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ʔ, b, t, ʔ, ġ, ḥ, ḥ, d, d, r, z, s, š, š, d, ʔ, z, ʕ, ġ, f, q, k, l, m,  
n, h, w, y; ā-ī-ū; à (*alif maqṣūrah*); ah-at (*rāʔ marbūṭah*); al- (anche da-  
vanti a lettere "solari"); ay, aw (*dittonghi*); ayy, iyy.

*Traslitterazione per il persiano:*

ā, b, p, t, ʔ, j, č, ḥ, x, d, z, r, z, ž, s, š, š, ʔ, ʔ, ʕ, ġ, f, q,  
k, g, l, m, n; v-u-ow (*vav*); h - e (*hafife*); y-i-ey (*ye*), ʔ, o, a, e, xʕ,  
iye; -e\-ye (*ezāfe*).

Per i testi in turco si adotta il moderno alfabeto turco, ricorrendo al sistema di traslitterazione scientifica per l'osmanlica coerente con i sopraindicati sistemi.

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# ORIENTE MODERNO

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## THE OTTOMANS AND TRADE

Edited by  
Ebru BOYAR and Kate FLEET



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ANTONIS ANASTASOPOULOS

(UNIVERSITY OF CRETE)

BUILDING ALLIANCES: A CHRISTIAN MERCHANT  
IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY KARAFERYE

Dimitrios Bekellas<sup>1</sup> was born into a family of means and lived in Karaferye (Veroia, in what is today northern Greece) in the second half of the 18th century. Our aim here is to discuss his case as an indicative example of the strategies that a Christian Balkan merchant pursued in order effectively to face real and potential menaces to his status and property. As may be expected, and as surviving documents demonstrate, the quest for protection and allies was a crucial priority for such a merchant.

We do not know a great deal about the Bekellas family and its activities in the 18th century. Our information consists of small pieces of information coming from archival documents, literary texts, inscriptions and later secondary sources. Dimitrios's father was called Hadji Manolis. He was one of the Christian notables of Karaferye. In the funeral oration delivered on the occasion of his death, he is described as a noble, wealthy and respectable member of the local community, but the only concrete piece of information about him from archival sources is that he possessed some land in the Karaferye district.<sup>2</sup>

1 – It seems that there were two basic variations of the Bekellas family name in the 18th century: one with an 'i' and another with an 'e' in the first syllable. In the funeral oration on the occasion of the death of Dimitrios's father, the family name appears as «Μικέλλας» [Bikellas] (see footnote 2). Dimitrios himself signs letters as «ο Δημήτριος ο Μπεκέλλας» [Bekellas]. Eventually, the family name became «Βικέλας» [Vikelas] (Demetrios Vikelas, *Η Ζωή Μου* [My Life], Athens, Syllogos pros Diadosin Ophelimon Vivlion, 1908, p. 7). The French traveller Cousinéry cites the name as «Békéla» (Esprit Marie Cousinéry, *Voyage dans la Macédoine*, Paris, Imprimerie Royale, 1831, vol. 1, p. 68-71). The family name has been read mistakenly as "Batalas" in *sicil* entries published in Ioan. K. Vasdravelles, (ed.), *Ιστορικά Αρχεία Μακεδονίας. Β'. Αρχείον Βεροίας – Ναούσης 1598-1886* [Historical Archives of Macedonia. II. Veroia-Naoussa Archive, 1598-1886], Thessaloniki, Hetaireia Makedonikon Spoudon, 1954. This misreading was inevitably reproduced by later bibliography (see, for instance, Nicolas G. Svoronos, *Le commerce de Salonique au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1956, p. 393).

2 – For the funeral oration by Ioasaph Kornelios of Zante, a professional orator, see Vikelas, *Ζωή*, p. 9-10. According to Ioasaph, «Γεννημένος από γονείς εις τους οποίους άστραπτεν η ευγένεια, αναθρεμμένος μέσα εις ταύτην την καλλίρροον και πολύρροον Βέροϊαν ... Ήτο ο μακαρίτης μία εικών Ναβουχοδονόσορος ... Εσόντρεξαν εις σύστασιν του ... ευγένεια, δόξα, τιμή, φήμη, πλοσύη, κτήματα, τέκνα, γαμβροί, νόμφαι, δούλαι, δούλοι...». Hadji Manolis possibly died in 1762 (Gheorghios Ch. Chionides, "Η εκ Βεροίας Καταγομένη Οικογένεια Βικέλα"

Concerning other members of the Bekellas family,<sup>3</sup> Dimitrios is known to have been a merchant and a licenced (*beratli*) dragoman of the British consulate in Salonica.<sup>4</sup> According to Ottoman documents, he was residing in Karaferye, where he saw to the affairs of the British consul.<sup>5</sup> However, this may have simply been a pretext justifying his appointment as a dragoman, as it is not known whether there really were British commercial interests in Karaferye.<sup>6</sup>

