religious identity as the authentic collective identity of the Balkan peasant that existed from time immemorial as opposed to an alien social construct. It is clear that religion is a highly contested territory, no matter the context, and as Guha notes, religious identity itself is “socially reproduced and propagated.” These specific social processes, however, were part of how and why religion and nationality came to define one another in Macedonia—in other words, how Orthodoxy became ethnicized. The ethnicization of Orthodoxy

was a process that involved the transformation of preexisting social value systems into a depository of national consciousness and, more important, a reference for immutable differences. For the purposes of the national elites, “who had to weld the isolated Macedonian villages … into a conscious nation,” church affiliation served as a readily available blueprint for their ambitious project. The religiously observant peasant masses, who regarded religion as the center of their social as well as spiritual worlds, would be drafted into this same project of nation-building through the gate of church affiliation. The readily available and universally accepted principle of religious observance required yet another element to be ultimately enforceable, namely coercion, whose means became increasingly violent as the project grew more contested. Ultimately, it was not merely the introduction of an alternative church and its rivalry with the preexisting one that molded and fixed the national identities of Christian Macedonian peasants but the violence that accompanied it. Ideology did not induce a mass mobilization of the peasantry until it was activated through violence.

In this chapter, I question the presumed causal link between religious difference and conflict by tracing the experience of the Exarchist-Patriarchist schism “on the ground.” Taking a closer look at how the Exarchists and Patriarchists came to be two separate and antagonistic communities shows that the link is more complicated than the clear formula of “one church, one language, one nation.” First, religious differences did not necessarily correspond to linguistic ones, and second, they were not the result of the need to reconcile national consciousness with religion. Finally, these two communities had been entirely capable of working out their differences, if grudgingly, without resorting to violence, prior to the activities of insurgent bands in the region.

Religion was important in forging national identities because it superseded any ideological alternatives in terms of its potential for unifying or dividing the rural Christian population. Yet its role was not one of logically following a preceding national division. Religion as dogma was not nearly as important as the daily practice of religion in this context. The symbolic nature of many of the conflicts centering around sacred spaces and the clergy was not simply coincidence but a deliberate motion aimed at exploiting the rules, customs, and practices through which people made sense of this world and the next. Acts such as defrocking a priest, confiscation of liturgical books, denial of sacraments, and the theft of a ceremonial robe were important not in and of themselves but because they struck a chord by directly usurping the system of symbols that the peasants had been using as a bridge between spirituality and everyday existence. Targeting a church during mass was not a random act of violence but one designed for maximum impact, spiritually.

and physically, and for replacing communal coexistence with communal boundaries, enforced by guns if necessary.

Religion and Religious Authority

In the eyes of western Europeans, Catholic or Protestant, clergy or lay, Christians of the Eastern rite, although deserving the support and sympathy of their co-religionists, practiced a strange, if not pagan, version of Christianity that bore little resemblance to the faith practiced in more civilized parts of the world, save for the cross that symbolized it. Members of the Orthodox clergy were viewed with suspicion and amusement, attached as they were to their bizarre rituals bordering on the occult, performed in languages they themselves were not able to understand, let alone convey the message to their flock.

Ruggiero Giuseppe Boscovich, a Jesuit priest accompanying the party of James Porter, the English ambassador to the Sublime Porte, on his return journey in 1762, was an early observer of Orthodox priests’ woeful ignorance. Thanks to his Slavic roots, he was able to communicate with a (presumably) Bulgarian priest whom the party met on their journey, in a village (most likely) in Thrace. The impressions he gathered from this exchange of the young, married priest were quite unflattering: “His ignorance, and that of all these poor people, is incredible. They do not know anything of their religion except for the fasts and holidays, the sign of the cross, the cult of some image, of which one encounters now and then among them some quite horrid and ugly ones, and the name of a Christian. To the extent that I could discover that evening, speaking my language, and also having inquiries made in Turkish, which is commonly understood among them, they know neither the Pater Noster, nor the Credo, nor the essential mysteries of the religion.”

More than a century later, H. N. Brailsford (a Methodist) was equally condescending, if slightly more sympathetic, to the village priests:

To go for ethical guidance to the average village priest would indeed be too ridiculous. The married priests outside the larger towns are for the most part almost totally uneducated, and lead the life of peasants. . . . They can read enough to mumble through the ritual, and write sufficiently well to keep the parish

---

11. Boscovich was born in Ragusa in 1711. In addition to being a Jesuit a priest, he was also “a Copernican astronomer and Newtonian physicist of international reputation, and furthermore an eminent scientific geographer.” He had a Serbian father and Italian mother, but his education and early socialization were decidedly Italian; Wolff, Inventing Eastern Europe, 172.

registers; but there the superiority to the peasant ends. Preaching is practically unknown. Their function is not that of the pastor or the teacher. They are simply petty officials who perform the rites appropriate to the crossing of the frontier between this world and the next.¹³

Unlike Boscovich, Brailsford placed the blame for the deplorable state of the priests and higher clergy primarily on “Turkish rule” that “crushed every form of intellectual life” and partly on the church hierarchy itself. “There is no heresy in the Eastern Church,” he wrote, “because there is no real interest in religion.”¹⁴ Even though a few Greek bishops had benefitted from education in Oxford and Leipzig, the “incorrigibly Byzantine habits of thought” rendered this exposure useless and their ignorance more offensive. Many members of the Bulgarian clergy had been trained in seminaries in Russia, where “modern and Western ideas [were] very jealously excluded.”¹⁵ Given the sad state of affairs with regard to the clergy, it was no wonder that their flock fared even worse in the recollections of Europeans with regard to their religiosity. Travelers noted, usually with surprise and often with condescension, how time was anchored to the procession of what seemed to be an infinite number of saints’ days; how people seemed to fast for almost the entire year; and worse, how the observance of so many religious holidays bred “laziness.”¹⁶

Needless to say, pious observance of religious rules among the peasantry was not unique to the Christian Orthodox of the Ottoman Empire. It was the norm in such communities all over Europe. Rather than a pure matter of conscience, religion was a set of guidelines and rituals according to which the rhythm of daily life was set. The rites and rituals not only fulfilled indispensable social functions but also evolved with them. Certain practices, such as fasting, were as much the result of exigency as of piety. If the descriptions in the travel literature reflect the actual situation with any degree of certitude, the diet of Ottoman peasants in Rumeli was comparable to that of other rural populations in eastern and most of western Europe, which meant that animal products were considered a luxury and reserved for festive occasions. Saints’ days ensured temporal continuity, marked the changing of seasons, and normalized time—it was no coincidence, for instance, that the Ilinden Uprising took place on the day that it did—not simply August 2, but the day of Saint Elijah.

Brailsford predicted that the theocratic hold of the church over the peasantry would be lifted along with the disappearance of Turkish authority. He obviously viewed the insurgency in Macedonia as a western-leaning, if

¹⁴. Ibid., 66.
¹⁵. Ibid., 62–65.
¹⁶. See, for instance, Baker, Turkey in Europe, 102.
not entirely secular, movement. The armed revolutionaries were pioneers of
democratic freedom in a land of religious tyranny of both the Muslim and
the Christian sort. “Already the Bulgarian Committee [IMRO] represents
a movement of democratic revolt against these princes of the Church,” he
noted, disregarding the fact that the Church was instrumental in propa-
gating a distinct Bulgarian national consciousness among the youths who
were educated at its schools—a point he himself made later in the same
book. More important, the “democratic” revolutionaries relied heavily on
the Church for several of their logistical and other organizational needs, not
to mention that the Church itself was directly involved in the revolutionary
movement through its radicalized priests and schoolteachers. It is true that
the relationship between the higher ranks of the Exarchate in Constanti-
nople and the revolutionaries was often strained because of the former’s
preference for a more prudent policy for the national cause and disapproval
of the insurgents’ provocative methods. Yet the insurgents knew they could
not carry out their agenda without the assistance of the Church—not least
because that was the most direct way of reaching out to the peasants.

The insurgents’ reliance on Church officials to provide cover for their
operations could occasionally end up in completely unforeseen blunders,
such as the case of the Exarchist assistant bishop of Tikves/Kafadar [Ka-
vadarc]. Assistant Bishop Methodii disappeared from his seat without
anyone’s knowledge on April 18, 1905, apparently leaving town on foot.
The authorities later found out that he had managed to catch a train to
Salonika and had sent a letter to a confidant (who evidently was not as trust-
worthy as he had assumed), asking for his personal belongings to be shipped
to Salonika. Rumor had it that the assistant bishop had fled in haste because
he was afraid that the “Committee” was about to find out that he had been
embezzling funds the church had collected on its behalf. The prefect found
it unlikely that Bishop Methodii had indeed been embezzling money. But,
anticipating the uproar that was probably brewing among the people who
had apparently been swindled, he decided to err on the side of caution and
requested the dispatch of a 150-strong detachment in addition to the troops
already in the provincial center, lest there be an uprising. Although the as-
sistant bishop’s behavior lends some credence to Brailsford’s opinions about
the Orthodox clergy’s rapaciousness, I must note that this example is more
illustrative as an exception rather than as the rule. Although there certainly
must have been several corrupt individuals among the clergy, as well as
laypeople, collecting “taxes” on behalf of the Committee, it is not possible
to conclude there was endemic corruption among Church members, of the
Exarchate or the Patriarchate, based on occasional examples. Moreover,

17. Brailsford, Macedonia, Its Races and Their Future, 66; cf. Macedonia, Documents
and Material, 116.
Chapter 5

failing to follow the rules of the committee resulted in serious punishments, including death, which acted as an effective deterrent against such slip ups; the bishop actually had good reason to be afraid.

Bishop Methodii’s misadventure with the Committee money notwithstanding, clergy belonging both to the Exarchist and the Patriarchist sides carried immense moral authority over the peasants. In fact, that is what made his transgression all the more egregious. Brailsford, for all his condescension toward the clergy as “petty officials,” was accurate in highlighting their role in performing “the rites appropriate to the crossing of the frontier between this world and the next.” What he failed to fully comprehend was the importance of that role among people who truly believed that they needed the comfort of faith, and the priests who affirmed that faith, when “the frontier between this world and next” was so narrow.

