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SAINT JOHN THE RUSSIAN (ca. 1690-1730) AND THE SPREAD OF HIS CULT[1]

KATERINA SERAÏDARI[2]

Abstract
This paper examines the development of St John the Russian's cult in Cappadocia, and more specifically the historical and social conditions as well as the interests and intentions that played a role in its stabilization and diffusion. Encouraged by the representatives of the Greek Enlightenment who wished to give impulse to the "Hellenization" process and defend Orthodox faith against Protestant missionaries' influence, this cult received a new impulse after the intervention of Russian monks at the end of the nineteenth century.

The church of St John the Russian was built in 1951in Neo Prokopi, a locality of Evia; it is today one of the most important Greek pilgrimages (Seraïdari 2020). It was during the population exchange between Greece and Turkey that a group of Orthodox refugees from Cappadocia managed to bring, after an exhausting journey, the saint's relic from their native Prokopi (Urgüp) to Evia in 1924. They belonged to the Orthodox population of Anatolia, also known by the name of Karamanlides: they spoke Ottoman Turkish, but wrote in Greek characters. In order to explain the linguistic particularity of Karamanlides, a main argument is still put forth – the same that I heard on a recurring basis during my fieldwork: under pressure by the

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[2] Dalhousie University.

Muslims, the Orthodox accepted to abandon the use of Greek and speak the language of their masters in order to maintain their Orthodox faith. A study on the Balkans, published in Oxford in 1915, presented in this way those who were living in inner Asia Minor: "In distant Cappadocia, at the root of the Anatolian peninsula, the Orthodox Greek population submerged beneath the Turkish flood more than eight centuries ago, has retained little individuality in its religion, and nothing of its native speech but a garbled vocabulary embedded in a Turkish vocabulary" (cited by Pentzopoulos 1962: 135). If in this passage the term "Greek" is used without questioning, Greek scholars have been more careful for at least four decades: they do not only consider that "the issue of the origin of the Turcophone Orthodox Christians of Cappadocia exists as a historical problem", but also that the issue "came to a head in the early twentieth century, when Asia Minor became the bone of contention between Greeks and Turks" (Balta 2010a: 15). In other words, the question of their origin (which had no reason to emerge in a pre-nationalist era) became more and more pertinent in the framework of increasing rivalry between two neighbouring nation-states.

Even if they are aware and celebrate their differences from other regional Greek groups, my informants of Neo Prokopi got angry when their Greekness was put into question. As for St. John the Russian, he is not only a source of protection and pride, but also a symbol recalling Cappadocia. Before the relic's arrival in Evia, local Greeks knew almost nothing about this saint, whose popularity grew rapidly, especially after the end of the Second World War and the Greek civil war that followed (1944-1949). In a way, the context was favourable for the development of his cult, since St. John the Russian was himself not only a military saint but also a prisoner: after having been captured while serving in the army of Peter the Great (1672-1725), he was sold to an Ottoman agha of Prokopi in 1711.

In a Greek society divided and traumatized by the Civil War, this saint of the early modern period, characterized by his hymnographers as the "new Job" because of his legendary patience against all odds, started to be considered as a positive model to follow. The power of this newly promoted cult was enhanced by the association with older theological traditions, such as the reference to Job. The oldest icon of the saint that pilgrims revere nowadays in Neo

Prokopi's shrine was probably made around 1790 (Hrysostomos 2015: 161-164). Four scenes of his life are represented on it. Inscriptions in karamanli Turkish (term referring to the use of the Greek alphabet for the writing of Turkish) accompany and specify these scenes, one of which shows the saint sleeping in a stable, and on a pile of dung: the parallel established between the saint and Job appears already in this karamanli inscription[3]. The first Greek Service[4] in honour of the saint, which was published in Athens in the middle of the nineteenth century (Iosif 1849: 1), also draws a parallel between the two figures since the saint is called "a second Job"[5]. The theme of courage and perseverance under trial is thus part of the saint' cult from the very beginning.

In the framework of this paper, I will limit my analysis to the beginnings of his cult in Cappadocia. The aim will be to understand the historical and social conditions, as well as the interests and intentions that played a role in its development and diffusion. For this, I will use and cross-reference three types of sources: historical, theological and hagiographical. The main hypothesis of this article is that this was an opportunity for the "enlightened" Orthodox clergy of Cappadocia to encourage, through the hymns written in Greek in honour of the saint, the spread of this language among the Turcophone Orthodox of the Ottoman Empire in the middle of the nineteenth century. During this period, which was characterized by a

[3] In his book, bishop Hrysostomos (2015:164) translates the inscription into Greek: « ως τον μακάριον Ιώβ το δωμάτιο του Αγίου ήταν σταύλος και το στρώμα του κοπριά ». This icon of the saint was a donation of a corporation of boatmen, whose members were born in Prokopi but were living and working in Constantinople; the corporation also funded the first edition of the saint's Service in 1849 (see below). According to the saint's Vitae, a miracle was accomplished in front of this icon in 1879 or in 1880, in presence of the monk Andrew (see the last section).

[4] In general, the Service, also called "Asmatiki akolouthia" [*Ασματική Ακολουθία*], contains, on the one hand, hymns written in honor of a saint, which are sung during his religious feast; and on the other hand, the saint's Vita.

[5] Here again, reference is made to the stable and the pile of dung : « οικήσας σταύλω γαρ, ως Ιώβ άλλος δεύτερος, ο επί κοπρίας, στένων και θλιβόμενος ». I would like to thank Tatiana Borisova for sharing this source with me. In the following Services, not only is the fact that the saint lived in a stable associated with the birth of Jesus in a manger, but also the tortures to which John the Russian was submitted at the beginning of his capture are put in relation with the Crucification (Dionysios and Modestos 1897: 38). The saint is thus presented as a Christlike figure.