There are two differing versions about the date of Dimitrios's death. According to Ottoman sources, he died before 7 Rebiyülevvel 1213 (19 August 1798), when his *berat* was transferred to a certain Musa in Salonica due to Dimitrios's

[The Vikelas family of Veroia], *Makedonika*, 7 (1966-1967), p. 211). According to Ottoman *tevzi defterleri* from the *sicils* of Karaferye, Aci Bekela owned some land in the village of Makroğuz (General State Archives of Greece/Imathia Branch, Karaferye Sicilleri [hereafter KS] vol. 81/microfilm exposure 13/page 387-388 [1759] and KS 85/6/427-429 [1765]). Aci Bekela may well be the same person as Aci Manol, who possessed land in Kulura (KS 81/13/387-388 [1759], KS 91/8/860-863 [1770] and KS 96/4/295-5/297 [1777]). As to the possibility that Manolis had died in 1762, it was not unusual to register someone as a landowner in the *tevzi defterleri* even after his death. In 1765 the Kulura land was registered as the land of the «Manoloğulları» (KS 85/17/774). According to an older *sicil*, Aci Bekela also possessed land in the village of Tağramon; he also figured among the representatives of the Christians of Karaferye (H. Vehbi Günay, 1159 (M. 1746) Tarihli Karaferye Kazası Şer'iyeye Sicilli (Transkripsiyon ve Değerlendirme) [The 1746 (1159 H.) Court Register of the *Kaza* of Karaferye (Transcription and Evaluation)], unpublished Yüksek Lisans Tezi (MA thesis), Ege Üniversitesi, İzmir, 1993, p. 106 (the name has been read as «Benlá»), 156, 172).

3 – Chionides has collected all available information about the Bekellas family in his «Η εκ Βεροίας Καταγομένη Οικογένεια Βικέλα». See also his more recent arguments in his «Δημήτριος Μπικέλλας. Ο Νεοανακαλυφθείς Αρχηγός της Οικογένειας Βικέλα» [Demetrios Bikellias. The newly discovered patriarch of the Vikelas family], *Μακεδονικό Ημερολόγιο Σφενδόνη*, LXXI (1996), p. 61-64.

4 – For a brief overview of the historical development and significance of the *beratli* and dragoman titles and status, see Alexander H. de Groot, «The changing national character of the dragoman (1756-1863)» in Gerard Höpp (ed.), *Fremde Erfahrungen. Asiaten und Afrikaner in Deutschland, Österreich und in der Schweiz bis 1945*, Berlin, Das Arabische Buch, 1996, p. 297-304.

5 – Bekellas's *berat* was originally issued in early Ramazan 1178 (22 February – 3 March 1765) and was renewed on 3 Cemaziyelahir 1188 (11 August 1774) (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Istanbul [hereafter BOA], Düvel-i Enebiye Defterleri [hereafter DED] vol. 35/1, p. 120/ doc. 413 and 126/442). The information about the renewal of Bekellas's *berat* in 1774 is reproduced in a published list of the official dragomans of the western consulates in Salonica. The list is undated, but most likely belongs to 1797. It is noted in it that Bekellas's two servants were Panayotaki Meliorho and Stavros Papadimou Lioliou (Ioan. K. Vasdravelles, (ed.), *Ιστορικά Αρχεία Μακεδονίας. Α'. Αρχείον Θεσσαλονίκης 1695-1912* [Historical Archives of Macedonia. I. Thessaloniki Archive 1695-1912], Thessaloniki, Hetaireia Makedonikon Spoudon, 1952, p. 351-353 [no 250]). The family name has been mistakenly read as «Μπικέλης». As expected, Bekellas's name is absent from a similar list of 1761 (*ibid.*, p. 252-253 [no. 186]).

6 – If there really were British commercial interests in Karaferye, these must have been related in all likelihood to the trade of cotton yarn and fabrics (see Svoronos, *Le commerce de Salonique au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 181-182, 198, 208). In his book about the commerce of Salonica, Svoronos notes that the British were cooperating with locals in internal trade (*ibid.*, p. 166-168, 193-194).

death.<sup>7</sup> According to his grandson's account though, Dimitrios moved at a certain stage in his life to Istanbul, where he traded in cotton fabrics, especially the renowned cotton towels of Karaferye. He abandoned Istanbul because of the outbreak of the Greek Revolution in 1821 and eventually settled on the commercial Aegean island of Syros.<sup>8</sup> As becomes obvious, there is a significant discrepancy of more than 20 years between the two versions. Given the fact that Vikelas, Dimitrios's grandson, was born in 1835, wrote his autobiography at around the turn of the 20th century and admitted that he knew little about his ancestors, as no family archive or documents had survived, I think that until we discover more concrete information about Dimitrios's life,<sup>9</sup> the official Ottoman version appears to be more reliable than the information coming from Vikelas.