Worship in Contested Churches

During the last decade of the nineteenth century, the “church contest” had become a palpable source of tension in Macedonia, one that involved not only disputes at the level of the clergy but also struggles centered on the physical church buildings and the worshippers within. The relations between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Sublime Porte had been quite tense since the establishment of the Exarchate, but it was not only the recognition of a separate church directly challenging the Patriarchate’s authority among the faithful that caused the tension. A paradox of the post-Tanzimat organization of autonomous religious communities—or millets, in the true sense of the term, with internal constitutions and an official representative, the milletbaşi—also unleashed a process that gradually eroded the authority of the Patriarchate over the Greek Orthodox community.19 The reforms accorded lay members of the community more control over the Holy Synod through the “mixed national council” (karma milli meclis or mikto ethniko symvoulio).20 As Greek Orthodox members of the Ottoman administration joined the council, the control of the Ottoman bureaucracy over the Patriarchate increased, although indirectly. In 1883, the growing concerns of the Patriarchate about Ottoman government involvement in the communal affairs of the millets, considered to be a set of “privileges” accorded to the Ecumenical Patriarchate since earlier times, resulted in a crisis. The immediate reasons involved the increased secularization of the

---


20. For more on this development, see Stamatopoulos, Metarrythmísè kai Ekkosmikeusë.
judiciary and government control over schools, which had been the purview of the Patriarchate. These interventions curtailed the legal authority of the Patriarchate over its own members; it made clergy members subject to civil laws in criminal cases, and the curricula and teachers of Greek schools subject to bureaucratic scrutiny. Finally, Patriarch Ioachim III cited restrictions imposed on the construction and repairs of churches in his protest to the Sublime Porte, and resigned. Greek Orthodox churches remained closed over Christmas that year. An imperial decree was issued in 1884 affirming the rights of the Patriarchate, but another crisis broke out in 1890, this time over the declared intention of the Sublime Porte to regulate the appointment of teachers and trustees of Greek schools. Adding insult to injury, the government had also issued berats for Exarchist bishoprics in Skopje and Ohrid. Patriarch Dionysios V resigned, declaring that he would not “renew his permission to his priests to perform divine service in their churches this year.” The Greek Orthodox churches in Constantinople followed suit by suspending their services, an action also followed by the Metropolitans in the Macedonian provinces. In Serres, for instance, all district churches remained closed in December 1890, until the community reached a compromise with the Metropolitan of Menlik (Melnik) that restored access to the churches also in Cuma-i Bâlâ (Blagoevgrad), Petriç (Petrich), and Demirhisar/Valovishta (Sidirokastro). The decision, celebrated by congregations anxious to reclaim their venues of worship, owed much to the resourcefulness of the kaymakam (prefect) of Menlik, who apparently persuaded the Metropolitan by promising him that he would not let the Bulgarians invoke the name of the Exarch in liturgy. The rest of the province was not as lucky, and their churches remained closed.

As communities remained without access to their churches, the fact that the clerical strike occurred during a time of heightened religious sentiment, when most people were fasting and Christmas celebrations were around the corner, exacerbated the overall restlessness. On December 18, the day of St. Nicholas (Julian calendar), the Greek Orthodox inhabitants of Serres pleaded with the Metropolitan and submitted a petition to the sultan to have their churches reopened. As we will see shortly, it was not a coincidence that such tensions happened to mount right around the major holidays of the Orthodox calendar. For the most part, it was the clear symbolic power of these dates and the increased sensitivity of the population that accounted

22. For a summary of these events see Vangelis Kechriotis, “The Modernization of the Empire and the Community ‘Privileges’: Greek Orthodox Responses to Young Turk Policies,” in The State and the Subaltern: Modernization, Society and the State in Turkey and Iran, edited by Touraj Atabeki (London, 2007), 53–70.
23. PRO, FO 193/1692, Vice Consul Capety to Consul Blunt, November 5, 1890.
24. PRO, FO 193/1692, Vice Consul Capety to Consul Blunt, December 6, 1890.
25. PRO, FO 193/1662, Vice Consul Capety to Consul Blunt, Serres, December 20, 1890.
Archival records of sectarian conflict reveal that incidents of church access–related violence, especially in the countryside, started to escalate gradually, beginning with the first years of the twentieth century. After 1903, reports of such incidents appeared on an almost daily basis in consular as well as Ottoman state documents. When the contested churches and chapels became a nuisance for the Ottoman authorities, they started closing them down as a temporary measure, not allowing access to either community. Even Easter, the most important holiday of the year—normally a festive occasion for celebrating not only the resurrection of Christ but also the arrival of spring—fell victim to the poisoned atmosphere. Attending Easter service, one of the basic tenets of religious observance for all Orthodox faithful, turned into a risky undertaking for most, and was impossible for some, because of the number of contested and therefore closed churches. One such church, in Visoçen (Xiropotamos), had been closed for three years when the Metropolitan petitioned the Inspectorate requesting permission to open the church for Easter service in April 1903; the response was negative. The Inspector pointed out that the church had been closed in 1900 because the conflict among the Greeks and Bulgarians had escalated to the point where the two parties were inflicting physical harm ("darb ve cerh") on each other. Until a general decree was issued about the matter, all similar local conflicts would be dealt with in the same manner (i.e., the Inspectorate would not issue exceptions for special circumstances).

Meanwhile, the Greek Orthodox community, wanting to keep the issue current and maintain proprietorship of the contested churches until such time when they reopened, became more vocal in their protests. Unlike a decade earlier, however, when the government treated the Exarchate and the Patriarchate as equals (at least in the eyes of the Patriarchists), the Ottoman officials were now—after the incursions of Bulgarian bands into Macedonia became an immediate threat—more likely to bestow favors on the Patriarchate at the expense of the Exarchate. Even the smallest village chapel could become a rallying point against the rival community by the other community claiming ownership of or simply access to it. Take, for instance, the small village of Koula (Palaiokastro), a çiftlik (estate or farm) of not more than twenty-four households, probably entirely owned by one

26. When Capety, the vice consul himself, was attacked at the Serres Metropolitan church a year later, after writing the reports above (notes 23–25), he was there for the celebration of his name day, May 21, which corresponds to the day of saints Konstantinos and Eleni, two most common Greek Orthodox names; this suggests that the church must have been packed. PRO, FO 195/1768, Serres, June 3, 1891.

27. BOA, TFR.I.SL 9/804, Bishop of Drama [Drama Metropolidi] to the Inspectorate, April 16, 1903; Inspectorate to the Subgovernorate of Drama, April 17, 1903.
The village had a small convent that was traditionally visited by people from neighboring villages on September 14/27, for the observation of the “Exaltation of the Holy Cross [Ypsose tou Timiou Staurou].” In 1904, however, local authorities canceled the celebration to prevent any disturbance that might arise because the residents of Koula had just signed a petition to join the Exarchate. In the words of the British Vice Consul J. M. Theodorides, who was in fact a Greek Orthodox local, the villagers had expressed their desire to be considered “among the Schismatic Bulgarians” while the neighboring villages were all “Orthodox.”

It appears that the Greek Orthodox community of Serres took the matter of this small village very seriously, and a large crowd estimated at 5,000 people gathered in town. They first went to the acting Greek Metropolitan and then, accompanied by him and the representative committees of the town, made for the mutasarrıf’s (subgovernor, or district governor’s) office. The subgovernor, Theodorides reported, had to give in to the pressing demands of the crowd and permitted the people to go to the convent for celebrations, adding that he would take all measures, including sending a military escort, to make sure that order would be preserved. Content with the assurances of the subgovernor, everyone left in good order. Even though Theodorides does not mention how the inhabitants of Koula celebrated the festival, it is questionable whether they dared to go to the little convent given the presence of a large Greek Orthodox crowd, which had contested the right to celebrate and won. It is also significant that a practice that, until recently, had been a routine observance turned into a political issue requiring the involvement of civilian and military authorities.

The demonstration of the Greek Orthodox community in Serres was not the first of its kind that year. Similar demonstrations asking for support from the Ottoman authorities sprang up across the region. The community in Salonika organized an impressive gathering on March 6, 1904. Reportedly, the community had informed the government officials a day earlier that it would meet at the Church of Aghios Nikolaos in the Eski Cuma neighborhood to observe the “Aya Nikola Palamas” [sic] holiday and then march to the governor’s mansion (hükümet) to present a petition about the “atrocities and aggression” of the Bulgarians.

---

28. Cartes Ethnographiques. G. F. Abbott, who passed through the village in 1900, did not provide any information on the language spoken by the peasants or their religious affiliation, but he noted that his party had to leave in haste because they were warned that an armed band was in the area; the band did, in fact, come to the chiftlik to pick up provisions shortly after Abbot’s party had left; Abbott, Tale of a Tour, 112–13.

29. PRO, FO 195/1183, Vice Consul Theodorides to Gérant du Vallon Serres, September 26, 1904. Consular staff employed by the European Powers in the Ottoman Empire were often recruited from among the local Christians.

30. Ibid.

31. The clerk drafting the letter is wrong about the holiday in question; probably he confused the name of the church where the ceremony would be held with the saint’s name.
governor that marching en masse from the church to the governor’s mansion would be “inappropriate,” the Metropolitan Alexander pledged to present the petition himself. Indeed, a large crowd that seemed to include “the entire Greek Orthodox community of Salonika” filled the church and listened to the service that went from noon until 5 p.m. The Metropolitan was politically savvy enough to pray for the sultan as the congregation cheered with cries of “Zito! [Long live!].” Instead of dispersing after the service, the crowd started to march on the Hamidiye Avenue (one of the main paved arteries of the city), passing by the consulates and ending up in front of the imperial barracks, where the marchers “showed their respect” with more cries of “Zito!” Their final destination was the Metropolitan Cathedral, where Archbishop Alexander repeated his speech at the church and further cries of “Zito” were heard before the crowd dispersed peacefully.\(^{32}\) This was a carefully choreographed event that pushed all the right buttons to garner sympathy for the Greek side in the ecclesiastical struggle. Timing the gathering with an important local holiday, following official guidelines to the letter, vocal expressions of gratitude to the sultan and respect to the military, making the crowd visible by marching across the city, and passing monuments and the foreign consulates (which were carefully left out of the official petition) were all elements of a cleverly designed show of power that managed not to transgress any norms of propriety. The petition itself, which praised the sultan and reaffirmed the loyalty of his Greek Orthodox subjects, contrasting their exalted and long-established place in Ottoman society with the rebellious and uncouth “Bulgarian evil-doers,” was another document of political sophistication.\(^{33}\)

The Bulgarian Exarchist community was perhaps not as talented in soliciting protection from the Ottoman officials, but it did not necessarily lag behind its rivals in resourcefulness in the fight over the churches. On June 11, 1905, the Inspectorate sent an inquiry to the kaymakamlık (prefecture) of Yenice (Giannitsa) demanding information about the inhabitants of the villages of Pirolik (Pentaplatano), Krusar/Krusari (Ampelies), Hisarbey (Drosero), Vardice/Vadrishta (Palios Milotopos), Vehdi Pazar (Palaio Giannitson), and Dalyan. According to information delivered by the Bulgarian commercial agent in Salonika to the Inspectorate, all churches in these villages had been closed down and, when the villagers put up fences to create some makeshift open-air churches, the gendarmes had demolished them. The villagers had also been forced to sign papers stating that they would

---

\(^{32}\) BOA, TFR.I.SL 32/3190, Governorship of Salonika to the Inspectorate, March 6, 1904.

\(^{33}\) BOA, TFR.I.SL 33/3228, Greek Community of Salonika to the Inspectorate, March 6, 1904.
not try again to erect these enclosures made of tree branches and rugs, and would no longer assemble for prayer.