"Hellenization" process (Petropoulou 1997: 172; Hadziiossif 2005: 12-18), the region started to be presented as a homogeneous geographic and historical entity: the Cappadocia of the nineteenth century appeared in this framework as the direct continuation of Byzantine Cappadocia, while the Ottoman presence's impact was minimized. According to Hadziiossif (2005: 12), "the historiographic category of Cappadocia allowed the Hellenization of the past of Orthodox Christians of central Asia Minor, which was a necessary condition for their integration into the modern Greek family".

Churches and schools in Cappadocia (1720s-1830s)

According to his different Vitæ, John the Russian was treated as a living saint by both Christians and Muslims while still in life. He passed away in 1730 and three years after, his relic was unburied and found to be uncorrupted and exhaling an agreeable odour. It was then transferred to the local church of Saint Georges and placed in a reliquary under the altar (Dionysios and Modestos 1897: 44). The Vitæ of the saint insist on the fact that he used to pray in this church. However, we know that the church of Saint Georges was built in 1729 (Hadziiossif 2005: 215). This was "the first and the more ancient church of Prokopi"; it was situated in the Muslim neighbourhood, next to the market (Hrysostomos 2015: 137) (Photo 1). I will not systematically compare historical and hagiographical sources[6], but in this case the data they provide us do not concur.

[6] In general, the comparison of the different Services shows how an official version is gradually created: when the same elements are repeated from one text to another, they start to gain credence through repetition, creating thus the canonical life of the saint. Changes are sometimes attempted, with more or less success. For instance, the Service of 1899 (the only one published in the stricter Patriarchical environment of Constantinople), is the only one that tried to omit the somehow awkward miracle with the pilaf dish (for more details see Borisova's article) (Asmatiki akolouthia 1899: 38). However, the following Services did not follow its example: this episode is still very popular and eagerly repeated by the priests of Neo Prokopi, as I was able to observe during my fieldwork.

Photo 1: No church is represented on this map of Prokopi (Cappadocia), which is displayed in the Museum of Asia Minor's civilization (Neo Prokopi, Evia). As the inscription on the map explains, the church of Saint Georges was in the square, on the left of the mosque. Photography by Katerina Seraïdari, 14 October 2019

In Cappadocia, the decade of the 1720s was characterized by intensified building activity and economic prosperity. The initiatives of the bishop of Caesarea, Neophytos (1720-1729), led to the building of churches and monasteries (Sarantidis 1899: 117; Hadziiossif 2005: 214-215). This tendency was also favoured by the economic growth related to the commercial activities of Cappadocian migrants who had settled in Constantinople. In 1728, bishop Neophytos founded an important monastery for the region and dedicated it to John the Prodrome; some years later, in 1734, Neophytos became Patriarch of Constantinople (Levidis 1885: 182-183). We have to keep in mind that Caesarea (Kayseri) was the most important ecclesiastical region in Asia Minor, since the bishop of Caesarea had a superior status, made explicit by his title of byzantine origin: "The Supreme of the Supremes and the Exarch of the Entire East" (Stelaku 2008: 182). The bishop of Caesarea was, after the Patriarch, the President of the Holy Synod (Rizos 1856: 69). It is because Cappadocia had been the cradle

of important churchmen like Basil the Great, bishop of Caesarea (ca. 330-378), Gregory of Nyssa, bishop of Nyssa (ca. 335-395) and Gregory of Nazianzus, (ca. 330-390) Patriarch of Constantinople[7], that the bishopric of Caesarea conserved a privileged status[8] over the centuries.

Thus, the death of John the Russian in 1730 occurred in a period characterized by various church-building or restoration projects, both on a local and a regional level. This atmosphere of religious fervour undoubtedly influenced the early stages of his cult. Some decades later, there was a shift in focus: schools also began to be considered an important issue. The monk Germanos (1759-1805) founded the School of Caesarea in 1792; its inauguration marked the beginning of "the renaissance of Greek letters" in Cappadocia (Levidis 1885: 206; Hadziiossif 2005: 311). This is the social context when the saint started being venerated in Prokopi: at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Orthodox communities of the region affirmed their religious identity through a church-building boom, and at the end of the century, their attachment to the Greek language through the organization of a newly established educational network. We may consider these initiatives as part of a proto-national movement initiated by a well-educated elite and the trade bourgeoisie supported by the clergy.

As Levidis (1885: 187) explains, Germanos founded his School in Caesarea because both the laity and the clergy there could not even

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[7] These three theologians are broadly known as "The Cappadocian Fathers". The Services in honor of John the Russian sporadically make reference to them, thus creating links between three emblematic figures of Orthodox Christianity and a newly established saint (see for example Asmatiki akolouthia 1899: 33, 54). In this case, the link is not analogical (as with Job or Jesus) but topographical (John the Russian and the three theologians being united as Cappadocians). By connecting Byzantine Cappadocia to Ottoman Cappadocia, the impression of continuity is thus emphasized.