Dimitrios's brother Nikolaos was a merchant in Pest; he was naturalised there in 1794. He is known to have been an active member of the local Greek community with an interest in the promotion of learning. Another Bekellas, Gheorghios, was among those who decided to establish a Greek Orthodox church in the same city. His connection with the other two Bekellas is not certain; he may have been their brother. Other members of the family are known to have lived in Karaferye, but we really know nothing but their names; one of them, Stamatios – possibly another brother of Dimitrios – composed an epigram for a visiting bishop.<sup>10</sup> Overall, it appears that the family had expanded from Karaferye to Istanbul<sup>11</sup> and Pest sometime in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It is reasonable to suspect that the members of the Bekellas family formed a commercial network, which included their native town and two important commercial centres within and beyond Ottoman borders, but no hard evidence has surfaced yet to support

7 – BOA, DED 35/1/140/590. I wish to express my gratitude to Dr Maurits van den Boogert for providing the information coming from the Düvel-i Enebiye Defterleri (see also footnote 5).

8 – Vikelas, *Ζωή*, p. 4, 10.

9 – If Dimitrios was still living in 1821, he must have been well over 70 years old. If he died by 1798, then his son must have been at least around, and most likely, over 40 when his wife gave birth to Dimitrios Vikelas.

10 – Chionides, «Η εκ Βεροίας Καταγομένη Οικογένεια Βικέλα», p. 213-215; Vikelas, *Ζωή*, p. 12-13. It becomes apparent from various pieces of evidence that, like several other merchant families of the same period, the Bekellas family was a cultured one; its members were educated and were involved in establishing schools, buying books, composing epigrams, and making comparisons drawn from Homer (according to Dimitrios's letter of 1777 against the local metropolitan, «... να με ζωγραφίξη άλλον Θεοσίτην και του Θεοσίτου χείρονα...»). It is known that Dimitrios studied in the Macedonian town of Kozani (Mich. Ath. Kalinderes, *Τα Αυτά Έγγραφα της Δημοτικής Βιβλιοθήκης Κοζάνης 1676-1808* [The Unbound Documents of the Municipal Library of Kozani 1676-1808], Thessaloniki, Demotike Vivliotheke Kozanes, 1951, p. 29; Chionides, «Η εκ Βεροίας Καταγομένη Οικογένεια Βικέλα», p. 212). For members of the Bekellas family, especially Nikolaos, as subscribers for books, see Gheorghios K. Myares, «Συνδρομητές Βιβλίων από τη Βέροια και τη Νάουσα μεταξύ 1758 και 1839» [Book Subscribers from Veroia and Naoussa, 1758-1839], *Μακεδονικό Ημερολόγιο Σφενδόνη*, LXX (1995), p. 243-252.

11 – Regardless of whether it was Dimitrios who moved to Istanbul or a son of his, there is no doubt that a Bekellas family branch was based in the Ottoman capital by 1821.

this suggestion.<sup>12</sup> In this context, the *beratlı* status apparently safeguarded the position of those who were required to remain in the original family base in the Balkan hinterland.

A number of Greek and Ottoman documents show Dimitrios to be involved in local antagonisms and judicial disputes. We may divide these into four basic categories: disputes with the Church, with the Christian community of Karaferye, with Ottoman officials and local Muslim men of power, and with other individuals.

Two of Bekellas's surviving letters refer to his problems with the local metropolitan. The first one is dated 1777; in it Bekellas protested to the Metropolitan of Salonica because the latter's counterpart in Karaferye had unjustifiably discriminated against him. Bekellas also suggested that the metropolitan favoured other people, who were presumably antagonising him on the local scene. From the answer of the Metropolitan of Salonica we learn that Bekellas was deemed responsible for the submission of slanderous complaints against the Metropolitan of Karaferye to the Patriarchate in Istanbul. The Metropolitan of Salonica made it clear that he would take Bekellas's side only if it was proved that he had nothing to do with the accusations against the local metropolitan.<sup>13</sup>