The prefect’s response was that the villages of Pirolik, Krušar, Hisarbejy, Eskice (also part of Palaio Giannitson), and Sukutlu (Palatades) had petitioned to join the Exarchate following threats from the “brigands” even though they had been loyal to the Patriarchate until 1904. The standing order was that such petitions would not be accepted until the security threats in the region were driven away, and it was also applied in this case. However, the villagers had persisted in performing services in “Bulgarian” with “Bulgarian” priests. For this reason, the prefect explained, their churches had been closed down and their keys temporarily confiscated by the state. Following this, the villagers built fences of wood and tree branches around the churches, and Bulgarian priests continued to officiate in these enclosed areas. Not only was it “inappropriate for Bulgarian priests to perform divine liturgy,” continued the prefect, given that the churches belonged to the Patriarchate, but the fences also posed a fire hazard. Therefore, the villagers were told not to build such fences, but it was not true, he averred, that they had been forced to sign papers.34

Considering the general attitude of the Ottoman gendarmerie toward Exarchist villagers, the prefect’s assertion that nobody had forced them to sign papers is highly suspect. It is also highly unlikely that this “worship al fresco” was a spontaneous and improvised solution to the hardship posed by the locked churches because the same particular (and somewhat peculiar) pattern had sprung up simultaneously in five villages. The main motivation for the attempts by each community to defy the ban on using closed churches was the principle of squatters’ rights. There was no guarantee that either of the communities could successfully claim proprietorship of the churches when the disputes were finally resolved, not only because there was no sign of an attempt to issue uniform and coherent guidelines on the part of the Ottoman government but also because it was not clear whether the Ottoman state would be the ultimate arbiter resolving the issue. Given the overall uncertainty, it was safe to assume that a community that had managed to somehow “occupy” the church when it was shut down would have a better shot at claiming it in the future.

Interruptions of religious rites were common occurrences, but sometimes they were carried out in the most unexpected manner, such as the strategically executed theft of a ceremonial robe. On January 17, 1905, for instance, his congregants noticed that Bishop “Yerasim Efendi” was missing from church during the observance of the rite of the New Year (probably Bulgarian Christmas, Boujik; the bishop in question was a representative

34. BOA, TFR.I.SL 75/7481, A. Schopoff, Bulgarian Commercial Agent to Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha, May 24, 1905; Inspectorate to the Prefecture of Yenice, June 11, 1905; Yenice Prefect to the Inspectorate, June 20, 1905.
of the Exarchate). His absence being rather conspicuous, the Inspectorate requested an inquiry from the prefecture of Usturumca/Strumitsa (Strumica) concerning the bishop’s whereabouts. It was soon understood that the bishop had been unable to officiate because two individuals had broken into the church the night before and stolen his ceremonial robe from the caretaker. Further inquiry revealed that the perpetrators were from the band of the famous Chernopeyef (an IMRO affiliate) and that they had been sent there because the bishop had refused to pay the (quite hefty) sum of 200 liras demanded earlier.\(^{35}\) Interestingly enough, the robe was returned the day after, leaving us to wonder whether the komitajis, certainly aware of the symbolic value of this article of clothing, also had enough faith in its spiritual value that they felt pressed to return it, risking capture by the authorities.

The moral value of clerical ornaments, liturgical objects and books, and, most important, icons, which served as a direct link to the spiritual world, was so exalted in the eyes of the locals that even Ottoman authorities were occasionally forced to acknowledge the direness of an assault on these venerated objects. The commander of the troops searching for weapons in the church of an Exarchist village in the district of Avrethisar (Ginaikokastro) found this out the hard way when he was immediately arrested on the villagers’ complaints that soldiers under his command “broke the icons and toppled the sacraments.”\(^{36}\)

The priest’s robe, not only the elaborate pieces worn for special occasions such as Easter or Theofania but also the simple everyday article, was a symbol that distinguished him from his flock and made him instantly recognizable. The Greek Orthodox Church did not harbor much sympathy for members who defected to the Bulgarian Exarchate and obviously did not see them as worthy of the robes they wore, as the “defrocking” of Papa Iovan Iconoff of Karlikovo (Mikropoli) of the kaza of Zihna (Palia Zichni) testifies. Karlikovo was a mid-size, Slavic-speaking Patriarchist village, possibly with Greek- and Vlach-speaking minorities.\(^{37}\) In other words, Karlikovo was one of those villages whose allegiance was up for grabs by either party, and at the beginning of 1905, its inhabitants had (partially) petitioned to join the Exarchate.\(^{38}\) Ottoman officials alleged that the village had been attached to the Patriarchate “since old times” and that the desire to join the

\(^{35}\) BOA, TFR.I.SL. 61/6121, Inspectorate to the Prefecture of Usturumca, January 17, 1905.

\(^{36}\) The incident took place in Tchigontzi (Tchougountzi) on January 20, 1905. MAE, Constantinople Serie E 147, Consul General’s report to the Embassy in Constantinople, Salonika, January 28, 1905.

\(^{37}\) According to the pro-Bulgarian Cartes Ethnographiques, Karlikovo was a mixed village of 380 households. Mishev cites it as a village of 1,300 souls, 1,440 of whom were Patriarchist Bulgarians and 60 of whom were Vlachs.

\(^{38}\) PRO, FO 195/2232, Consul Graves to the Ambassador, February 6, 1906. Even though the British consul’s and Ottoman officials’ initial reports give the impression that the entire village had petitioned to join the Exarchate (see BOA, TFR.I.SL 100/9992, Inspectorate
Exarchate was motivated by the threats of the “Bulgarian brigands.” In any case, because their petition was presented after August 1903 (the date that had been declared final by the Inspectorate for official recognition of conversions to and from the Bulgarian Exarchate) the village would officially continue to be counted as Patriarchist. 39

This may have been the official status of Karlikovo, but because their priest, formerly a representative of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, had also converted with the villagers (or more likely, had persuaded them to convert), the higher Greek Orthodox clergy of Drama found the situation extremely disturbing and took measures accordingly. 40 In the words of Consul Graves:

It appears that the [Greek Orthodox] Metropolitan requested the Mutasarrif to have the priest of Karlikovo brought to Drama to answer a charge of uncanonical conduct. This request was transmitted by the Mutasarrif to the kaymakam of Zihna, by whose orders, after reference to the Mutasarrif of Serres, two gendarmes took charge of the priest on the 20th of January and conveyed him to the frontier of the Drama Sandjak where he was handed over to the Drama patrol by whom he was conducted to the Government House at Drama. Thence he was taken by a policeman to the residence of the Greek Metropolitan, where he was kept a prisoner until nearly midnight. The Metropolitan’s Cavass, accompanied by a deacon and two other men, then entered the room, and while the Cavass held a revolver pointed at the head of this old man of eighty-four years of age, his hair and beard were cut off with a clipping-machine, his priest’s hat and robes were removed, and he was dressed in peasant’s clothes, and a fez placed upon his head. 41

The details of the literal “defrocking” of the priest, such as the acts of shaving his hair and beard, and replacing his robe with a peasant’s outfit complete with a fez, signified more than a simple lesson taught through humiliation. The habits of the Exarchist clergy had long been a sore spot for the Patriarchate, which had made various unsuccessful attempts to deny them, from the very beginning, the right to wear the distinctive attire of the Orthodox Church. 42 The issue had become even more inflammatory after the Exarchate started acquiring bishoprics, such as Nevrekop (Gotse Delchev) and Veles/Köprüülü (Veles) in 1894, in areas that were considered outside the accepted “Bulgarian” sphere of influence. The appointment of

to the Grand Vezirate, February 16, 1906), it is clear from subsequent correspondence that part of the village had remained attached to the Patriarchate (BOA, TFR.I.SL 129/128580).

39. BOA, TFR.I.SL 100/9992, Inspectorate to the Grand Vezirate, February 16, 1906.

40. Karlikovo was administratively under the jurisdiction of the kaza of Zihna but ecclesiastically under that of Drama.

41. PRO, FO 193/2232, Consul Graves to the Ambassador, February 6, 1906.

an Exarchist bishop in Nevrekop, for instance, caused protests in Menlik, Demirhisar, Zihna, and Drama by the Muslim as well as the Greek Orthodox population. One of the issues that the Greek Orthodox emphasized in their petition to the governor was the garb of the Exarchist clergy in these areas. In the words of the French consul in Salonika:

In their petitions, the protesters assert that there is but one Orthodox church, and therefore, there should not be two distinct ecclesiastical authorities; in case that there would be schism, they demand, at least, that the exarchist priests should no longer be authorized to carry the costume of Greek priests; the form and the color of the cap present, in their eyes, a real importance. ... The orthodox fear, justifiably, that the same peasants will rally around the Exarchate the day the priests and bishops, speaking the same language as them and not having discernible differences with other priests either in their costumes or their rites are officially permitted to oversee the administration of civil and religious affairs.

In the eyes of the Greek Orthodox, the Exarchist clergy was cheating by not giving up the garb and the distinctive cap (kalymmauchi) of the Orthodox Church because this visual continuity failed to signal to the peasants that the Church they now attended was not the Church that they had belonged to for generations. And when they seized the opportunity, higher members of the Patriarchate did not refrain from removing these symbols of the “genuine” Orthodox Church from the person of Exarchist priests. In 1894, almost a decade before the defrocking of the priest of Karlikovo, when the outrage against the assignment of new bishoprics to the Exarchate was at its height, the priest of a small village named Klepousna (Agriani) suffered a similar humiliation. He was defrocked four years after 90 of the 140 households of the village signed a petition expressing their desire to attach themselves to the Exarchate. Before he was taken into the room where the district manager and the Metropolitan were waiting for him to hear his defense, the Metropolitan’s deacon seized the priest’s cap, saying, as it was reported by the British consul, “we made you a priest, and we depose you.” The priest had to “enter the room bareheaded which was regarded as a great disgrace to him.”

The removal of the priest’s cap and the “defrocking” of the priest of Karlikovo followed a formula meant to deliver a message not only to the priests who had thus been stripped of their ecclesiastical authority but also to the Exarchate. In the case of Karlikovo, further correspondence reveals that the Metropolitan, who was single-handedly responsible for the priest’s public

43. PRO, FO 195/1849, Vice Consul Capety to Consul Blunt, Serres, May 14, 1894.
44. MAE, vol. 9, Consul to Casimir Perier, Selanik, May 9, 1894.
humiliation, defended his conduct on the grounds that he was “acting under the orders of the Patriarchate and strictly within his rights” in punishing a rebellious priest of the Church. After the matter was brought to the attention of Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha, however, the prefect of Zihna and his deputy were removed from their posts, a measure much appreciated by representatives of the European Powers in the region—with the exception of the British vice consul at Drama, Mr. Gregoriades, who, no doubt owing to his own affiliation with the Greek Orthodox Church, found the conduct of the Metropolitan “quite justifiable” and “accused the Turkish authorities of interfering in a purely ecclesiastical matter in which they were not concerned.”

The conflict soon spread from the domain of the church officials to their parishioners. The Exarchists of Karlikovo, who obviously did not appreciate the way their priest had been treated by the Greek Metropolitan and the Ottoman authorities, turned their resentment against their Patriarchist neighbors and attacked them.

Giving someone a haircut and shave may not strike modern sensibilities as an exceptionally offensive act, but in this specific context it was nothing less than a violation of the priest’s ecclesiastical identity, a violent intervention to directly decommission the priest and nullify his social capital. The first sentence of a petition presented by Karlikovo’s communal representatives to the Inspectorate substantiates the exact nature of the violation involved in the shaving of an Orthodox priest’s hair and beard; the letter starts with an expression of gratitude for permission to continue observing divine liturgy officiated “by a newly appointed priest” who would serve them “until the beard of our priest Papa Yovan Ikonov grows back.” A priest was no longer a priest without his beard.