[8] When the title "Ecumenical See of Constantinople" was put into question in Russia in the 1860s, a parallel was drawn with Basil the Great and the See of Caesarea: "St. Basil the Great is also called ecumenical teacher, but we cannot, on this basis, call the See of Caesarea Ecumenical" (Gerd 2014: 42). The efforts of the Russian Empire's representatives to contest the Patriarchate of Constantinople's status and to present themselves as the spiritual leaders of Orthodox Christians during the second half of the nineteenth century will be briefly discussed below.

understand what was read in the church, since they were making use of a "barbaric language"; this is why for Germanos, the return of the Greek language constituted a "holy goal". Levidis (1834-1918) was an influential local scholar, trained in Constantinople. He insists on the determination of Germanos to show the benefits and the necessity of a Greek education to those "uneducated people" who lived in a country that, before becoming "barbaric", gave birth to the Cappadocian Fathers and many other men famous for their piety and erudition (ibid: 187-188). This passage by Levidis shows the contempt expressed at the use of karamanli Turkish (characterized as "barbaric language") which started to emerge in Cappadocia from the end of the eighteenth century. Despite this contempt, Levidis wrote himself in karamanli Turkish every time he considered it necessary for educational purposes. This was a general tendency, as will be showed.

In 1804, Germanos moved with his pupils to the monastery of St. John the Prodrome (ibid: 191) that the bishop Neophytos had restored; the new school was located at a distance of thirteen kilometres from Caesarea. From that moment on, the monastery started to be considered as the educational beacon of Christians in the East. However, between 1821 and 1826 (a period marked by the Greek revolution of 1821), the school was shut down, as it was suspected to locally amplify the impact of this national liberation movement (Hadziiossif 2005: 337).

One of the pupils of Germanos was Païsios (1778-1871), who was born in Farasa (Camlica) in Cappadocia. Païsios became bishop of Caesarea in March 1832; the same year, he managed to ensure the support of the Patriarch of Constantinople Konstantios (1830-1834) for the introduction of an ecclesiastical reform: from 1832 onward, the most distinguished monk of the monastery of John the Prodrome would be named bishop of Nazianzou and succeed to the bishop of Caesarea in case of vacancy (ibid: 209). In 1833, he persuaded the Patriarch to give a new status to this monastery: the bishop of Caesarea could use it as the seat of its bishopric, in order to control directly both the monastery and the school[9].

[9] The Encyclopaedia of the Hellenic World (EHW): http://asiaminor.ehw.gr/Forms/fLemmaBody.aspx?lemmaid=5679 (consulted on May 5, 2020). Interestingly enough, this monastery was broadly known as the

One of the main goals of Païsios was to fight against the growing Protestant influence in Cappadocia. For this reason, he ordered teachers and priests to make use of the Turkish language — the only one that the local population could understand. This situation could only change when "the ancestral language" [*η γνώσις της προγονικής ευήχου γλώσσης*], that is Greek, could massively reach, through education, these Turcophone Orthodox. This was, for him, the only way to stop conversions to Protestantism (Levidis 1885: 210).

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the "Hellenization" process remained the ultimate goal, but it was no longer the priority. The consolidation of Cappadocians' Orthodox faith, which was threatened by the Protestant missionaries' efforts, was much more urgent for Païsios. With this in view, it is easier to understand why bishop Païsios, who was one of the main actors of the "Hellenization" process examined here, did not hesitate to personally translate some ecclesiastical texts into karamanli Turkish in 1839. These were submitted to the Patriarch of Constantinople Grigorios VI (1835-1840), who asked three Turcophone teachers to evaluate the precision of the translation: one of them, Iosif, was probably the writer of the first Greek Service in honour of St. John the Russian that was published in Athens in 1849 (Mamoni 1988: 136, note 32).

Païsios particularly interests us, because he was the first ecclesiastic to give the permission to sing the Service of St. John the Russian in the churches of Prokopi (Hrysostomos 2015: 137, note 200). This constituted the first official recognition of the cult and it came at the moment of the publication of the Service, in 1849 – more than a hundred years after the passing of the saint. In this case, both Païsios (who gave the "official validation" for the Service) and Iosif (probably the writer of the Service) were engaged in a common struggle against Protestantism – a struggle that obliged them to adopt

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"Zincidere monastery"; nevertheless, the local scholar Anastasios Levidis and the bishop of Ikonio gave a more Hellenised form to this name in the nineteenth century, turning it into the "Monastery of Flaviana" (Petropoulou 2001: 290, note 30). The name of Levidis itself was Hellenised, since he was called "Kazantzoglou" before receiving a new Hellenised family name in his school in Constantinople. For Petropoulou, Levidis constitutes a representative example of the scholars of this period who were placed between a traditional pre-national world and the modernity of a world dominated by national models of identification (ibid: 292).

a more compromising stance toward the use of the Turkish language. This is probably why the first Service of the saint was divided in two parts: the hymns were written in Greek, whereas the brief biography of the saint was in karamanli Turkish[10]. The development of his cult cannot be fully understood without the analysis of the social and cultural context in which it was embedded.

The consolidation of the cult (1830s-1860s)

The Greek revolution of 1821, which led to the birth of a new state, pushed the Ottoman elites to take measures in order to stem the tide of nationalist movements within the Ottoman Empire. The Hatt-i Sherif in 1839, which affirmed that laws applied equally to all subjects, both Muslims and non-Muslims, inaugurated a period of important reforms, known as the Tanzimat. This period was also defined by the Crimean war (1853-1856) and the American civil war (1861-1865). During the Crimean war, the inhabitants of a neighbouring locality, Synasos, left amounts of money in their wills to "the captive monk" [*εχμάλωτο τον καλόγερο*], as they called John the Russian at that time. These donations were probably linked to "an Orthodox ideology and sympathy" for Russia, which was fighting against the Ottoman Empire and aspired to become the protector of all the Orthodox (Hadziiossif 2005: 58). This is the first indication that we have of the cult of the saint outside Prokopi. It is probably not a coincidence that these donations to the saint came after the permission