In 1784 Bekellas wrote another letter against the Metropolitan of Karaferye, but this time addressed his protest to the Greek Orthodox Patriarch in Istanbul. He reiterated his allegations about the discrimination against him for no other reason than pure hate on the part of the prelate, and focused on one specific episode to support his view. More specifically, he accused the metropolitan of instructing his scribes not to collect his donation, nor those of those around him, for an upcoming major religious service; as a result their names would apparently not be commemorated in the course of the Holy Liturgy, unlike the names of the rest of the Christian inhabitants of Karaferye and of the nearby town of Ağustos (Naoussa). What is interesting is that Bekellas claimed that the metropolitan did the same to two other Christians of Karaferye, the Kehayaoglus, who enjoyed, as he did, the protection of foreign consuls.<sup>14</sup> This suggests that the metropolitan's attitude possibly stemmed from intracommunal grievances connected with the fact that those with *beratlı* status did not share in the tax burden, unlike the rest of the community. Similar tension and problems were not unusual in Salonica, the centre of the *sancak* to which Karaferye belonged. There, the metropolitan sided with the lay leadership of the Christian community and exerted pressure on the tax-exempted *beratlıs*.<sup>15</sup>

12 – Cf. Traian Stoianovich's classic "The conquering Balkan Orthodox merchant", *The Journal of Economic History*, 20 (1960), p. 234-313, esp. p. 295-296.

13 – Kalinderes, *Ta Avtá Έγγραφα της Δημοτικής Βιβλιοθήκης Κοζάνης 1676-1808*, p. 28-29 (26 March 1777), 30-31 (-).

14 – Ibid., p. 31-33 (14 October 1784). One of the two Kehayaoglus co-signed the letter; this one was under Swedish protection, while the other was under Neapolitan protection.

15 – See, for instance, Konstantinos D. Mertziotis, *Μνημεία Μακεδονικής Ιστορίας* [Monuments of the History of Macedonia], Thessaloniki, Hetaireia Makedonikon Spoudon, 1947, p. 326,

The friction between the Bekellas family and the Church went back in time. Some 50 years before the letter of Dimitrios, the Patriarch in Istanbul had petitioned the Porte and demanded that Aci Manol Bekella be incarcerated in the fortress of Volos. Using particularly strong language, the Patriarch accused Bekella of being an evil man and an intriguer, who had repeatedly conspired to cause problems in the local community; he was also disobedient to the Metropolitan of Karaferye and hindered the proper collection of taxes.<sup>16</sup> The disruption of tax collection is admittedly a common locus in petitions to the Porte, but it is not improbable that there really existed as early as that a dispute between the Bekellas family and other prominent members of the community on tax grounds.

Surviving *sicil* entries prove that, in the case of Dimitrios, financial issues were indeed the source of tension between him and the Christian community leaders. We learn from a *sicil* entry of 1771 that Bekellas reached a compromise with the *kocabasıs* of Karaferye, who owed him 1,400 *guruş* from a loĝn (or several loans). Before reaching this compromise through the intervention of unnamed mediators, Bekellas had demanded – apparently as a measure to exert pressure on them – that two *kocabasıs* be taken to Salonica and tried before the *mütesellim* and the local *kadı*. No more details are given about the exact nature of the debt, but we may assume that the *kocabasıs* represented the local Christian community and not simply themselves.<sup>17</sup>

A few months later, a sultanic decree was issued concerning the request of Bekellas – specifically called a *bazırgan* (merchant) this time – to bring to justice two *kocabasıs* of Karaferye for illegally collecting a total of 636 *guruş* from him in the course of one year.<sup>18</sup> One of them, Karacaoĝlu, was one of the two *kocabasıs* who were involved in the previous case; apparently the two sides still had open accounts to settle. This time again Karacaoĝlu and another *zimmi* were ordered to appear in Salonica, where the case was to be heard in the presence of the local judge and the deputy governor. As the decree made reference to the exemption of *beratlı* merchants, like Bekellas, from the *cizye* and *rekalıf-i örfiye* taxes, we may safely assume that the issue at stake was the licensed merchant's fiscal obligations.<sup>19</sup>

Let's move now to the third category of cases, that is, problems with local

359-360, 362-366.

16 – BOA, Cevdet Adliye 6040 (it bears a patriarchal seal dated 1734).

17 – KS 91/22/920/entry 3 (4 February 1771); cf. the incomplete KS 91/22/919/2 (-).

18 – KS 93/1/348/1 and 2 (1-9 October 1771 & 23 November 1772). It seems strange that there is a distance of more than a year between the two entries – the *ferman* and the *buyruđdu* issued on the basis of it. This may be due to a scribal error. In any case, the petition submitted to the Porte about this case was dated 1771.

19 – What remains unclear in the case of Karaferye in the second half of the 18th century is whether the local court could be bypassed simply on the request of a litigant (and largely thanks to his connections) or whether certain criteria should be met before such an action was taken. More generally, the relation between the Karaferye and Salonica courts remains an open question, especially in the light of the scantiness of judicial cases in the surviving *sicils* of Karaferye from this period.