It appears that temporarily losing their priest was not the last indignity these villagers had suffered. On February 16, a man by the name of Atanas Girkof had passed away. The priests Tanasis, Yovan, and Dimitri, who were responsible for Papa Yovan Ikonov’s suffering, were now determined to prevent the new priest from performing the last rites for the dead man and burying him in the village cemetery. The Exarchists needed a separate lot for a cemetery, the petitioners reasoned, so that “the occurrence and repetition of such inappropriate situations would not be allowed.” “Inappropriate” is an understatement for the situation: it is difficult to say for how long the burial was delayed, but the Inspectorate’s response, written on March 22, mentioning that the body had been “left in the open [açıktakaldiği],” is disturbing enough. The recommendation of the Inspectorate was to establish whether it was possible to divide the existing cemetery between the two communities.

46. PRO, FO 195/2232, Consul Graves to the Ambassador, February 6, 1906.
47. MAE, vol. 51, December 28, 1906. There were no injuries or death reported, but the attacks seem to have been repeated.
48. BOA, TFR.I.SL 100/9927, March 18, 1905.
and, if that seemed unworkable, to issue permission to the Bulgarian community for a separate cemetery in an appropriate location. Note that the Greek Orthodox clergy chose to reassert their authority at a time and occasion when the Exarchist community was extremely vulnerable. It is even more noteworthy that the Exarchists chose to hold on to a rotting corpse rather than have a Greek Orthodox priest say the last rites for the deceased man. No sacrament, it seems, was too sacred for these clergy members, who were in the fight until the bitter end. Perhaps less extreme than the denial of last rites, but still cruel, were the denial of the first rite (baptism) and the most important one in between (the bestowal of wedding wreaths). All these were rituals of life that not only marked the transition from one stage to the next but were also required of the faithful. These were the most precious instances in which Orthodox clergy could interfere between God and those who had strayed, and interfere they did.

Priests were at the forefront of the struggle for the churches, sometimes as unwitting bystanders and often as active participants, but as this case suggests, their struggle was not seen as a religious matter by any of the concerned authorities, including that of the office of the Ottoman General Inspector, even though their congregations considered them the gatekeepers of eternal salvation. The peasants venerated the clergy not for their temporal but for their spiritual power, and they feared them for the same reason. It is not surprising that the clergy members were not shy about using this power to further their political agendas, as in the case of the Bulgarian bishop (re’is-i ruhâni) of Nevrekop, who apparently banned his flock from engaging in any sort of commercial activity with the Greek (Orthodox) and from attending their churches. One of the punishments that the noncompliant risked was monetary—a fine of 1 Ottoman lira (a very large sum for the peasants) presumably to be paid to the coffers of the Bulgarian church of Nevrekop.

49. BOA, TFR.I.SL 100/9927, The Inspectorate to the Salonika Province, March 22, 1905.
50. Refusal to bury the dead was a resistance method employed not only in protesting the Greek Orthodox clergy but also Ottoman officials when appropriate, as happened after the massacre in Mravintza çiftlik in January 1905. Ten men were killed by Greek komitadjis dressed like Ottoman soldiers. The wives of the dead refused to bury their husbands despite the prefect’s offer to pay 2 mecidye each as an incentive. The women wanted to take their protest to Salonika and presumably demand autopsies. MAE, Constantinople E 147, Verbal Deposition of Risto Costandi, Mitre Gochi and Risto Lazo recorded at the French Consulate, January 22, 1905.
51. The Metropolitan of Vodine, having secured the assistance of government authorities to expel Bulgarian-speaking priests and teachers from Patriarchist villages, would not allow residents of the same villages to travel to another village to be married or have their children baptized by an Exarchist priest. Even the Ottoman official writing about the issue did not hide his shock at the Metropolitan’s conduct; BOA, TFR.I.SL 60/5920, Vodine Prefecture to the Inspectorate, December 24, 1904.
52. It seems that in the language of Ottoman bureaucracy, reis-i ruhâni (lit. “spiritual leader”) was generally used for bishops of the Exarchate, whereas the term metropolit was reserved for their Greek Orthodox counterparts.
53. BOA, TFR.I.SL 9/838, Subgovernorate of Serres to the Inspectorate, April 17, 1903.
The fee was only part of the deterrence factor, however; the transgressors also faced excommunication for the dire offense of buying so much as a head of lettuce from a Greek Orthodox shopkeeper. In addition to all the horrible consequences of excommunication we may imagine for the faithful, we must also note fears that would be considered “superstitious” in our times. In the Balkan folk tradition, excommunication was associated, among other things, with vampires. In his travelogue Tozer noted, “The principal causes which change persons into vrykolakas [vampires] after death are excommunication, heinous sins, the curse of parents, and tampering with magic arts. The first of these is the most common and most important and dates from very early times.”

It is remarkable that the bishop’s announcement to his flock through the intermediary of priests coincided with the Megali Evdomada, the week before Easter Sunday, when the fast is most austere, religious sentiments run high, and, perhaps most important, the markets are busiest because of all the shopping going on in preparation for the holiday. Oddly enough, according to the report of the prefecture of Nevrekop, during the Paskalya Pazarı, or Easter Market, that was set up on Friday, no Bulgarians were seen shopping from Greek Orthodox vendors. When questioned about this peculiar phenomenon, the bishop’s response was that it was possible they had found what they desired being sold by Bulgarian vendors and not the Greek Orthodox or perhaps that the latter were selling at more expensive rates. Anyway, he added, they would be buying from them again in a couple of weeks. When asked why they would start buying from them in a couple of weeks if they did not yesterday, the bishop was quiet.

The bishop’s ban was clearly aimed at reducing or completely eliminating whatever daily contact remained between the Exarchist and Patriarchist communities that protected the threadbare social fabric from disappearing entirely. The marketplace in Nevrekop was one place where people interacted with one another despite their sectarian, linguistic or national differences very similar to the way these markets still function in Macedonia.

---

54. BOA, TFR.I.SL 9/838, Prefecture of Nevrekop to the Subgovernorate of Serres, April 15, 1903; Governorship of Salonika to the Inspectorate, April 18, 1903.
55. Tozer, Researches in the Highlands of Turkey, Vol. 2: 86.
56. BOA, TFR.I.SL 9/838, Prefecture of Nevrekop to the of Serres; Subgovernorate of Serres to the Inspectorate, April 21, 1903.
57. Declarations by both parties banning all transactions would become commonplace within a few years. For instance, a Greek Orthodox who, despite threats from the “Greek party,” negotiated the sale of a house that he owned to the Bulgarian commercial agent in Serres, was killed by a Turk allegedly working for the Greeks; MAE, vol. 147, Colonel Vérand to the Ambassador, Serres, January 31 and February 15, 1905. In the same town, a notable Greek lady, who had been renting a building to Bulgarian tenants, was threatened by the Greek committee; PRO, FO 195/2263, British Vice Consul Bosanquet to Consul Graves, Serres, May 30, 1907. The ban would later be transformed into an extensive boycott in most parts of the province in Salonika, FO 195/2263, Salonika, Consul Graves to O’Connor, June 18, 1907.
58. See Karakasisidou, Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood, esp. 74–76.
words, the bishop was using his ecclesiastical authority to intervene in an entirely secular space of interaction to divide it along sectarian lines. What is even more striking than the order to boycott the businesses of the other community was the ban on attending its church. It reveals, yet again, that church segregation was not as rigidly practiced as we might expect, even as late as 1903, three decades after the sectarian split.

Compromise and Coexistence—Church Rotation, a Viable Alternative?

In many villages with mixed populations of Greek Orthodox and Bulgarian Exarchists, “church rotation,” a compromise whereby the two communities took turns holding services in a single church, seems to have prevented serious conflicts for many years. The practice was widespread enough in the early 1900s to be noted by astonished European visitors, such as H. N. Brailsford, who wrote: “the absurdity of this use of spiritual weapons in carnal warfare is so patent that ‘Greeks’ and ‘Schismatics’ frequently share the same church, and say Mass on alternate Sundays in Greek and Slavonic from the same altar.”

As the propaganda activities in Macedonia intensified, however, it became increasingly difficult to maintain this compromise. The only church of Spatovo (Kimiși), a medium-size village in the district of Demirhisar, was one such building that had been used in rotation by the villagers, who were all Slavic-speaking. The village church was first brought to the attention of Ottoman authorities in March 1904 when the Bulgarian Exarchist community sent a petition to Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha demanding the restoration of the practice of church rotation.

According to the petitioners, the entire village had converted to the Exarchate fifteen years earlier (in 1889), after which date they started to perform their rites in the village church in “Slavic [Išlavca, i.e., Church Slavonic]” and the children of the village were also instructed in “Slavic.”

The petitioners alleged that twenty-five households had reverted back to the Patriarchate in 1898 because of pressures from the Greeks. The villagers, to prevent a conflict, had consented to take turns using the church with the Patriarchists. According to the arrangement that they had worked out, the Patriarchists would have use of the church every third Sunday because they

60. According to the Cartes Ethnographiques, the village consisted of 201 Bulgarian households. Mishev cites a total population of 2,000, 1,280 of whom were Exarchist and the rest Patriarchist Bulgarians.
61. BOA, TFR.I.SL 67/6606, petition to Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha, March 31, 1904.
62. Note that the petitioners did not call the language of instruction “Bulgarian,” which was often used in reference to both the local dialects and Church Slavonic.
were in the minority and did not contribute to the expenses of the church. Through a similar arrangement, one of the smaller rooms of the school building was also allocated for the children of the Patriarchists. The community had two muhtars (leaders, chiefs), one for each group, and two mühürs (official seals).

According to the letter, the remainder of the village had also attached itself back to the Patriarchate in summer 1903 because of the threats of “the ill-omened Greek Orthodox [Rum meş'umları]” and out of fear of persecution by the authorities, especially after the “disturbances” in May and June 1903. Even though the villagers had remained “loyal to the state” during these acts of “murder and brigandage,” six of them had been arrested and placed in custody in Serres, and many of them had been detained several times in Demirhisar. The official seal of the Exarchist community had also been removed. After the arrival of the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Menlik in July 1903 in Spatovo to conduct services, the keys to the church had been handed over to the Greek Orthodox trustees and the icons of Cyrill and Methodios had been confiscated along with twenty-six volumes of religious books in Slavonic.

In February 1904, after the area had calmed down and become relatively secure, 133 households applied to the prefecture of Demirhisar with the intention of rejoining the Exarchate. The prefecture gave them verbal affirmation of the approval of their petition. Despite this, the Kaymakam muavini (deputy prefect), a Greek Orthodox man, prevented the restoration of their rights over the church and the school. Neither their icons nor their liturgical books were returned because of this man’s interference. Actually, this was not the first recorded grievance against this particular deputy prefect, who, according to the allegations of the Bulgarian Exarch in November 1903, had publicly announced to the Bulgarians that those who “recognized the Patriarchate would indefinitely be safe from all persecution and repression, and even the Bulgarians who were incarcerated would be pardoned if they acquiesced to the same offer.”

Spatovo was obviously one of the villages where the locals had not heeded his advice. The long petition by the villagers ended with a restatement of their wish to reinstitute the practice of using the church in rotation, to restore the school building to their community, and to have their confiscated icons, books, and the official seal of the community returned.

The Inspectorate ordered the prefecture of Demirhisar to carry out a preliminary investigation and ascertain whether the claims of the Exarchist villagers were correct. According to the prefect’s report, the village consisted of 190 households, which had been adherents of the Patriarchate.