[10] In general, in the texts of the nineteenth century, there is no clear distinction between Turkish and karamanli Turkish. For example, in the introduction of the Service of St. John the Russian published in 1897, there is a reference to the first edition of 1849: interestingly enough, it is not specified there that the first biography of the saint was published in karamanli Turkish. The expression used in Greek gives the impression that it was simply published in Turkish: « μετά βραχείας λίαν βιογραφίας του Αγίου, και αυτής εν τουρκική φράσει » (Dionysios and Modestos 1897: γ). However, the first Service of the saint that was published in Constantinople two years later (the two previous ones being published in Athens) makes a clear reference to karamanli Turkish: « *τουρκική διαλέκτω συγγραφείσης εν ελληνικοίς ψηφίοις* » (Asmatiki akolouthia 1899: γ). Without doubt, the distinction between Turkish and karamanli Turkish was more relevant for those living in the Ottoman Empire than for those living in Athens, the capital of the newly founded Greek state.

to sing his Service in the churches of Prokopi was given by bishop Païsios in 1849. All these elements constitute the successive steps of a process leading to the formalization of the cult.

If the Crimean war made relevant the Russian identity of the saint whose relic was venerated in Prokopi, the American civil war had a different effect: it increased the demand for basic goods. As a result, the commercial activities of Orthodox merchants in the Ottoman Empire expanded. The impact of this commercial growth and economic prosperity even reached Cappadocia, as the region witnessed a second important period of intensive church-building activity between 1840 and 1870 (Renieri 1993: 34). It seems that during the decade of 1840, the Orthodox communities of the region entered into competition, each one trying to construct a bigger and a better-looking church (Hadziiossif 2005: 172). Sometimes, two churches were built in a town in less than a year, thus showing the competition between neighbouring Orthodox groups: these "Tanzimat churches", quite large in size, "exceeded the local needs" (Tanyeri-Erdemir, Hayden and Erdemir, 2014: 495)[11].

Local models of identification were obviously negotiated during this period, since wealthy patrons focused on reshaping the image of their communities and erected churches that mirrored their own financial standing. Moreover, this church-building boom reveals a period of intense religious fervour, reaching a "paroxystic level" according to Mavrohalyvidis (1990: 13), who criticized the erection of enormous and luxurious churches inside poor villages, filled by houses constructed out of mud. It is possible that the epidemic of cholera, that stroke Cappadocia for six years (1848-1854), explains this "paroxystic level" of religious fervour.

To go back to Prokopi, a second church was built there, which was dedicated to saint Basil the Great, one of the Cappadocian Fathers. It seems that bishop Païsios incited the Orthodox of the town to build another church dedicated to John the Russian; but his flock

[11] According to this article, it was after 1839 that "a large number of churches emerged in an extensive geography from the Balkans to Central Anatolia and from Cyprus to the Black Sea Coast". The term "Tanzimat churches" is used to define these constructions which were "the products of a general political situation in the Ottoman Empire" (ibid: 503).

declared that they had no more money available for this purpose. They promised, however, to erect it in due time (Hrysostomos 2015: 138).

It is not clear when the church of St. Basil was erected. Some sources date it to 1845 (Dionysios and Modestos 1897: 46), while others state that it was inaugurated on 15 August 1834: it seems that this date was mentioned in an inscription on the south side of the building, which also specified that the church was constructed under the reign of the sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839) and under bishop Païsios (Hrysostomos 2015: 137). It is probable that the church-building activity in the region had already started in the decade of 1830. Both Levidis and Renieri support this point of view; the new church of Andronikio (Endülük), for example, was erected in 1835 and was decorated with icons sent from Russia (Renieri 1993: 34-35).

The relic of St. John the Russian was transported to this newly built church. Most Vitæ consider that this transfer occurred in 1845. However, the Service of the saint that was published in 1899 in Constantinople mentions another date: according to it, the relics were transferred to the church of St. Basil in 1833 and not in 1845 (Asmatiki akolouthia 1899: 42). This concurs with the information given by Hrysostomos for the construction of the church[12].

Another major event occurred at the end of the decade of 1840: the publication of the first Service in 1849 in Athens. It is in the introduction of the second Service, the one published in 1897, that we find a reference made to the "official validation" [*Αρχιερατική επικύρωσις*]: the date 25 June 1849 is given and two names are mentioned, that of bishop Païsios and that of Leontios Nazianzou – a monk from the monastery of St. John the Prodromos who became bishop Nazianzou (eparchy to which Prokopi belonged) between September 1848 and May 1850 (Filippaios 1961: 87). Leontios Nazianzou signed the validation, but, as the extract states, the permission was given not only by bishop Païsios but also the Holy Synod (Dionysios and Modestos 1897: ε).

This permission stressed the local character of the cult, since it clearly stipulated that the hymns in honour of the saint could be sung

[12] The date of 1832 is also given by The Encyclopaedia of the Hellenic World (EHW): http://asiaminor.ehw.gr/Forms/fLemmaBody.aspx?lemmaid=5669 (consulted on September 21, 2020).

only in the churches of Prokopi. However, as we have seen with the wills of the inhabitants of neighbouring Synasos, the decade of 1850 was characterized by a relative expansion of the cult: the renown of the saint had already started spreading outside Prokopi.

The first Service of the saint was funded by a corporation of boatmen, whose members, while born in Prokopi, were working in Constantinople. This professional specialization had developed since the eighteenth century between the Orthodox from Prokopi who immigrated to Constantinople; as a result, they were the majority group in Constantinople's corporations of boatmen[13]. In general, Cappadocian immigration (which concerned the male members of the different communities) was related to the modernization and extension of transport network. It brought economic prosperity, educational growth (as immigrants funded schools in their hometowns especially after the middle of the nineteenth century) but also dependency from the main urban centres of the Ottoman Empire; it also had disastrous demographical effects: from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, Cappadocia suffered from a gradual decline of its Orthodox population (Anagnostopoulou 1998: 232).