Muslim officials and men of influence. In early 1765 the Sultan issued two decrees dealing with a petition by Bekeloğlu Dimitraki and another *zimmi* of Karaferye. Dimitrios accused the town's *kadı* of having imprisoned him illegally and extracted 670 *guruş* from him, while the second victim of the judge claimed that he had been unjustly fined and forced to pay 400 *guruş*. As a result of the petition, a *muhzir* of the *kazasker* of Rumeli was ordered to go to Karaferye and report back to the Porte after having carried out an investigation among the local population as to the conduct of their *kadı*.<sup>20</sup>

Five years later, Dimitrios complained that İsmail Şefkat, the *voivoda* of Karaferye, and Kara Ahmed, a local *ayan*,<sup>21</sup> had harassed and intimidated him and eventually forced him to pay them 1,802 *guruş*. Furthermore, when the two men heard that Bekellas intended to bring a charge against them, they conspired to present him as a nuisance and to render his allegations less credible by acquiring a document from the local court of law saying that he was constantly protesting about oppression that he had supposedly suffered sometimes from the local judges and sometimes from the local notables – which must not have been very difficult to achieve with all of Bekellas's antagonisms and complaints. Eventually though, Bekellas was successful in obtaining a sultanic decree according to which his case would be heard before the judge and the deputy governor in Salonica, since it was impossible to have a fair trial in Karaferye;<sup>22</sup> indeed a few weeks later the *naib* of Salonica sent a letter to the authorities of Karaferye informing them about Dimitrios's allegations and asking for Kara Ahmed and the *voivoda* to be sent to Salonica to appear in court.<sup>23</sup>

Dimitrios's judicial problems were not limited to those with the Christian community and Ottoman officials. As a businessman, he naturally faced disputes arising from his business activities. In 1765 a certain Kostantin complained to the Porte, because *tacir* (merchant) Dimitraki was refusing to hand over half of the earnings of a rather profitable joint venture.<sup>24</sup> Seven years later, in 1772, a certain Osman brought another suit against Bekeloğlu Dimitraki for not discharging a debt of 570 *guruş*, which had resulted partly from a loan and partly from business transactions. The case was to be heard in Salonica following orders

20 – BOA, Rumeli Ahkâm Defterleri (hereafter RAD) vol. 21/ entry 787 (13-21 February 1765) and RAD 21/811 (22 February-3 March 1765).

21 – Kara Ahmed's name appears quite often in the *sicils* of Karaferye. He was anything but a man of impeccable character. Cf. Antonis Anastasopoulos, "Lighting the flame of disorder: *ayan* infighting and state intervention in Ottoman Karaferye, 1758-59", *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, VIII/1-2 (2002), p. 73-88. Unfortunately this article was printed with several mistakes.

22 – KS 91/11/625 (20-29 November 1770). This entry has been published in Greek in Vasdravelles, *Ιστορικά Αρχαία Μακεδονίας. Β'. Αρχαίον Βεροίας – Ναούσης 1598-1886*, p. 193-194 (no. 210). The decree has also been preserved in Historical Archives of Macedonia, Salonica/Selânik Sicilleri 118/52-53.

23 – KS 91/20/916/1 (17 December 1770). It is noted under KS 91/11/625 that a decree by the *mütesellim* of Salonica about the same case was also received by the court of Karaferye.

24 – BOA, RAD 20/526 (27 September-6 October 1765).

from Istanbul.<sup>25</sup>

It is obvious that a man like Dimitrios was fighting on so many fronts that he needed allies and protection if he wished to secure his wealth and promote his interests. His greatest guarantee was the *berathlı* dragoman status, that is British protection, and he used it repeatedly. When Kostantin demanded his share from the profits of their partnership, Bekellas benefited from the terms of the Ottoman Capitulations to England, as he refused to have this dispute heard locally. Indeed, according to the Capitulations, disputes concerning sums of money exceeding 4,000 *akçes* could be heard only before the Imperial Council in Istanbul.<sup>26</sup> When Kostantin complained, the Porte further pointed out that foreign subjects could not be tried in the absence of the ambassador, the consul or the dragoman (apparently the principal one) of their country.<sup>27</sup>