---

64. BOA, TFR.I.SL 67/6606, Inspectorate to the Prefecture, April 2, 1904.
“since old times,” but 160 of them had attached themselves to the Exarchate in 1896–1897. For four years following this, the Exarchist majority had shared the church with the Patriarchist minority, and the two communities had attended church together. In 1900–1901, after a dispute among them, they had started the practice of rotation instead of sharing the church simultaneously. In August 1903, they had returned to the Patriarchate, and seven months later, in February 1904, they reverted back to the Exarchate. At this point, the prefect noted that the Bulgarians apparently could not stick to one sect (“bir mezhebde sebât etmemeleri”); they did not consent to the method of rotation; and that the church had originally been constructed under the name of the Greek Orthodox community. He had asked for counsel from his superior on how to proceed with the matter given these facts, but he had not received an answer. Regarding the liturgical objects, the prefect implied that they had not been seized by force; the villagers themselves had handed them over to the Metropolitan Ioachim Efendi.65

A few days later, another petition from a representative of the Exarchist community of Spatovo was on the desk of the Inspector General, explaining why the prefect’s interpretation of the events was partial to the Greek side.66 According to the petitioner, Avram Konstantin, the Greek Orthodox deputy prefect had convinced the prefect through “tricks and lies [hiyel ve desâis]” to summon the members of the Exarchist community of Spatovo to his office and tell them that they could have their liturgical books and other objects back, but that the practice of rotation would no longer be allowed. He also told them that they were not to go near the church when the Greek Orthodox were there, that they would have to give up their official seal, and that they would be officially represented by the Greek Orthodox muhtar. It was no doubt a safer bet for Avram Konstantin to place the blame entirely on the Greek Orthodox deputy and absolve the Muslim official of any wrongdoing than to complain about the conduct of both. Two days later, the Exarchist community sent yet another telegram, informing the authorities that they could not get into their church even though it was Easter Sunday and that the village consisted mostly of Exarchists.67

The Exarchist villagers of Spatovo apparently found a more sympathetic ear with the Inspectorate than the local authorities. A telegram sent on April 11, 1904, from the Inspectorate to the governorship of Salonika ordered that the requests of the Exarchist community be granted.68 Each community would enjoy use of the church every other week according to

65. BOA, TFR.I.SL 67/6606, Prefect Ramiz to the Inspectorate, April 4, 1904.
66. BOA, TFR.I.SL 67/6606, Avram Konstantin of Spatovo to the Inspector General, April 6, 1904.
67. BOA, TFR.I.SL 67/6606, Vangel Atanas and his 39 companions of Spatovo to the Inspectorate, April 8, 1904.
68. BOA, TFR.I.SL 67/6606, Inspectorate to the Governorship of Salonika, April 11, 1904.
the new arrangement. Not two weeks had passed after this order was issued, however, than the Metropolitan of Menlik sent an angry protest telegram to the Inspector General. According to the Metropolitan, the Inspector had been deceived by a group of evil-doers consisting of five or six people (“beş altı neferden ibaret fetne-engiz takımı”).

According to the Metropolitan, the dispute in Spatovo was not an issue of religion, or one of “Orthodoxy and Schismatism,” as he put it, but was all about the endowment of the church, which was estimated at 100 Ottoman liras. The “evil-doers” had duped the villagers into signing the petition by saying that it was for the appointment of a kocabaşı (Christian village elder). These evil-doers, he continued, incited the population to achieve their “atrocious and malevolent” ideas under the pretext and defense of “Bulgarianess” (“vicdansız ve su’i-mekâsd efkârlarına na’il ve muvaffak olabilmek için Bulgarlığı siper ve vâstå isti’mal ile ahaliyi tesâvîs ederler”). He claimed that the village consisted of 230 households, about 15 or 20 of which had been misled to take sides with the evil-doers. The total number of “Schismatic” households, according to the Metropolitan, was not more than 30 (consistent with the prefect’s report), an insignificant minority in comparison to the more than 200 Greek Orthodox households. He maintained that it could be easily verified that this was not a “national or a spiritual” matter if the “Schismatics” were granted permission to build another church or to convert a building into one. They would not accept such a solution, the Metropolitan contended, because their purpose was not to found a new church, but to seize the present one’s endowment (“bunların efkâr ve mekâsıdı kilise temellük etmek olmayub vâridâtını almakdır”). He would even have allowed them to use Slavic in the church had he been convinced that the issue could be resolved in this manner, but their purposes were entirely at odds with religion and motivated purely by the desire to harm the Greek Orthodox. Therefore, he was asking that the order allowing the Exarchists to use the church every other week be reversed.

It is clear from the correspondence between the Inspectorate and the mutasarrıflık (subgovernorate or district governorate) of Serres that the Metropolitan’s argument was not found to be convincing by Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha’s staff, who sent persistent telegrams to the provincial authorities inquiring about the status of the liturgical books and the church in Spatovo. The same correspondence also reveals that the local authorities dragged their feet in carrying out the urgent orders of the Inspectorate. As a response to the repeated demands, the prefecture of Demirhisar assured the subgovernor that the Exarchist community would be allowed to have liturgy at

69. BOA, TFR.I.SL 67/6606, Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Menlik to the Inspector General, April 21, 1904.
70. BOA, TFR.I.SL 67/6606, Inspectorate to the Subgovernorate, April 22, 1904; Subgovernor of Serres to the Inspector General, April 23, 1904.
the village church the following Sunday (April 24) and that one room of the school had been transferred to the Exarchists for instruction in Slavic. But the Exarchists would have to give up whatever hope they may have had of retrieving their books and icons for reasons bordering on the absurd: the subgovernor claimed that the Greek Metropolitan’s predecessor had handed the liturgical objects over to the Demirhisar Rum mütevellisi (Greek Orthodox council member) for “safe keeping” in his shop, which, unfortunately, had burned down.\(^\text{71}\) The Greek consul in Serres subsequently attempted a final effort to terminate service rotation at the church in Spatovo by contacting the Inspectorate and claiming that the practice was causing conflict, but an investigation revealed that there was no such conflict between the two communities.\(^\text{72}\)

We would hope that all this brokering, scheduling, and monitoring and the compromise that was finally accomplished ensured that these two communities managed to exist side by side as they had done “since old times.” This indeed seems to have been the case at least for another eight months after the completion of the correspondence related here. Whatever disputes and tensions the peasants of Spatovo may have had during this time, they were not serious enough to leave an archival record, which is significant, given their previous propensity to drop a few lines to the Inspector General describing their grievances.\(^\text{73}\) In December, however, the name of the village was back on Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha’s agenda, and this time the issue centered on the church school. The children of the Exarchists had been thrown out of their classroom, along with their school materials, on December 2 by the usual suspects: the Metropolitan of Menlik, accompanied by two gendarmes assigned for his service by the prefect of Demirhisar.\(^\text{74}\)

### Communal Schools as Boundary Markers

At the local level, it is impossible to distinguish the school disputes from the broader sectarian rift. They were two sides of the same coin, and school disputes in small rural communities such as Spatovo usually paralleled the development and aggravation of disputes over use of a church building by the communities. They served as a wedge between the two communities,

---

\(^{71}\) BOA, TFR.I.SL 67/6606, Attachment to the telegram from the Subgovernor of Serres to the Inspector General, April 23, 1904.

\(^{72}\) BOA, TFR.I.SL 67/6606, Subgovernor of Serres to the Inspector General, April 29, 1904.

\(^{73}\) All the correspondence concerning Spatovo was placed in one file at the Rumeli Müfettişliği archives, which makes it quite unlikely that there were any missing petitions or telegrams between the two clusters of documents.

\(^{74}\) BOA, TFR.I.SL 67/6606, petition from the Exarchists of Spatovo to the Inspector General, December 16, 1904.
and another tangible marker of the boundaries dividing them, rendering coexistence more difficult, if not impossible. In this regard, it was not what the schools taught but what they stood for that made them an instrument of nation-making among the peasantry. As we have seen in chapter 2, education in the service of nationalization in Macedonia was a two-tiered process that involved the network of parish schools in the countryside and more sophisticated institutions such as gymnasia in larger centers that had different but complementary agendas. The leadership and influence of the national elites were considerably more pronounced in the top tier of this process, that is, the high schools.

Despite the rudimentary conditions in which they operated, the village schools, overall, were successful centers for recruitment to the national cause. It is remarkable that even small villages with fifty or seventy households had at least one primary school—and sometimes more. Nevertheless, we can hardly argue that it was ultimately a successful educational campaign that created Greeks and Bulgarians out of the children of Christian peasants in Macedonia. It is true that the schools in urban centers played an immensely important role in the making of national leaders, some of whom, as we have seen, took their mission to villages across Macedonia as schoolteachers. As influential as they were, these teachers were still the minority among those educating the rural parishioners’ children, many of whom could not attend school regularly due to their families’ reliance on them as extra labor. The dearth of teachers and the unwillingness of some communities to accept teachers who did not speak their language meant that not all schools were open all the time. The committees also interfered with the functioning of schools if they could not fully collaborate with the overseeing eparchy. Most important, the educational projects of Greek and Bulgarian national elites lacked the means and the ideological unity that could be guaranteed only through the resources of a central state, even as the Greek and Bulgarian states coordinated their efforts with the local religious authorities. The contribution of rural schools to nationalization therefore should be attributed more to their role in further delineating and politicizing communal differences than to large-scale indoctrination.

The dispute over the church building in Spatovo, which eventually spilled over into a dispute about the school building, encapsulates the process through which communal boundaries were hardened. Even after the laborious efforts of several authorities to mediate the conflict in Spatovo, which seemed to have been successfully resolved, the question of fair access to the school reanimated the dispute between Exarchists and Patriarchists. As the negotiations for the church building were finalized, both parties had consented to an arrangement whereby the extra room of the village school

---

75. *Carte des Écoles Chrétiennes*; Brancoff [Mishev], *La Macédoine et sa Population Chrétienne*. 
would be assigned to the children of the Exarchists because they outnumbered the Patriarchists by five to one. Unfortunately, this arrangement lasted only until the arrival of the Greek Metropolitan at the village months later. The Metropolitan demanded that the extra room assigned to the Exarchists now be divided into two sections, one of which would be allocated to the Patriarchists. When the Exarchists refused to give up half of the room, the Metropolitan had the Exarchists’ children removed from the room and gave it to the Greeks (“Rum”). The incident was reported by the Bulgarian bishop and corroborated by the Greek Metropolitan. The local authorities then advised the leaders of the two communities and the Greek Metropolitan to manage the situation according to the old arrangement, which previously had worked without any complaints from either side. The Greek community, however, now refused to accept any arrangement other than the Metropolitan’s, and the Exarchist community, further emboldened by the Metropolitan’s interference, refused to give up half of the room, arguing that it was not big enough to accommodate their children, who constituted the majority.

Determining the exact number of rooms in the village school, their dimensions, and the manner in which they were used by the two communities in the last years occupied the officials of the Inspectorate for several months, and the Austro-Hungarian consul in Salonika also got involved in the matter. It appears that they were able to convince the Exarchists to share one of the smaller rooms with the Patriarchists, but the fragile status quo was disturbed yet again in March, this time by the Exarchists, who allegedly confiscated one of the rooms. According to the Greek Metropolitan, the Exarchists had called on the children, who normally would have been tending the cows in the fields, to convince the local authorities that they constituted the majority (“eksersiyeti kazanmak için sigârîları güden çocuklar idhal ve mahallî hükmût memurlarını bu suretle iknâ edebilerek.”). As a result, he continued, not only had the Exarchists almost managed to transform the Greek community school into a Bulgarian one but they had also forced the Greek teachers to instruct all children, boys and girls, in the same room, which surely was unacceptable to the sultan and the General Inspector.