It seems that the presence of the saint became a source of pride for the Turcophone Orthodox of Prokopi, who were often stigmatized as "uneducated". The comments of a local scholar from neighbouring Synasos, Rizos (1856: 85), provide a representative example of the way Turcophone Orthodox were treated in the middle of the nineteenth century. Rizos deplores the absence of schools and the lack of education in Prokopi, while saying that its population "lives in deep ignorance" [*ευρίσκονται εις ζοφεράν αμάθειαν*]. Rizos does not even mention the cult of St. John the Russian; he is much more interested by schools than by churches.

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[13] See The Encyclopaedia of the Hellenic World (EHW): http://asiaminor.ehw.gr/Forms/fLemmaBody.aspx?lemmaId=5666#chapter_0 and http://asiaminor.ehw.gr/Forms/fLemmaBody.aspx?lemmaId=5300#chapter_0 (consulted on September 25, 2020). On the last half page of the first Service (Iosif 1849: 8), we can read the names of (both dead and alive) members of the corporation who funded the publication: this is a current practice that shows that all these people, whose names are mentioned, had put themselves under the protection of the saint.

The attempts to spread the cult of John the Russian are not dissociated from the "Hellenization" process. Interestingly enough, only the first edition of 1849 uses karamanli Turkish: all the other Services are written exclusively in Greek. Moreover, in the first edition, the name of the corporation of Prokopi boatmen (who funded the publication) is composed in vernacular Greek and is full of Turkisms: « ΤΩΝ ΜΑΙΣΤΟΡΩΝ ΤΟΥ ΕΣΝΑΦΙΟΥ ΤΩΝ ΠΡΟΚΟΠΕΩΝ ΚΑΙΚΤΖΗΔΩΝ ». In the edition of 1899, however, the style is different and the same corporation is presented in scholarly Greek: « δαπάνη της εν Κων]πόλει Αδελφότητος των λεμβούχων Προκοπέων » (Asmatiki akolouthia 1899). This change in the presentation of the corporation is indicative of the "Hellenization" process I discuss here: in the space of fifty years that separate the two editions, the language is de-orientalised, since all words of obviously Turkish origin have been eliminated and replaced by a neo-Classical vocabulary. In our case, it is the cult of a saint of Russian origin that became the vehicle for this change.

The threat of Protestantism and the "Hellenization" process

The nascent cult of St. John the Russian could have been suppressed without leaving any historical record or without even taking root. Most probably, it emerged spontaneously, under popular initiative; undoubtedly, stories about this figure were initially sustained by an oral culture before it found its way into printed texts. Nevertheless, any cult requires official authorization: through approval or discouragement, ecclesiastical authorities attempt to canalize popular devotion and keep control over religious life. The question that particularly interests me is how popular devotion may rise when the conditions are favourable[14], especially after having received an official authorization (as it happened with St. John the Russian in 1849). To put it differently, a saint may, in the right circumstances, become the centre of a fervent cult: my aim is to

[14] This was also the goal of my research on the cults fostered after the discovery of unearthed Marian icons of the nineteenth century on two Cycladic islands, Tinos and Naxos (Seraïdari 2007).

understand which are the historical parameters that helped to give rise to this specific cult.

The threat of Protestantism and the "Hellenization" process may explain this rise. We have to take in consideration these two parameters in order to understand why Turkophone Orthodox were encouraged in their piety: clerical management, in this case, had to be very careful and subtle in order to avoid crisis and discontent. This is also why ecclesiastical books were translated in karamanli Turkish during the nineteenth century, despite the contempt that the use of this "barbaric language" increasingly arose in the more educated parts of the population[15]. Protestant missionaries also printed "Turkish books in Greek character" in order to reach a larger public and gain influence (Balta 2010b). Their production started around 1826: from that moment on, the term "Christians of Anatolia" (mainly used until then in the books edited by Turkophones) was replaced by the term "Orthodox Christians", thus allowing to stress the importance of the opposition to Protestant propaganda (Balta 1987: 228). This competition between the Protestants and Orthodox had a strange effect, since it inaugurated what may be called the "golden age" of karamanli Turkish, with more and more books published in this language (Hadziiossif 2005: 340).

During this period, it is plausible that St. John the Russian became a powerful weapon for the Orthodox clergy, and his cult a sign of Orthodox unity and power. We have seen that Orthodox persons' first and last names were massively Hellenised, under the influence of the clergy and teachers (see Petropoulou 1988: 181, for the change of Anastasios Levidis' name); schools were often attached to a church and maintained by voluntary contribution. The clash between the Church and the rising power of the Orthodox merchants,

[15] In other domains, however, there was no compromise. Levidis was not the only one to have his name Hellenised: the family names of Turkish or Arab origin were systematically Hellenised since the end of the eighteenth century in Cappadocia (Hadziiossif 2005: 321).Interestingly enough, in 1839, the bishop Païsios did not only translate some ecclesiastical texts in karamanli Turkish; he also sent an encyclical in karamanli Turkish asking Orthodox people who wished to baptize their children to choose a Christian first name for them, and not first names "from races of inferior cultural level". This aimed at stopping the attribution of Turkish first names to Orthodox Cappadocian children (Petropoulou 1988: 169).

who were influenced by the ideals of the Enlightenment and were often accused of atheism, took place in urban centres like Smyrna but apparently not in Cappadocia.

