



“Christos Mavropoulos’ collection of documents: An invaluable evidence on Ottoman and Greek history”

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study is to briefly present and make known the important content of ottoman translated documents relevant to the history of Chios, an Aegean island under Ottoman rule, during the 18th and 19th centuries. Several of these documents, originally written in Ottoman paleography, were translated into modern Greek by Christos Mavropoulos and then published in a book titled “*Turkish Documents regarding the history of Chios translated by Christos Mavropoulos*”, Athens 1920. Later on, more documents were published in the fifth volume of the *Journal of Argentis’ Association in Chios*, Chios 1956 under the title “*Turkish Documents and Inscriptions*”, also translated by the same scholar.

The translation of the turkish documents and turkish inscriptions by Christos Mavropoulos, an interpreter and court clerk in Chios island at the beginnings of the last century, are a particularly remarkable undertaking, as these documents, is a truly invaluable source for the history of the Ottoman Empire itself and its Greek subjects during the period of the Ottoman rule in the 18th and 19th centuries.

These documents consist an authentic archival material revealing aspects of both Ottoman and Greek history through primary Ottoman sources. Furthermore these information are easily accessed due to the fact that the documents are translated and printed.

The study of these Ottoman documents alongside with several Greek sources, present us a complete insight of the events of that period and at the same time the documents offer the opportunity of comparing, correlating and verificatting data given in several Greek and Ottoman sources.

Equally important is the fact that the documents refer to a relatively long and vital period of history. Especially because in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries important developments took place, both in the Ottoman Empire, with most

important the reform efforts which began in the late eighteenth century and culminated in the implementation of the *Tanzimat* reforms in the nineteenth century, as well as in Chios, due to the massacre of 1822 following the involvement of the inhabitants in the Greek War of Independence and the earthquake of 1881 which affected enormously the administration, economy and society of the island.

Furthermore Christos Mavropoulos’ translated documents are thought to be of great importance, because the majority of the original documents have been lost or destroyed probably in the second decay of the twentieth century. Besides, even if these were available, it would have been difficult to be translated due to the relatively limited eligible scholars to undertake this task combined with the bulk of the documents.

Mavropoulos’ book comprises of 231 translated documents whilst in the fifth volume of the *Journal Argentis’ Association in Chios* 110 additional documents were published. In accordance to their content, these documents have been classified as administrative, jurisdictional, nautical etc. The documents inform us about the different aspects of chiot economic, social, political and ecclesiastical history as this was formed within the Ottoman state. Apparently, the chiot history is inextricably linked to the Ottoman reality and depends to a large extent on the administrative and economic mechanisms of the Empire. Besides, life in Chios developed within the Ottoman framework as was the case of all provinces of the Empire.

The documents, decrees, decisions of the *kadi’s* court, reports, appointment documents of ottoman officials, tax documents etc. are indisputable witnesses of the Ottoman reality at that time, presenting objective, accurate and valuable information. In these documents, the Sultans’ attitude towards the inhabitants of the island becomes apparent. Thus it is evident that the Sultans were favorable towards the Chiots, granting them various privileges related to taxation, trade,



ecclesiastical issues, testamentary dispositions, litigation and so on. The privileges granted to Chios were in accordance with the Empire's policy towards its subjects who accepted the Ottoman rule without resistance.¹ Nevertheless this practice enabled the Empire's subject to more effectively organize their everyday life as well as their economic activities. In addition, due to the privileges the authority of the Ottoman officials was limited and thus the Sultan's subjects could protect their interest asking directly the mediation and assistance of the Ottoman Government.

Additionally, the documents provide us information about the community of the Mastic Villages, a different community at the south of the island. The majority of the relevant documents concern the taxation of mastic, this unique product of the region. Information on taxation is particularly important, as there is evidence of almost all taxes, the kind, the exact amounts owed to the High Porte, the distribution of the taxes to the liable inhabitants, according to their social and economic status, and finally the collection of the taxes.

Information are also given about the Custom of Chios and the custom duties of the island. Moreover, the documents reveal the relations of the Christian inhabitants, their private affairs, the behavior and the mentality of the Muslim population living in Chios, as well as the Chiots' inheritance customs and their donations to the community and the poor. In addition, we are informed about the topography and natural history of the island, as detailed descriptions of various areas and neighborhoods are given. There are also data on the urban planning of the city and the architecture of the island. At the same time, we are informed about family names, well-known in the Chiot society at that time, as well as important genealogical data of the inhabitants, and finally the activities of certain reputable families.

In addition, we are informed about the response of the Ottoman Government to the petitions of the inhabitants, as well as the provisions on behalf of the Sultan to protect the public health by appointing for example a specialized ottoman officer, a "hygienist", as it is mentioned. Additionally we are informed about the reconstruction of the port with the initiative of the Sultan, aiming at improving the inhabitants' trade activities and subsequently at their economic recovery, due to the catastrophe of 1822 on the one

hand, and on the other at the increase of the wealth of the Empire's treasury.

The documents, moreover, demonstrate the willingness of the Sultans to settle several issues concerning the every-day life of their subjects for their own benefit and simultaneously to secure the interests of the Empire itself. For example, after 1822, the High Porte advised the new lieutenant governor of the island, Youssouf Pasha, to follow a policy of clemency beginning a period of reconstruction for the Chiot community. Thus, on September 1822 Youssouf Pasha arrived in Chios from Tsesme and by official proclamation invited the inhabitants to return to their island and take back their confiscated property on the condition that they would accept the ultimate authority of the Sultan and at the same time the obligation to pay their taxes and duties to the imperial treasury. Though the Chiots' return home was not without difficulties, they were heading back, as a result of the flexibility and mildness of the pasha's administration, as well as the favorable promises of the Ottoman High Porte, who may have realized that the destruction of one of the most richest Aegean island was disadvantageous to the Empire's own interests, particularly in fiscal terms.²

Furthermore, the documents' provided data is extremely important and Mavropoulos' contribution to the history, not only of the island, but also of the Empire, is remarkable. The collection of documents rescued by Mavropoulos is one of the few translated and printed collections of Ottoman documents referring to a specific locality of the Ottoman Empire that was later incorporated into the Greek independent state. Chios could be a case study of the Ottoman administration on a small island part of the Empire. In fact, the documents reflect the administration of the Ottoman state upon its subjects. More specifically we are informed about the implementation of the Ottoman administrative practices and reforms (*Tanzimat*) and we realize that a local community had to adapt them and consequently function within the limits set by the central ottoman government. Likewise we are informed about the structure of the Ottoman administrative bodies in Chios, the ottoman local officers, their relations with the local christian officials, namely the *Demogerontes*, the presence and activities of the Chiot Christian representatives at the High Porte in Constantinople, as well as the

¹ Psarrou, E., *Ottoman rule in the Aegean. Chios during the 19th century, centre-periphery relations*, Athens: Papazissis Publishers, 2020, pp. 51-53.

² Psarrou, E., "The administration of 1882 and Ioannis Psycharis" in *Mnemosyni, Annual Journal of Historical Studies for Modern Greek Studies*, vol. 16, (2003-2005), pp. 62-82.



representatives of the foreign powers based in Chios, such as the consuls of European countries.

Concluding the present study, we must once again emphasize the importance of the documents and the information provided for both Greek and Ottoman history. Mavropoulos' work is likely to stimulate more scholars to delve into unexplored areas of the history of Chios and thus present new evidence.