A report prepared by a police officer from Serres, and approved by the representatives of the two communities of Spatovo, finally clarified the confusing matter of the number, division, and use of the rooms of the school. The room that the Exarchists had started using in December 1904 had not been seized from the Greek community; it had been created by dividing in

76. BOA, TFR.I.SL 67/6606, report [copy] to the Prefecture of Demirhisar, December 20, 1904; Governorship of Salonika to the Inspectorate, December 25, 1904.
77. BOA, TFR.I.SL 67/6606, Inspectorate to Governorship of Salonika, December 31, 1904 and January 2, 1905; petition from the Exarchists of Spatovo to the Consul of Austria-Hungary, January 6, 1905.
78. BOA, TFR.I.SL 67/6606, petition from the Metropolitan of Menlik and Demirhisar to the Inspector, March 6, 1905.
two the large room on the first floor of the school building that they had already been using. The Greek Metropolitan had come in, removed the children from the small room on the second floor, and locked it up in January. A police officer and a gendarme had been sent to open up the room and return it to the Exarchists’ use in February. According to the report, there was no conflict arising from the division of the school in this manner, and female and male teachers (“daskal ve daskaliçeleri”) also stated that they got along well.\(^79\) The recommendation of the vilâyet to the Inspectorate based on this report was not to intervene in light of the fact that the previous arrangement had been restored and no conflict seemed to have arisen from it.\(^80\)

Did the statements of the teachers to the Ottoman authorities that they were getting along reflect the actual situation? Perhaps, but it is hard to imagine the Slavic-speaking teachers reconciling with their Greek colleagues, whose religious leader had thrown the Exarchists’ children out of the school building with the complicity of local officials. Nor would the Greek teachers accept with joy the dwindling number of their student body and their relegation to a minority status in what they considered to be a building and institution that belonged to their community. In other words, there is not much reason to expect that relations between these two communities were as amicable as they appeared in the police officer’s report, even though the names of representatives of both sides were signed on it.

On the other hand, the correspondence over the church and school building of Spatovo over the course of a year also reveals that this village was a location where Exarchist and Patriarchist communities had worked out an arrangement between themselves that allowed a sustainable, if not harmonious, form of coexistence. Paradoxically, in Spatovo and countless other mixed villages, the church and the school, the two institutions around which the life of a community revolved and the early socialization of its members occurred, not only constituted the main source of conflict but were also the domain where the factions had to continue to be together. The trajectory of the conflict that followed the division of the Orthodox faith into two different camps in Macedonia was not a straight line tracing a fracture that would inevitably end in violence. It was violence and coercion that made dead-ends out of the various bypasses that existed and might have been taken.

### Violence and Religion

Villages with Slavic-speaking populations that had remained loyal to the Patriarchate were the terrain on which the struggle for Macedonia—ecclesiastical,
scholastic, demographic, and military—was carried out. Valandova (Valandovo) of the prefecture of Doyran (Macedonian portion: Nov Dojran; Greek portion: Kilkis) was one such village, first brought to the attention of authorities by the Greek Metropolitan of Usturumca/Strumitza on January 12, 1905, in a letter complaining about the occupation of the community church and school by Exarchists and requesting the restoration of both to the Greek Orthodox community.\(^{81}\) The Inspectorate demanded an immediate investigation from the prefecture in response. The investigating committee dispatched to the village consisted of Kemal Efendi, a police chief; Atanas, a member of the town's administrative council (who, it seems, was a Slavophone Patriarchist); Hristo Nano of the municipal council, and Esmen Ağa.\(^{82}\)

The Greek Orthodox villagers told the investigators that they had never abandoned their religion. According to their version of the events, a couple of months earlier their teachers had left the village and returned to their hometowns, scared away by the killings of a female teacher and a few locals in Garçiste (Grchiste) by a Bulgarian komite. Naturally, the school had closed down, but the villagers temporarily sent their children to the “Bulgarian school that remained open, instead of leaving them ignorant and without instruction, given that they spoke Bulgarian anyway [bi't-tabi' mekteb ta'til olunduğu ve bu cibetle etfâlin bilâ-tedâris cahilâne bulunmaktan ise zâten öteden beri Bulgar lisânyyla tekellüm etmelerinden nærî açık bulunan Bulgar mektebine suret-i muvakkatede berây-ı tedris gönderildiklerini].” It was also true that a Bulgarian priest had come into their church, although their own priest was present, and that he had conducted services during a holiday, taking turns with the other priest and conducting the service in Bulgarian. It was not true, however, that any coercion was involved, and because this had happened only once, and all the villagers were familiar with Bulgarian (“cümlesi Bulgar lisânına âsinâ olmalarından dolayı”), they had not refused him. They asserted that they had never severed their ties with the Patriarchate, and they were not subject to any hidden or explicit threats.

The prefect of Doyran, who related the report of the investigating committee to the Inspectorate, noted that it was quite likely that the villagers were not revealing the complete story. The fact of the matter, he continued, was that there was only one church in Valandova, and it belonged to the Patriarchate and was reserved for the use of the Greek Orthodox community. Moreover, the people who lived in the vicinity of the church, like the majority of the village population, were Greek Orthodox, and the number of Exarchist households was only twenty. Yet the Greek Orthodox population had recently come under pressure to keep their school vacant.

\(^{81}\) BOA, TFR.I.SL 62/6171, Greek Metropolitan of Usturumca to the Inspectorate, January 12, 1905.

\(^{82}\) BOA, TFR.I.SL 62/6171, Prefecture of Doyran to the Inspectorate, January 15, 1905.
and send their children to the Bulgarian school. Even though they had not been able to find any tangible proof suggesting that the Bulgarian brigands ("Bulgar eskiyasi") had passed through the village, a police report had observed that the Greek Orthodox community had lately altered their behavior, which the report attributed to the committee or other "harmful individuals." The prefect himself had received intelligence from an anonymous source that the inhabitants of Valandova had been severely threatened and pressured by a Bulgarian band forty days earlier. In his report, he emphatically recommended that the village be sheltered from the pressure of the komites and that the Greek Orthodox teachers and priests be brought back. Finally, the prefect inquired whether legal action would be required against the Bulgarian priest who conducted service in Bulgarian in a church that belonged to the Patriarchate without official permission or authorization. The Inspectorate’s response sent to the prefecture on January 26 was that all necessary measures must be taken to prevent such unauthorized interventions in churches belonging to the Patriarchate.83

It is interesting to note that the same village was mentioned again in a correspondence of the prefecture of Doyran to the Inspectorate, five months later during the census.84 It appears that the church had been restored to the Greek Orthodox community because the Exarchists were now asking for a license to build their own church. The local authorities had granted them a temporary building license until an imperial order could be issued. The prefect also recommended registering these twenty households as “Exarchist Bulgars” to prevent the complaints and hardships that were sure to follow if they were not granted this right, even though, having converted in 1900, they were not included in the older register of 1893 as “Bulgars.”85

The level of tension in such a small village must have been palpable. They had apparently shared one church and one school until five years earlier, sometimes using the church simultaneously and speaking the same language, but they were now split over who possessed the right to use the same buildings. It is also noteworthy, however, that there is no indication in any of the correspondence regarding Valandova that the church split resulted in any prior acts of conflict during the five years that the twenty households had turned Exarchist. The statements of the villagers to the investigators that they sent their children to the Bulgarian school instead of “leaving them ignorant” and because they all “spoke Bulgarian anyway,” and did not refuse the Bulgarian priest for the same reason, were probably inspired by

83. BOA, TFR.I.SL 62/6171, Inspectorate to Doyran Prefecture, January 26, 1905.
84. BOA, TFR.I.SL 74/7301, Doyran Prefecture; to the Inspectorate, June 3, 1905.
85. The population figures provided by Mishev for this village were 332 “Exarchist Bulgarians” and 560 “Hellenizing Patriarchist Bulgarians,” which, although slightly inflated, also correspond to the description in the Ottoman prefect’s report; Brancoff [Mishev], La Macédoine et sa Population Chrétienne, 100.
the Bulgarian komites in the region, who no doubt protected the twenty-
household Exarchist minority of the village.

We should not lose sight of the fact that the villagers were giving this statement to a committee of Ottoman officials, consisting of Muslims and Patriarchists, which suggests that there might have been a kernel of truth in their implied indifference to the presence of Bulgarian clergy and teachers in their midst. Between the komite and proselytizing Exarchist priests, on the one hand, and Ottoman officials and the overbearing Patriarchate, on the other, there is seemingly little hope that Valandova managed to maintain this delicate balance of coexistence for long, but, surprisingly, the name of the village does not appear at all in later reports of conflict between Patriarchists and Exarchists. This may, of course, be because of a hole in the archival record, but it also points to the likelihood that Valandova was spared the violence that afflicted similar villages.

Nevertheless, the feeling that violence was the imminent consequence of their communities’ being pulled apart by external forces beyond their control was increasingly accepted among the population, as exemplified by the statement, in unison, of a Patriarchist priest and an Exarchist council member from the mixed village of Ravna (Isoma) that their church dispute would not be resolved without bloodshed. The subgovernorate deemed the statement so explosive that they dispatched a significant gendarmerie force and infantry to this small village to prevent the gloomy forecast of the priest and the council member. Four years later, however, the dreaded resolution happened. A Bulgarian band of six entered the village on January 12, 1908, and retreated, leaving behind four people dead and seven houses burned. The attack followed a typical church dispute: the Greek community had obtained a permit to build a new church that the Muslim half of the village was opposing. Because of their pressure, the subgovernor was hardly able to enforce the decision that guaranteed the right to build the church, but he finally managed, and construction started. This time, however, the Greeks did not want to abide by the arrangement that allocated the use of the existing church to the Exarchist and Patriarchist communities in rotation and insisted on their right to use both churches exclusively. Shortly after this, the Exarchist priest of the village was killed, and according to Major Foulon of the French gendarmerie stationed in the area, there was no doubt that the band that later attacked the village was avenging the killing of this priest.

The village of Graçen/Gratsiani (Agiochori) is another example of a Slavic-speaking Patriarchist village being more vulnerable to agitation by armed

---

86. BOA, TFR.I.SL 52/5144, Subgovernor of Serres to the Inspectorate, September 11, 1904; Inspectorate to the Subgovernorate, September 17, 1904.
87. BOA, TFR.I.SL 52/5144, Inspectorate to the Subgovernorate September 16, 1904; Subgovernorate to the Inspectorate, September 17, 1904.
88. MAE, no. 150, Rapport du Major Foulon, Serres, January 21, 1908.
bands through their churches and schools. Graçen was a Patriarchist village of approximately 295. On August 18, 1906, the village Greek Orthodox priest (it is not clear from the report detailing the incident whether he was Slavic-speaking—which is very likely—or Greek-speaking Greek Orthodox) was killed by Bulgarian komitajis. The village presumably remained without a priest after this incident until October, when, according to the vice consul, a new priest from the nearby Alistrat (Alistrati) named Leonidas came and held services “with a rifle in his hand and a cartridge-belt over his shoulder.” The villagers must not have appreciated the new priest’s combative worship style, given that they immediately reported him to the military authorities. The vice consul reported that Father Leonidas was arrested, along with three Greeks (probably teachers from the Hellenic Kingdom), and that 3 Gras rifles and 109 cartridges were recovered from his possession. The villagers requested a priest and schoolmaster who understood their language to replace the ones who had just been apprehended, but to no avail.