Bekellas made use of his *berathlı* status on other occasions, too. In 1770 he went to Istanbul in order to inform the British ambassador about the *voivoda* and Kara Ahmed. The petition was subsequently submitted to the Porte not by Bekellas himself, but by the ambassador on his behalf. In the sultanic decree that was then issued, Dimitrios was not treated as an Ottoman subject, but as a *müstemin*, a foreign subject residing in the realm of Islam, whose rights had to be respected.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the two Muslims were warned that they would be brought to Istanbul if they refused to behave. The British ambassador also petitioned the Porte on behalf of Bekellas in his two lawsuits against the Karaferye *kocabaşıs*.<sup>29</sup> As noted above, the *mütesellim* of Salonica then stressed that merchants in the service of the British consul as dragomans were exempted from the *cizye* and the *tekalif-i örfiye*; this was a benefit stemming from the *berathlı* status and an important advantage over the rest of the Christian community of Karaferye. The formulation of imperial and other decrees demonstrates clearly that whereas legality and oppression were defined on the basis of the "noble sharia" (and/or *kanun*) for the common *zimmis*, two more elements came into play in the case of licensed dragomans and extended the bounds of their rights, namely the Capitulations and their patents («mugayir-i ahdname-i hümayun ve şurut-ı berat»).<sup>30</sup>

Thus, British protection served Bekellas well not only in his business transac-

25 – BOA, RAD 27/87 (19-27 September 1772).

26 – See for instance article 24 of the English Capitulations of 1601 (*EP*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. «İmtiyazat. ii. – the Ottoman empire» (Halil İnalçık), III, 1971, p. 1180-1181).

27 – Thus Bekellas not only evaded trial in Karaferye, but also practically limited Kostantin's right to protest.

28 – For the status of the *müstemin* from a doctrinal point of view, see *EP*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. «Amân» (Joseph Schacht), I, 1960, p. 431-432. For the application of this notion to the Ottoman context, see *EP*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. «İmtiyazat. ii. – the Ottoman empire» (İnalçık), p. 1179-1182.

29 – I am indebted to Dr Maurits van den Boogert who was kind enough to send me a photocopy of the petition submitted by the British ambassador for the second case (BOA, A. DVN. DVE 81/94 [1771]).

30 – The citation comes from KS 93/1/348/1.

tions,<sup>31</sup> but also in his judicial affairs. He had his petitions forwarded by the ambassador of a major foreign power, and, thanks to the Capitulations, he could avoid the hearing of his cases in Karaferye when he wished otherwise. Furthermore, he could not be tried in the absence of British diplomatic representatives, just as if he were a foreigner himself. Besides, the exemption from *cizye* and other taxes must have meant a considerable financial relief. This exemption extended to the sons and two servants of the dragomans, which allowed them to build a tax-exempt network and to bring under their patronage relatives or partners, who could be passed off as servants.<sup>32</sup>

There are admittedly cases in which Bekellas's special status is not mentioned at all. For instance, in the reply of the Porte to his allegations about the *kadı* in 1765 there is no reference to his being a dragoman, but at that point Bekellas had indeed not yet become a dragoman. We may actually assume that it was incidents like this that made him seek foreign protection, as the process of obtaining it was completed at the same time when the two decrees about the *kadı* were issued. No mention of his *beratlı* status is made in the decree concerning his dispute with Osman either. But on this occasion, the petition had been submitted by the latter, who had good reasons to conceal Dimitrios's special status. Bekellas may have invoked his *berat* at a later stage of the procedure so as to block the execution of the imperial order. Overall, we should not neglect the fact that Bekellas had been born an Ottoman subject and lived in an Ottoman environment. Therefore, he was subject to and made use of the Ottoman methods of finding justice; prominent among those was the right to appeal to the Imperial Council and the sultan himself.<sup>33</sup> Besides, the eventual outcome of any case would be decided by the Ottoman authorities and not by the British ambassador or consul. Their role was to make their protégé's voice louder and more effective, when appealing to the Ottoman state.

British protection was welcome when it came to the Ottoman authorities, but was apparently insufficient when it came to disputes with the local metropolitan. There Bekellas had to seek protection and allies within the Greek Orthodox milieu. In fact, his letter to the Metropolitan of Salonica suggests that Dimitrios may have been systematically cultivating good relations with the higher clergy, so as to be able to use their influence whenever necessary. A surviving letter in which he congratulates the Veriot Bishop of Servia and Kozani on his election to that of-

31 – A *beratlı* merchant enjoyed lower custom duties on imports and exports (Christine Philliou, "Mischief in the Old Regime: provincial dragomans and social change at the turn of the nineteenth century", *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 25 (2001), p. 106).

32 – Cf. Mertziou, *Μνημεία Μακεδονικής Ιστορίας*, p. 336-337. *Berats* eventually became a commodity sold to wealthy merchants. It cost some 2-3,000 *guruş* to get the licence to become a dragoman of the French consulate in Salonica in the 18th century (Svoronos, *Le commerce de Salonique au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 152). When a check was made in Aleppo in 1790, only six of the some 1,500 *zimmi* merchants with *berats* proved to be true dragomans (*El<sup>2</sup>*, s.v. "İmtiyazat. ii. – the Ottoman empire" (İnalçık), p. 1187).

