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## THE RISE AND FALL OF THE CONFRATERNITY CHURCHES OF KYTHERA

The shaping of ecclesiastical law on Kythera (Cerigo) during the course of foreign domination (1206-1863) is a matter which deserves attention when interpretations are being made of certain details of the political and economic aspects of the social strata. It also contributes to the study of the demography of the island.

A variety of Kinds (orders or categories) of churches can be distinguished on the island as follows: (1) Confraternity churches or Adelphata (Ius confraternita), (2) Paternal churches, otherwise known as 'family churches', which are subdivided into two categories: (a) Ius Patronato Publico, and (b) Ius Patronato Privato. (3) Stavropegic and patriarchal churches, i.e. those coming under the direct jurisdiction of the Patriarch rather than the local Bishop. (4) Paraklissia, chapels of shrine, (5) Exoklissia, country chapels, (6) Exomonía, disused hermitages or small monasteries, (7) Monasteries. This has been so since the early and middle periods of Venetian domination. Catholic and Orthodox clergies co-exist peaceably: the island's Catholic population being small, opportunities for prosyletising few, and occasions for conflict minimal.

During the early and middle years of Venetian rule, the construction of places of worship was the result of collective endeavour by groups of people to satisfy their joint needs. Later, however, noble families or, on a smaller scale, families belonging to the other social classes built

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1. A.B.K. (Archives of the Bishopric of Kythera, Kythera), Codices of Bishops Nektarios Vener, Neophytos Levounis, Prokopios Kallonas and Evgenios Machairiotis (1700 - 1863).

privately owned churches. As there existed a fundamental principle of freedom of worship, both in the country and in Chora (the capital), the islanders - with the help of the parish priest - spent every spare moment of their time and every ounce of their energy on their socio-religious duties. Even with the limited resources at their disposal, they were obsessed with the idea that they had to demonstrate their reverence for the Divinity in every possible way. With the wholehearted support of the other members of their families, the Kythereans believed that they had to assist in the construction of a church-building, which would be dedicated to one of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, or to a saint. The fact that the island's many churches were all the products of private enterprise suggests the connection between this phenomenon and the religious trends of the age. Consequently, the building of privately owned churches by the islanders of all classes is a phenomenon that indicates competitive tendencies. In the case of the peasants and burgesses, the initiative stemmed basically from the needs of the local people, the tightly-knit family circle of parishioners the peculiarity of the local conditions and the financial resources of those who could afford to become church-owners.

The churches were endowed by those who were bound by bonds of worship, and real property or chattels - in the form of votive offerings - were bequeathed to them. Thus, registers of the property belonging to the privately owned churches came into being, with the result that the churches not only paid for their own maintenance but even brought their owners an income. This aspect of things encouraged the building of churches in large numbers aided by the voluntary offering of artisan skills or physical labour in such matters as the gathering of materials, by the local inhabitants or the nobleman's tenant farmers .

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2. C.P.A. (Caluci Private Archives) Caluci Register of Church Lands owned by the Caluci family, Kythera; N.K.H.A. (Notaries of Kythera Historical Archives) 1600 - 1863.

The institution of confraternity churches was introduced into the Ionian Islands by their Venetian rulers. The foundations in Kythera were originally products of the initiative of certain nobles. Later, groups of notables accounted for others which sprang up in the surrounding countryside, outside Chora. These churches, six in number, were supported by equal contributions from the members, 'brethren' of organised assemblies, the Adelphato - Adelphotis. Such, for example, was the collective endeavour of a group of colonising nobles of Chora, a section of whom, through intermarriage with local stock, had become hellenized and had embraced the Orthodox Faith. The building of their church met their particular religious needs .

The confraternity churches took their origins from older churches which had also been built by the collective endeavour of local communities, or from newly-built churches. The oldest "Adelphato" was that of Aghia Anna, in Chora, which emerged from an old ruined church which had been renovated. This "Adelphato" subsequently took-over the confraternity of the Panaghia Myrtidiotissa in the citadel of Chora, a confraternity founded after the end of the Venetian occupation because the church had formerly been a Catholic parish church. The result of the merger was that the latter became the chapel of shrine/<sup>of</sup> Aghia Anna, and this happened because most of the population of the Citadel moved down into Chora, appreciably reducing the number of parishioners bearing in mind that the nobles who remained on the Citadel used private chapels.