At the end of January, a Bulgarian band of five took shelter in the village. A Greek band, apparently in pursuit, arrived after them and set some houses and the village bakery on fire. The komitadjis retaliated with bombs, and by the time a local detachment of soldiers and reinforcements arrived, three people were dead and three others injured. The next day, as the soldiers were searching the village for arms, they were met with fire from the komitadjis, who had been in hiding and who tried to flee as the soldiers closed in. Two of them were killed.89

It is certain that Graçen was a Patriarchist village—especially given that pro-Bulgarian sources of the period record it as such. It is quite remarkable that the village, at least according to the British vice consul, had remained Patriarchist until August or September 1906, quite late and well after the church disputes took a violent turn. In fact, it is not even clear that the villagers ever officially petitioned to join the Exarchate, but the vice consul, who related the incident, had reached that conclusion based on the villagers’ demands for a “priest and schoolmaster who understood their language.” As the case of the defrocked priest of Karlikovo reveals, the Greek Orthodox Church, thanks to its status as the older and more established ecclesiastical institution, included Slavic-speaking representatives even during the worst stages of the struggle for Macedonia. We have also seen that the Patriarchate could be accommodating in meeting demands for Slavic-speaking priests and schoolteachers as long as they did not preach for the Exarchate. Following the establishment of the Exarchate, conversions in the region did not occur en masse, and a good segment of the Slavic-speaking lower clergy remained within the ranks of the Patriarchate. Therefore, it is highly likely

89. PRO, FO 195/2263, Vice consul Bosanquet to Consul Graves, February 16, 1907; MAE, Constantinople, Serie E Macédoine, no. 144, f. 179 A, Colonel Vérand to the French Ambassador in Istanbul, Serres, February 6 and February 19, 1907.
that Graçen had remained among the followers of the Patriarchate, even though its priest and inhabitants were Slavic-speakers and, like many others, opted to preserve the older local religious practices instead of getting involved in a dispute originating in the imperial center. This choice is not extremely surprising, given most people’s attachment to the spiritual tradition they were born into and the physical isolation of some of these villages, which made them more immune to (or detached from) calls to switch their Church affiliation. In either case, the communal decision to convert, or not, became a source of acute conflict only after these decisions became politicized thanks to the violent means of coercion employed by the insurgents fighting to establish dominance.

There were no rules of conduct exempting the sacred, even though preserving the sacred from encroachment was presumably what the insurgents were fighting for. The rifle and cartridges that Leonidas, the Greek priest, held close as he was overseeing the liturgy were a relatively minor effrontery and could even be seen as a necessity, considering that no church was safe from the physical assaults of the rival komites. Papa Dimitri of Barakli Cuma/Dolna Djoumaya (Irakleia), who was shot dead on May 25, 1907, while he was conducting services in his church, and his wounded colleague, Papa Stoyan, might even testify that keeping a rifle next to the liturgical objects could have come in handy. According to the reports of the British vice consul, the band entered the church, which was enclosed in a yard, from its two entry points simultaneously. The cavass (guard) was caught unaware and killed. The band then proceeded inside and shot the two officiating priests and two women who happened to be attending services at the time. The vice consul’s inference was that the attack was in revenge for the killings of two Patriarchists of the same area earlier in the day by a Bulgarian band.

Priests were held personally responsible not only for their own actions and affiliations, but also for the actions of their parishioners, which made them viable targets for disgruntled locals and bands clamoring to impose their own rules on the population. In Usturumca/Strumnitza in April 1904, the French consul general reported that the church dispute had agitated people to such an extent that a “grécisant” (i.e., Patriarchist) named Zographos had been attacked by a Bulgarian, who had fled town after his failed murder attempt. Zographos, having survived the bullet wound, and certainly full of rage that his attacker was nowhere to be found, sought revenge by shooting the Exarchist priest Gerassimos, who, fortunately, was not harmed.

As we have already seen, the general conduct of the priests did not contribute much in the way of dispelling the common notion that they were

90. PRO, FO 195/2263, Vice consul Bosanquet to Consul Graves, Serres, May 28 and June 7, 1907.
91. MAE, vol. 40, Consul General Steeg to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 12, 1904.
the principal instigators of the conflict. Adherence to a national cause did have its detractors among the hundreds of priests serving in Macedonia, but those who did follow a nationalist agenda used everything in their power to make sure that their flocks followed suit, even if it meant going against the policies of the Patriarchate or the Exarchate. Consider a few more examples. The Bulgarian Exarch presented a letter to the Grand Vezir in November 1903 about a Greek Orthodox priest and a muhtar in Serres who had been circulating the district. They were knocking on the doors of Exarchists, accompanied by a police officer, and telling them that they would be banished from their homes unless they attached themselves to the Patriarchate. The same letter alleged that the Greek priest of Rondi-i Bâlâ (Ano Vrondou), under orders of the Greek Metropolitan, had entered the Bulgarian church by force and, after conducting mass, had removed all the liturgical objects and taken them to the seat of the Metropolitan.92 Naturally, Exarchist clergy were the subject of similar complaints by their Patriarchist counterparts, especially concerning their collaboration with the komites in the region. Take, for instance, the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Usturumca/Strumnitzia, who intercepted a letter in February 1905 and immediately presented it to the local authorities as proof that the Exarchate was in cahoots with the “brigands.” The letter was written by Christo Gorki, the assistant of Chernopeyef, the famous band leader, and addressed to the heads of komites in Patriarchist Christian villages. While the Russians were there, the villagers were told, they should go to the Bulgarian Metropolitan and declare their allegiance to the Exarchate.93 Although the Exarchist and Patriarchist clergy did not unanimously share the goals of the bands, much less condone their tactics, it is true that most of them harbored and protected the guerrillas when the situation called for it and that a smaller but more influential segment actually participated in masterminding the activities of both factions in the region.

It is also important to note that no matter what policy was dictated by Constantinople, the priests had to serve in areas where insurgent bands had either established control or were fighting to achieve that goal. Members of the clergy refusing to comply with the demands of the insurgent bands did not have much recourse other than asking for assistance from the Ottoman authorities or pleading with the representatives of the European Powers. Neither of these were effective measures against the immediate threat posed by the guerrillas, especially in the case of Exarchist priests, given the reluctance of the local Ottoman rank and file to protect anyone associated with the Exarchate, opposed as they might be to the revolutionaries’ tactics. Even though the Inspector’s office maintained at least the appearance of

93. BOA, TFR.I.SL 65/6434, Usturumca Prefect to the Inspectorate, March 8, 1905.
objectivity when dealing with Exarchist and Patriarchist clergy, the suspi-
cious attitude toward the Exarchate went high up the chain of command to
the level of the officers and district governors, who reasoned that the persis-
tent presence of radicals among the priests and schoolteachers even after the
wave of arrests and amnesties following the Ilinden Uprising compromised
the entire Exarchist establishment. The French consul general in Salonika,
M. Steeg, remarked in a report to the embassy in Constantinople, “Hilmi
Pasha does not conceal the vivid repugnance he feels to let the functions of
priests and teachers be filled with ex-agitators.” The consul found Hilmi
Paşa’s reaction exaggerated because, as he put it, “the nominations of new
priests and teachers done by the bishops of the Exarchate are dictated to
them most often by the committees.” As a matter of fact, the bishop whose
ceremonial robe was stolen right before Christmas mass was one of those
who did not comply with the orders of the committee. Not only was he hu-
miliated in the eyes of his congregation because of the theft, but, he was also
helpless in reopening the schools of his eparchy, which the revolutionaries
kept shut down because of his infraction.⁹⁴

Churches as Property, Disenfranchising the Exarchate

The Patriarchate certainly made good use of the suspicion of authorities
toward the Exarchists—especially after the Ilinden Uprising—in presenting
the cases of disputed churches from their point of view. It was convincing to
argue that the communities in question were only recent converts and that,
even if they were sincere in their claims of “Bulgarianness,” they had no le-
gal entitlement to property belonging to the Patriarchate through the Greek
Orthodox community, such as churches. The ownership issue, articulated as
a purely legal matter, did not simplify the resolution of the disputes. It did,
however, considerably strengthen the hand of the Patriarchate because most
of these churches had been constructed during a time when there were no
Exarchists to speak of. Even in cases where the churches were built with do-
nations from communities, most of which had subsequently converted to the
Exarchate, the Patriarchate could produce titles and records and formulate a
convincing legal argument that the churches in question were Patriarchists’
property and thus could not be handed over to the Exarchist villages without
their consent. This argument was presented as a legitimate reason to keep
disputed churches under the control of the Patriarchate as late as 1910.
When the Senate was holding discussions on the new kiliseler kanunu (Law
of Churches), Deputy Alexander Mavrogenis concluded that the issue was
simply one of “real estate” and that the Exarchists had no legitimate claim

⁹⁴. MAE, Constantinople E 147, Consul General to the Embassy in Constantinople,
Salonika, January 28, 1905.
to the churches built by the Greek Orthodox community for the “spiritual center.” Interestingly, Besarya Efendi countered that it was not the church, but the government, that had ultimate authority over such decisions, and his point of view ultimately prevailed in the drafting of the resulting law.95

Another factor in favor of the Patriarchists was that, even though villagers were within their rights to present petitions stating that they wished to adhere to the Exarchate, in regions where the Exarchate did not officially have bishoprics, the local parishes that converted to the Exarchate were practically on their own and, at least in principle, still under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Patriarchate. In the case of localities wishing to join the Exarchate where the Exarchate had a bishopric, the legal recourse for Patriarchists contesting church rights was more limited. But some overcame these hurdles through more creative methods that ensured the intervention of the Ottoman authorities against Exarchist communities. An example of this is a disputed lot in Usturumca, purchased by the Bulgarian community for the sum of 900 pounds to build a church. The lot remained vacant for a number of years because the Greek community successfully litigated to “prevent its being even enclosed.”96 The Exarchist community finally obtained the official construction license for the lot on March 22, 1904. Not a week had passed after the work started when shots were fired into a Greek café in town. A Greek Orthodox man by the name of Vassil Christomanos claimed that he had been attacked by Bulgarian komitajis in the café, but his story was discredited because he was with friends at the time and no one reported seeing any Bulgarians. It also appears that no injuries were reported. The alleged attack, however, served as a justification for Christomanos’s actions the next day, when he shot—and fortunately missed—the Bulgarian Metropolitan who was inspecting the construction. The consul mentioned the agitation that this event stirred up in town, especially considering “the approaching Easter Feasts.” This was yet another example of a religious holiday spoiled because of sectarian rivalry.