33 – See Halil İnalçık, "Şikâyet Hakkı: 'Arz-i Hâl ve 'Arz-i Mahzar'lar" [The right to protest: 'arz-i hâls and 'arz-i mahzars], *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, 7-8 (1988), p. 33-54.

fice and on the warm welcome by his flock was apparently part of this policy.<sup>34</sup>

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that when writing to the Patriarch, Bekellas was very careful in his choice of words and the tone of his protest. Obviously he knew that he was not allowed to overstep certain limits, and was also aware of the solidarity among the prelates, which was clearly demonstrated in the reply by the Metropolitan of Salonica to his request for support in 1777. Besides, the threat of excommunication, which was taken very seriously not only for its consequences in the afterlife but also because of the social isolation that it entailed in this world, always hung over the head of a layman such as Bekellas.

Finally, Bekellas's allies included people in the same position as himself; presumably they could achieve more united than individually. Such were the Kehayaoğlu, who were also dragomans, lived in the same town and were faced with the same problems.<sup>35</sup> What is noteworthy is that Bekellas's allies do not seem to have included Muslims. Karaferye was a mixed town from a religious point of view, and there existed instances of legal or extra-legal collaboration among Christian and Muslim members of the local elite for the common benefit or to avoid troubles with the state authorities.<sup>36</sup> Bekellas's contacts with Muslims cannot have been limited to his lawsuits with Osman, the *kadı*, the *voivoda* and Kara Ahmed. In fact, Osman's case suggests that he had dealings with Muslims.

It is worth mentioning that the French Cousinéry, who visited Karaferye probably at some point before the French Revolution,<sup>37</sup> stated that he had been entertained by a certain «Békéla», a rich man who was well versed in scholarly Greek and enjoyed British protection thanks to a *berat* that he had received from the Porte. Cousinéry did not cite Bekellas's first name, but his host can quite reasonably be identified as Dimitrios. According to the French traveller, the distance between Karaferye and Salonica was too long to guarantee effective protection, and Bekellas was obliged to travel often to the latter town, where he eventually died a poor man.<sup>38</sup> After his death, his children transferred their activities

34 – Kalinderes, *Ta Anáta Έγγραφα της Δημοτικής Βιβλιοθήκης Κοζάνης 1676-1808*, p. 73 (8 July 1785).

35 – It may be added here that Bekellas («ο δημήτριος χατζή μανουήλ και δραγομάνος της γγγυλτέρας») was among the signatories of a collective letter in favour of the dragoman of the Venetian consul in Salonica (29 March 1766) (Spyridon P. Lambros, "Το εν Θεσσαλονίκη Βενετικών Προξενείον και το μετά της Μακεδονίας Εμπόριον των Βενετών" [The Venetian consulate in Salonica and Venetian commerce with Macedonia], *Μακεδονικόν Ημερολόγιον Παμμακεδονικού Συλλόγου*, V (1912), p. 234-235).

36 – Cf. Anastasopoulos, "Lighting the flame of disorder: *ayan* infighting and state intervention in Ottoman Karaferye, 1758-59", p. 84-85.

37 – Cousinéry was in the Levant for about 30 years until 1793 and again during the reign of Louis XVIII (1814-1824); some of his remarks indicate that his narration about Karaferye refers to the period prior to 1793, but the author does not specify the exact time of his visit there. Vikelas suggests that the two men probably met around 1763 and Chionides accepts this dating (Vikelas, *Ζωή*, p. 425; Chionides, "Η εκ Βερούσιας Καταγομένη Οικογένεια Βυκέλα", p. 212).

38 – BOA, RAD 20/526 and 27/87 confirm that Dimitrios was spending time in Salonica. It is not known if Bekellas actually died a poor man, or if Cousinéry exaggerated.

and wealth abroad («dans l'Allemagne»). What is interesting is that Cousinéry claimed that Bekellas suffered more vexations from his fellow Greeks than from Ottoman officials and Muslim men of power.<sup>39</sup>

To conclude, what is important in Bekellas's case is that it allows us to see a Balkan merchant having recourse to several authorities and individuals in order to secure his position. One had to decide each time how one could best tackle a challenge. This obviously also explains why there were cases of Muslims and Jews who did not, when it came to bringing action against Greek Orthodox opponents, turn to the *kadı* court but to the church authorities requesting that they excommunicate them.<sup>40</sup>