In Prokopi, a small school was built next in 1834 to the new church of St. Basil; it was replaced by another in 1856, which was established by the bishop of Caesarea[16]. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the educational structures of Prokopi were set up. Even St. John the Russian participated, in a way, to this effort: according to the Service written by Dionysios who, as a child, was at the school when its roof collapsed in 1862, pupils remained unhurt thanks to the saint's miraculous intervention (Dionysios and Modestos 1897: 47-48**)** (Photo 2). This could be seen as a heavenly sign of approval: even the school and its activities (developed in the framework of the "Hellenization" process) were placed under divine protection.

[16] See The Encyclopaedia of the Hellenic World (EHW): http://asiaminor.ehw.gr/Forms/fLemmaBody.aspx?lemmaId=5666#chapter_0 (consulted on September 25, 2020).

Photo 2: The representation of the miracle in the church of Neo Prokopi (Evia): the saint maintains the collapsing roof of the school, protecting thus the pupils. On the lower part of the fresco, the first names of the donors are mentioned, as well as their intention to dedicate it as a prayer "for the protection of the children from Russia, Greece and all over the world". The fact that Russia is mentioned before Greece means that the donors were probably of this nationality. Photography by Katerina Seraïdari, 13 October 2019.

According to the Services, St John the Russian was venerated not only by the Orthodox, but also by the Armenians, Turks and Protestants: all these pilgrims who visited his shrine with devotion were miraculously healed and comforted (Vernezos 2016: 26; Asmatiki akolouthia 1899: 51-52). That meant that even Protestants were obliged to recognize the divine grace this saint was invested with. The reference to the devotion of Protestants (which may include different categories of people, from American missionaries to newly converted Orthodox) is particularly interesting for us, since it suggests Orthodox superiority. This is, however, a hagiographical topos, recurring in multi-religious environments.

The sources which refer to the healing of Protestants who believed in the saint's powers, give little and stereotypical information. However, a story about a Protestant's punishment by the saint even became a song, written in karamanli Turkish by a refugee established in Evia and surnamed Homiros for his poetic skills (Balta and Stavridi 2018: 103-104): on 27 May 1902, during the religious feast of the saint, Damianos, a Protestant from Prokopi, mocked the pilgrims coming to prostrate themselves in front of the relic; for his impiety, he was punished by death and his corpse driven by the horse of the saint. The article by Balta and Stavridi is a presentation of this refugee's poetic work. It also shows, however, how easily people from Prokopi passed from Orthodoxy to Protestantism and back: Homiros' father was Orthodox, but he decided to become a Protestant in order to marry a local Protestant girl; this conversion improved the family's living conditions since visiting Americans paid for staying at their house (ibid: 86). When the Protestants decided to open a school in Prokopi, the Homiros' father presented himself as the owner of the plot; after the Americans' refusal to pay him, he solicited the help of the bishop of Caesarea. With the support of the bishop, he was finally legally recognized as the rightful owner of the plot. After this happy end, Homiros' father, his wife and their seven children were converted (back) to Orthodoxy: since he was an influential person in the community, three others families followed his example and renounced Protestantism for Orthodoxy (ibid: 86-87).

In a society marked by opportunistic behaviours of this kind, ecclesiastical authorities could not but foster a popular cult like the one surrounding the relic of St. John the Russian. The comparison of John the Russian with a Biblical figure like Job took, in this context, a new sense: Prokopi's inhabitants should be equally patient and refuse to convert in order to gain material benefits. We have to keep in mind that, according to his Vitæ, the saint was subjected to torture by the Ottoman agha who wanted to convert him to Islam, during the first period of his captivity: if the saint resisted, other captives "were tempted by the earthly goods that their master offered them" or could not support the torments (Dionysios and Modestos 1897: 37). We may consider this not only as a reference to typical themes of Christian martyrdom, but also as an example set for contemporary

Cappadocians: they should imitate the saint and resist the temptation to convert.

This temptation became stronger during the troubled decade of the 1870s, which was marked by prolonged unrest. After the death of bishop Païsios in 1871, a successor needed to be elected: this was the first time that a succession of a bishop mobilized and divided so much the Orthodox population of the region (Hadziiossif 2005: 193). In the summer of 1873, the central Anatolian famine « started with the drought »: during the extremely cold winter of 1874-75 all supplies were exhausted (Ertem 2017: 154). Prokopi suffered a lot from hunger between 1873 et 1874: Homiros' mother was twenty years old when this happened, and she often told her children how the snow blocked the communication between the different localities; she also narrated the want of bread (Balta and Stavridi 2018: 86). A song in Turkish that the refugees from another Cappadocian locality transmitted to their descendants after their settlement in Greece, speaks about the lack of bread: "The bread is my soul, the bread is my slavery, the bread made me crazy, and made me a slave going from one door to another" (Nigdelis 2014: 57-58, note 73).

However, the economic crisis was not only local: the Ottoman Empire, which slipped into debt because of the Crimean War, was forced to declare partial insolvency in 1875. The Protestant missionaries tried to fill the void left by the Ottoman state: they helped save thousands from starvation, while following « their own religious and political agendas »; in other words, « famine relief and charity gave the British consuls and the American Protestant missionaries the grounds on which to challenge the legitimacy of the Ottoman government » (Ertem 2017: 160). Their intervention also allowed them to gauge the solidity of the Orthodox population's faith. In order to explain the conversion of some Orthodox of Cappadocia to Protestantism, Anastasios Levidis evokes the famine of 1874 and the help that the Protestant networks offered to the hungry population (Balta 2010b: 395).