More complicated were cases involving small community churches in regions exclusively under Patriarchate authority. In such cases, the outcome usually favored the Patriarchist side, given the propensity of the Ottoman authorities for holding up the claims and demands of the Greek Orthodox as a counterweight to Exarchist influence. The Ottoman officials largely shared with the Greek Orthodox clergy the belief that the most effective way to end revolutionary activity in the region was to keep as large a segment of the population as possible within the grip of the Patriarchate. In a report written for the British Blue Book on May 5, 1903, British Vice Consul Theodorides...

96. PRO, FO 193/182, Consul Graves to O’Connor, Salonika, April 5, 1904. The consul’s report does not make it clear exactly how long the lot had remained vacant. The Exarchate had obtained the bishopric in Strumnitza in 1889.
opined that the villagers should be “encouraged” to return to the Patriarchate because “Exarchist signifies *comitadji* and a real blow cannot be dealt the revolutionary organization except by making the Exarchists return to their original church.”

In a subsequent report, the same vice consul pronounced the type of encouragement he had in mind more clearly. After a skirmish in Baniče/Banitsa (Karies) between the troops and an insurgent band, more than 500 arrests had been made in various districts of Serres, followed by petitions from 1,700 households to return to the Patriarchate.

Therefore, Theodorides noted approvingly, “there remains no village in the caza [Serres] to the Schismatics.”

The subgovernor of Serres concurred with Vice Consul Theodorides in his report to the Inspectorate about the incident and the petitions that followed:

Owing to the military precautions implemented under the auspices of his majesty the sultan, the Bulgarian evil-doers have been exposed. Some villages now come to understand that they were deceived [*iğfal ołunmuṣ*] by the evil propaganda of the Bulgarian priests and teachers installed in their midst, and those villages that have been inclined towards the evil-doers with the encouragement and threats of the Committees, even though they had been attached to the Patriarchate since old times, have applied to the government and stated that they are *Rum* as in the past, and petitioned for the appointment of *Rum* teachers and priests to the Metropolitan, and their registry of under the *Rum* community.

The resemblance in the expression of opinions describing the Exarchists as “evil-doers” and “schismatics,” and calling for their conversion back to the Patriarchate by all necessary means, is not merely a coincidence, given that the British Vice Consul Theodorides was a “respected consultant” of both the Greek Metropolitan and the Ottoman subgovernor. Alliances of this sort between the local Ottoman officials and the representatives of Greek Orthodox interests in the area undoubtedly multiplied the resentment of the population against the two sources of authority, the state and the church. Moreover, the accomplishments of the policy of what may be termed “containment by conversion,” so exalted by the vice consul and the *mutassarreft*, did not last for very long.

---

97. MAE, vol. 40, Appendix to the correspondence of French Consul in Salonika to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 10, 1904, excerpt from a report written by Theodorides on May 5, 1903.

98. Gotse Delchev was among those killed at this battle.


100. BOA, TFR.I.SL 14/1j17, Subgovernor Rükneddin to the Inspectorate, June 1, 1903. The mentioned villages were Frasṭan-i Bâlâ/Dolna Frachtani, Diranova/Drianovo, Dutlu/Doutlia, Baniče/Banitsa, Hristos, Marhat/Marsena, and Lakos.


102. Shortly after writing this report, the Subgovernor was replaced by Hifzi Recep Pasha.
the Serres region and the sensible interventions of Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha in favor of the Exarchists, acknowledged by the French consul in Salonika, some of the villages started going back to the Exarchate. Furthermore, the policy of “containment by conversion” would become impossible to sustain, despite the best efforts of the local officials and the Greek clergy, after the order of the Inspectorate to recognize the date of the Ilinden Uprising as a cut-off date for the official recognition of all conversions, including those asking to rejoin the Patriarchate. Finally and more important, this was a self-destructive policy in the sense that, by singling out the Greek Orthodox as the community to be preserved, it made the Slavophone Patriarchists a more attractive target for the wrath of the Bulgarian komitajis, who found a ready group of volunteers among the Exarchist peasants disgruntled enough to turn against their neighbors.

Despite the attempts of the office of Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha at reconciliation, the coercion of local Ottoman officials and the repression of the Patriarchate, from one side, and the guerrilla attacks, from the other, irrevocably polarized the Christian population. As the conflicts intensified to the point where going to church on Sunday might mean death, it became impossible for the two communities to use village churches alternately, let alone share them simultaneously, which had once been the accepted practice. After 1904, designating separate lots for each community to build its own church was advanced as another option in official correspondence. Even that, however, would not resolve the problem because by this time the relative centrality of the location of the new church also became a source of conflict. Reluctance to compromise was such a blinding force that the parties would—at least in one case that we know about—rather burn down a church than share it.

A Leap of Faith: Religion and National Identity

Macedonia is a place with plural geographies, borders, and pasts, corresponding to the national vantage point one takes. These divergent and contesting notions of space and identity became calcified behind national borders, stamping the people on either side as belonging to one and only one group, only relatively recently; and even today, they cannot mask the heterogeneity that once characterized these regions entirely. A visitor to one of the border towns of Macedonia on a market day before Easter will

103. MAE, vol. 40, French Consul to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 10, 1904.
104. BOA, TFR.I.SL 52/5144, Subgovernor of Serres to the Inspectorate, September 17, 1904.
105. MAE, vol. 40, French Consul to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, April 12, 1904.
106. MAE, Constantinople, Serie E Macédoine, no. 144, f. 191, Captain Sarrou to Colonel Vérand, May 23, 1907.
witness a scene not that far removed from those a century ago, as I did a few years back in Demirhisar/Sidhirokastro (synonyms in Greek and Turkish for “Iron Fortress”), a town mentioned several times throughout this book. True, there were some obvious differences: motor-driven cars had replaced the horse- and oxen-drawn predecessors, and instead of bijouterie from France, knick-knacks made in China dominated the stalls. The blaring music and cries of ambitious vendors hawking their wares with the help of audio amplifiers made me nostalgic for the days without such modern amenities, but the produce was alluring even on an unseasonably cold and drab day. A shopper could find anything a household might need before the holiday, from vegetables to cooking utensils to children’s clothes. And the place was teeming with shoppers, exactly as it would have been a century ago, making it the best day of business for the nearby coffeehouses that served the exhausted shoppers and leisurely onlookers the same kind of coffee that people have been drinking in the Balkans, Asia Minor, and a large part of the Middle East since the sixteenth century—although it goes by a different name in these parts nowadays: elliniko rather than tourkiko. I was on the Greek side of the border, but I could discern Greek mixing with Slavic dialects. A woman, the descendant of Asia Minor refugees and married to a Vlach, chatted with me, eager to seize the opportunity to practice her rusty mother tongue, a quaint dialect of Turkish that she had not spoken since her mother had passed away. A live performance by Roma musicians provided a respite from the skiladika emanating from the speakers. I could clearly hear the “whispers of assorted pasts,” to paraphrase Anastasia Karakasidou.107

It was hard to imagine, in such an environment, how people could decide where to buy the dill and parsley for their mageiritsa (Easter soup) based not on freshness and price but on the church the vendor would attend the next evening, as the bishop of Nevrekop had demanded of his flock during the Megali Evdomada (Holy Week) in 1903. As if to remind me of what I should not lose sight of, two women, who realized I must be a foreigner, stopped me on my way out of the market and insisted that I not leave town without visiting “our monastery.” Making that monastery “ours,” and not “theirs,” was the same process that had created Greeks, Bulgarians, and Macedonians out of Orthodox Christians. The muted sounds I heard attested to the “assorted pasts,” but it seemed they were destined to fade into oblivion.

The Balkan elites were quick to embrace nationalism as a way out of the defunct and anachronistic political formations that dominated all aspects of their lives—political, social, religious, and economic. Nationalism was a secular ideology closely associated with the notions of mass political participation and representative government, which made it attractive to the nascent bourgeoisie, and to the men and women of letters, who were not

---

content within the confines of the old imperial order, including the church. The ideas of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution made a great impression on the pioneering nationalists of the Balkans as they adopted the concepts of scientific rationality, linear time, and teleological history to their circumstances. Religion did not occupy center stage in such bourgeois understandings of the world and their place in it. It may seem paradoxical, then, that the development of secular—or perhaps “vernacular”—cultural movements in the Balkans in the nineteenth century subsequently spearheaded national movements that consolidated religious identities into national ones, rather than entirely supplanting them. Considering the social realities of the human material that the elites needed to recruit for the ultimate success of their national projects, however, the leap from a secular literary culture into a nationalist ideology, formulated and presented through the medium of a “national” church, does not seem that great. The imagined community provided by, and experienced through, the church was the only one that the peasants could make sense of as a union that extended far beyond their otherwise insular worlds. Therefore, for the Balkan nationalist elites, the course of action that had the best shot at success was to create national markers out of religious ones. Victor Roudometof, a historian of the Balkans, has called this plan of action “the redeployment of Orthodoxy,” which, he argues, was a direct response of the Balkan intelligentsias to the “articulation of the Greek ethnie as a secular nation.”

But the centrality of religion to the project of nation-making in the Balkans leads me to conclude differently. Although the Greek model indeed pioneered the movement for bourgeois-secular national cultures, the impact of a secular Greek ethnos on the rest of the Balkan bourgeoisies and intelligentsias did not emanate in one direction, from the Greek elites to their peripheral Balkan counterparts. Especially after the second half of the nineteenth century, when the church struggle entered a course that would ultimately end with the schism and the formation of national churches in newly emergent Balkan states, religion became an issue of utmost importance also for the supposedly secular Greek elites. Despite its impressive accomplishments, the Greek national project was far from complete at this time, at least as far as the new generation of nationalist intellectuals and statesmen in Athens were concerned. The secular/classical model was insufficient as an ideological support capable of sustaining irredentism in Macedonia (and eventually Asia Minor) when it was confronted with a Slavic-speaking population asserting its collectivity through an alternative ecclesiastical organization. In a sense, rather than the Greek intelligentsia dictating the terms of secular nationhood to the

109. According to Kitromilides the “antinomy between Orthodoxy and nationalism” was overcome only after “nation-states had nationalized their churches.” Kitromilides, “‘Imagined Communities,’” 59.
Bulgarians and religious Rum, they would redefine nationhood according to religious criteria. In the end, the threat of Bulgarian nationalism, propagated in Macedonia through the Exarchate, was an important factor embedding Orthodoxy at center stage in the newly cast definition of the Greek ethnos.

Although religion turned out to be the most potent device of nation-making available to the elites, there was more to this process than just the radicalization of sectarian differences. The evidence presented here demonstrates that the mere provision of a new theological alternative that appealed their social and cultural sensibilities did not guarantee mass participation by the peasants, Exarchist and Patriarchist alike, and that the religion question in Macedonia was not solely a matter that followed the formation of an alternative Church. The Exarchate was originally a Church based in Constantinople, the imperial capital, rather than in a place more appropriate to Bulgarian national narratives, such as Tirnovo. It was not a logical consequence and embodiment of Bulgarian national awakening. On the other hand, Bulgarian nationalists would probably have created it by 1900 if it had not already been instituted with an imperial ferma. For the elite and the nationalist visionaries on both sides, the Church was the next frontier in the battle for national sovereignty, and the schism was inevitable because of the political imperative of the nation. But the dispute had to be worked out also at a second level, the level of the people, and there expectations of a lasting solution became inextricably entangled with violence. As an Exarchist and a Patriarchist from the village of Ravna put it, there was no redemption until “blood was spilled.”