On the one hand, Bekellas cultivated personal relations with church officials, foreign diplomats, and fellow townsmen; on the other hand, he made use of formal institutions. Simply having a good personal relation with the British consul in Salonica was not as effective as holding the official title of the dragoman of the consulate, just as good personal relations with the Metropolitan of Salonica were not enough to secure his support against the Metropolitan of Karaferye. However, the fact that the Christian community of Karaferye kept putting pressure on Bekellas over tax issues, even though his tax exemption was officially acknowledged, suggests that the dragoman status provided some but not absolute immunity either. The Ottoman system did have institutions that could protect a merchant like Bekellas, but the eventual outcome depended on many factors, such as the integrity and efficiency of state officials, the real weight of such institutions in society, actual respect for sultanic decrees, and particularly the line of action taken by the person whose interests were under threat. For instance, Bekellas chose to appeal to the state authorities and eventually the *kadı* court when challenged by Muslims or Christians of Karaferye who had clearly broken the law, made use of the terms of the Capitulations in commercial disputes and turned to church officials when discriminated against by the metropolitan in a way that was not breaking Islamic or Ottoman law. From another viewpoint, formal and informal methods of tackling problems kept alternating; Bekellas had to make the right choice in each particular instance. In Christine Philliou's words, «[provincial dragomans] were always open to using old and new institutions alike for their survival and prosperity. ... Provincial dragomans, like many other groups around them, pushed the social and exploited the geopolitical boundaries that had been set for them, undermining state authority by actively

39 – Cousinéry, *Voyage dans la Macédoine*, vol. 1, p. 68-69. According to Andreas Andreades, who wrote in 1910, the whole Bekellas family was forced to leave Karaferye because the wealth of Dimitrios «εκίνησε την πλεονεξίαν των Τούρκων» [excited greed in the Turks], but this may merely be an early 20th-century anti-Turkish stereotype (Andr. M. Andreades, «Δημήτριος Βικέλας» [Demetrios Vikelas], *Μακεδονικόν Ημερολόγιον Παμμακεδονικού Συλλόγου*, III (1910), p. 40-41 as cited by Chionides, «Η εκ Βεροίας Καταγομένη Οικογένεια Βικέλα», p. 211).

40 – See examples in Panaghiotes D. Michaelares, *Αφορισμός. Η Προσαρμογή μιας Ποινής στις Αναγκαιότητες της Τουρκοκρατίας* [Excommunication. The Adaptation of a Penalty to the Necessities of Ottoman Rule], Athens, Ethniko Hidryma Ereunon/Kentro Neoellenikon Ereunon, 1997, p. 428-429.

engaging institutions and appropriating them as their own».<sup>41</sup> Of course, this does not mean that they were always successful in doing so or that they were beyond the reach of formal Ottoman institutions and local rivals at all times. Quite the contrary: there was high risk, even for their own life, in provoking their fellow citizens in the way that Dimitrios did.

Despite the lawsuits and vexations, Dimitrios Bekellas spent a considerable part or even the whole of his life in Karaferye. Eventually though the family left town. They may have done so because Karaferye was too small to accommodate their business ambitions. They may also have been forced to leave because they were exposed to more threats than they could bear.<sup>42</sup> Most likely, they left because of a combination of both.<sup>43</sup> We shall not know until more information surfaces about the Bekellas family. Regardless of the eventual outcome, though, what is striking in Bekellas's case is that he could afford an impressive degree of self-confidence as a result of the opportunities offered to him by the general conditions in which a Balkan merchant operated in the 18th century. He thus felt strong enough to deal with all sorts of opponents and antagonists, who might otherwise have been able to humiliate or even eliminate him.

The Bekellas case is not by any means unique, and that is why it is relevant: it exemplifies the possibilities that were opening up for Christian merchants in the southern Balkans in the second half of the 18th century, as well as highlighting the limitations within which they had to operate. These limitations were set not only by the greed of officials and bullies, but quite as often by antagonisms within the Christian community. As such the Bekellas case is a typical one that deserves further study.

41 – Philliou, «Mischief in the Old Regime: provincial dragomans and social change at the turn of the nineteenth century», p. 103-104.

42 – When Dimitrios's grandson visited the family house in 1901, he was impressed by its heavy courtyard gate and sturdy windowless ground-floor walls, and commented that «Αι τοιαύται προφυλάξεις μαρτυρούν την έλλειψιν ασφαλείας και τον φόβον κακοβούλων επιδρομών» [such precautions testify to the lack of safety and the fear of malicious raids] (Vikelas, *Ζωή*, p. 423).

43 – One is tempted to ask why Bekellas's *berat* was not transferred to his relatives after his death. Were they not interested in it, because they had moved out of Karaferye, or did they fail to maintain control of it against competition? According to Philliou («Mischief in the Old Regime: provincial dragomans and social change at the turn of the nineteenth century», p. 109), it was very common for dragomans to bequeath their title to their sons and relatives.