It seems plausible that the importance of St. John the Russian increased in these difficult times. In 1878, a Cappadocian-born monk, named Andrew, left the Panteleimon monastery on Mount Athos and came to Prokopi to pay homage to the saint. This visit (which was

accompanied by a miraculous rescue[17] stressing the miracle-working grace of John the Russian) initiated a new phase in his cult.

The saint and the Russians

The decade of the 1870s was eventful not only for Cappadocia but also for the Holy Mountain. In the Panteleimon monastery, a week after the death of the last Greek abbot Gerasimos, the first Russian abbot, Makarios (Sushkin), was elected on 10 May 1875. The reign of Makarios (1875-88) is still considered as the golden age of Russian monasticism on Athos. This succession marked a new era for the Panteleimon monastery but also for the whole peninsula: "Following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, Russian monastic communities grew rapidly due to the protection of high diplomatic and governmental officials and the raising interest among the Russian people. In fact, they soon became the richest and most populated on the rocky peninsula" (Gerd 2014: 85).

In our case, the monk Andrew functioned as an intermediary, thanks to whom the reputation of the saint spread beyond Cappadocia's limits. Apparently, he was not the only Cappadocian monk in the Panteleimon monastery. The Service of 1897 mentions an indefinite number of "Cappadocian brothers [*εν τη ιδία Μονή συνασκουμένων Καππαδοκών συναδέλφων*]" who had a great devotion for their local saint [*ευλαβεία προς τον συμπολίτην αυτών Αγιον φερόμενοι*] (Dionysios and Modestos 1897: 52, note 1). When the monastic community asked for a relic, the inhabitants of Prokopi, after a first refusal, finally decided to concede the right hand of the saint. The arm was detached from the body and two representatives from Prokopi, the monk Dionysios Charalambidis and a notable, brought it to the Holy Mountain on May 1881. In this framework, the presence

[17] According to the Service published in 1899 in Constantinople, the saint protected the monk Andrew who had venerated his relic with such devotion and who had undertaken such a tiring and perilous voyage (Asmatiki akolouthia 1899). If the Vita of 1899 omits the popular miracle with the pilaf dish (see note 4), it insists on the protection that John the Russian offered to his Ottoman master when the latter went to Mecca as a pilgrim (Asmatiki akolouthia 1899: 38). From this point of view, the saint is presented as the protector of (both Orthodox and Muslim) pilgrims.

of these Cappadocian "brother monks" could become an additional argument: the saint was of Russian origin but he also became Cappadocian after his captivity, and his hand was offered to an Athonite monastery where monks from these two communities coexisted.

Interestingly enough, the first text that was published after the fragmentation of the relic does not even mention the fact that the Panteleimon monastery was Russian (Levidis 1885: 308): it was as if the right hand of the saint was simply given to a monastery of the Holy Mountain; nothing is said either about a Cappadocian monk community established there. Furthermore, Levidis' version does not make any allusion to the monk Andrew and to his trips to Prokopi that preceded and prepared the translation of the relic. Levidis is not, however, a writer of the saint's Vita: his book is about the ecclesiastical history of Cappadocia.

The story will be much more developed in the Vita published two years later. After an initial refusal of Prokopi's inhabitants to share the relic with others, not only will the approval of the saint be confirmed by miracles (one of them being the safe trip of the relic from Prokopi to Mount Athos), but the saint will also prove to be more Russian than expected. A miracle that occurred in Prokopi before the hand's translation shows the importance of language's choice in this multi-linguistic environment: when a six-years-old Orthodox child, encouraged by the monk Andrew, stood in front of the saint's icon (see note 2) and asked in Turkish the saint to revel his name, John miraculously responded. But he did not give the Greek or the Turkish version of his name; he gave the Russian one (Dionysios and Modestos 1897: 51-52). It is as if in the presence of the monk Andrew, the saint became more Russian than ever before: his accent, when he responded to the child, was Russian [*με ρωσσικήν προφοράν*], according to the Service. The mention of Cappadocian monks in the Panteleimon monastery and the fact that Andrew was said to be himself Cappadocian helped, somehow, to soften the effects of the saint's sudden "Russification".

We have seen how this Turcophone population was stigmatized because of the ignorance of "the ancestral language" – as Greek was called. St. John the Russian himself should speak both Russian and Turkish: from this point of view, the saint was a foreigner who did not

speak Greek either. He could thus easily emerge as a positive symbol for a community defined as linguistically problematic. In a way, this miracle in front of the saint's icon, which emphasized his foreign origin, managed to "des-Ottomanize" the Orthodox of Prokopi in a totally different way: not through common language (as the "Hellenization" process aimed at) but through a common religion. As shown above, the regular contacts between the Panteleimon monastery and the community of Prokopi started at the end of a period of military confrontations between the Russian and the Ottoman Empire (the Crimean War and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78). If, during the same period, Grecophone local scholars were stressing the importance of educational growth, the Russian monks, who recognized the significance of Prokopi's local saint and offered him a new status by introducing a relic in the Holy Mountain, continued to give the highest priority to religion. Whereas the first, under the influence of the Greek Enlightenment, considered schools as important as churches, the latter defended the interests of an Empire whose development was based on (and justified by) Orthodox faith.

The decision to offer to the Panteleimon monastery the right hand of the saint was immediately rewarded through donations and gestures of reciprocity: funding was provided for the construction of a chapel dedicated to him. It is with this money that on 2 June 1886, more than a hundred and fifty years after the saint's passing, the first church in his honour started to be built in Prokopi (Dionysios and Modestos 1897: 53, note 1). The Service stressed the economic difficulties occasioned by the decision to build a large church on a hill, in the location of the old cemetery, so that the altar could be placed upon the empty tomb of the saint. But the inhabitants of Prokopi were enthusiastic: they collected money and were collectively engaged; even pupils and women got down to work to make the foundations (Hrysostomos 2015: 138). People from Prokopi, even if they lived in other localities, left money in their wills for the building of this church, as a will made on 14 January 1888 (Hadziiossif 2005: 215) illustrates. In 1891, everything stopped because of the lack of money; after a regional mobilization and a new fund-raising campaign, the work started anew. But the church was without a roof until 1897 (Dionysios and Modestos 1897: 53-54, note 1). Sources are contradictory regarding the completion of the church: this was,

undoubtedly, a late-Ottoman building, more or less completed in the final years of the nineteenth century.

The monk Dionysios Charalambidis played a major role during this period. He is the one who brought the hand of the saint to the Holy Mountain, who edited the Service of 1897, who gave the information about the saint that Levidis published in his book (Levidis 1885: 300) in which nothing is said about the presence of Russians on Athos and their implication in the affair. As a writer of one of the saint's Vita, Dionysios recorded events in which he participated as a protagonist: he was even among the children miraculously saved after the collapse of the school's roof.

Dionysios, who also travelled to Constantinople and to other places to collect money for the new shrine, regularly sent letters to the Panteleimon monastery to ask for funding and to give news about the work progress (Hrysostomos 2015: 139-140). But the Russians did not only send money; they also sent priestly vestments, sacred vessels, a Cross made of iron and gold [*σιδηρόχρυσον*] to be put on the dome, a precious reliquary for the saint's relic[18]; in 1902, the Holy Synod, through the Russian embassy in Constantinople, sent more objects and icons. It is a letter of Dionysios, written on 14 February 1912 that gives all this information (ibid: 139) (Photo 3 and 4). On 12 April 1912, Dionysios wrote to the abbot of the Panteleimon monastery and asked for a heavy bell to be sent, because the local Church committee had not the financial capacity to buy such an item (ibid: 140). This exchange of letters reveals the role played by the Russian monks who eagerly accepted, through their donations, to patronize the new shrine and, subsequently, to sustain the saint's cult: for the Russian monks of the Panteleimon monastery, this was the right moment to show the importance of Russian influence in the Orthodox world. For the Orthodox of Prokopi, this was the opportunity to collectively improve their image by transforming a local and regional saint into an Orthodox symbol more broadly venerated. We have to keep in mind that the community's decision to offer a part of the relic was taken in a

[18] Together with some other Russian precious objects, this wooden reliquary was transferred from Cappadocia to Neo Prokopi. These objects are nowadays displayed in the Museum of the Civilization of Asia Minor, which is located next to the shrine (Seraïdari 2020).

context of anxiety, as already mentioned: if hunger, poverty and economic crisis persuaded some Orthodox Cappadocians to become Protestants, in our case the decision was not about conversion but about sharing the mortal remains of a saint.

Photo 3: Old photography of a procession of the saint in Evia, probably in 1928. The saint is in the reliquary that the Russians had sent as gift to Prokopi (Cappadocia). This wooden reliquary is nowadays displayed in the Museum of Asia Minor's civilization (Neo Prokopi, Evia). It has a particularity: the saint is represented on both sides of the cover and in two different ways — with his eyes closed on the outside of the reliquary, and with his eyes open (as we can see here) on the inside.

Photo 4: Holy chalice from Russia (silver gold-plated, 1874), as it is displayed in the Museum of Asia Minor's civilization (Neo Prokopi, Evia). This chalice, which is mentioned in a letter of Dionysios, was sent to Prokopi (Cappadocia) by the Holy Synod of Russia, through the Russian embassy in Constantinople in 1902. Photography by Katerina Seraïdari, 13 October 2019.

After having been a source of comfort for a Turcophone Orthodox community of central Anatolia, the saint gradually became the focus of more powerful interests. Thanks to the moral and

financial support of a Russian community established on Mount Athos (the "gatekeeper of Orthodoxy"), the influence of St John the Russian became extendable and his cult received a new impulse. If the saint was considered as a rampart in the defence of the Greek language (against the extended use of karamanli Turkish) and of Orthodoxy (against Protestant proselytism), after the sharing of his relic with the Russian monks, it seems that he became a bridge, uniting different parts of the Orthodox world. If the Vitæ written after the fragmentation of the relic adopt this positive stance, it does not signify that the relations with the Russians were unanimously approved. For some, these exchanges were also marked by opportunism and greed. When Farasopoulos (1895: 72) describes how English travellers tried to buy an icon of Christ in another Cappadocian village but finally received a negative and "proud response" [*αγέρωχον απάντησιν*], he compares this "honourable" attitude that showed "the piety and the noble spirit" of this community with the reaction of the Prokopi's inhabitants who "for 1000 lires mutilated the hand [*τον βραχίονα*] of the saint relic and sold it to the Russian monks of the Mount Athos".

The development of St. John the Russian's cult is historically meaningful. Paradoxically, the new cult seems to have been encouraged by the representatives of the Greek Enlightenment. This was motivated by a double aspiration: to give impulse to the "Hellenization" process and defend the Orthodox faith against Protestant missionaries' influence. To complicate the picture, the intervention of Russian monks at the end of the nineteenth century shows the divisions that already existed inside the Orthodox world: if Russians were seen as protectors and benefactors by Ottoman Orthodox, in Greece they were criticized for their pan-Slavic and imperial policy and for their ambition of becoming the "Third Rome" (Gerd 2014).

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