The corporate body of the Confraternity of Aghia Anna, on its foundation, consisted of thirty noblemen of Chora, including priests, monks, the then Archbishop Nektarios Veneris and others. Although its statute stated that "If any pious person should donate any real or personal pro-

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3. A.C.K.L. (Archives of the Church of the Theotokos Kondoletou at Livadi), Book entitled Marègola; Academy of Athens, F.C. (Folklore Centre): Ms of I.P.Cassimatis, no 2327 (in Greek) p. 5; A.B.K., Libro Regolamenti ed atti della Confraternita del Aghia Anna (Marègola), 1699; K.H.A. (Kythera Historical Archives), File of Documents of the Holy Church...of the Latins, years 1797 - 1864.

perty in order to seek enrolment as a confraternity member, he is to be permitted to be enrolled without let or hindrance...", admission was nevertheless closed to the lower social classes because the founder members were bound to each other by ancestral ties - from baptism until death<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the confraternity always retained a strongly personal character. The church's property, both real and personal, grew steadily as a result of donations and votive offerings from living confraternity members or bequests made by members for their own 'spiritual salvation' or on behalf of 'departed relatives'.

Similar statutes were in force in the confraternity church of the Theotokos Kondoletou at Livadi, near Chora, where the adelphato was composed largely of noblemen who owned large estates and summer residences in the neighbourhood and shared in the administration of the church in their capacity as confraternity members.<sup>5</sup>

The earliest confraternity church in the northern part of the island was founded in the middle of the eighteenth century as a result of the increase in settlement around the central village of Karavas and the subsequent need to found a noteworthy church by local notables, after the example of the nobles and notables of the village of Livadi and of the capital, Chora.<sup>6</sup>

While there are only 'lords' ('ἀρχόντες') sitting on the boards of the adelphata in Chora, in the villages one frequently finds both 'lords from Chora' as well as others who were prominent local residents. It was a privilege of the lordly members of the Chora confraternities to be members of both. On the other hand those 'lords' or village 'notables' who were not included in the above confraternities felt themselves obliged to acquire a place of worship of their own. Consequently they competed

4. A.B.K., Libro Regolamenti ..., op. cit.

5. A.C.K.L., Book... Maregola ..., op. cit.

6. A.B.K., Libro Regolamenti ..., op. cit.; A.B.K., Codex of Prokopios Kallonas, op. cit.

with each other in the matter of building private churches or chapels. In the newly-developing quarters of Chora they built privately owned chapels which were used as parish churches. These same people, as well as others who were members of adelphata in Chora or the villages, also built small chapels or sizeable churches on their large farm-estates near Chora or in the rural areas, particularly if it happened to be the site of their summer residence.

The zenith of the confraternity institution was reached during the early and mid-Venetian period when the island was faced with an acute demographic problem, and desperate struggle for survival was the main characteristic of Kytherean society. The absence of security, collective migrations of the population, piracy, captivity, plunder and sickness were all factors which contributed towards keeping the society in a state of poverty and decadence. Thus no chance was offered to the nobles to rebuild private churches. To the situation also contributed the fact that during the colonisation of the island, at that period, Greeks and some Venetians, who already had titles of nobility, or acquired them on the island, solved the problem of their own religious accommodation by founding the confraternity churches. The separation was considered to be necessary because of the social distinction of the noble-class, whose privileges and exclusivity were officially recognised in 1573 with the establishment of the Community of Nobles (Libro d'Oro), after persistent representations to the Venetian authorities both on and outside the island.

The members of the adelphata were given the title of 'confrater magister' which was a means of confirming their social engagement in church matters. They drew-up, an ecclesiastical statute in each case, and used

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7. A.B.K., Codex of Evgenios Machairiotis, op.cit.; A.C.K.L., Book ... Maregola, op.cit.; A.B.K., Libro Regolamenti ..., op.cit.
8. Codex: The Kytherean Codex, being the Laws, Decrees and Privileges in force in the Community of Kythera, in A.H.E.S. (Archives of Historical and Ethnological Society, Athens), no. 91; G. Pojaco, Le Leggi Mu-

a liberal procedure for the election of their administrative committees and of the priests, that of open discussion followed by secret ballot. This particular way of functioning of the adelphata was one of the matters which contributed to the re-enforcement of the social, political and ethnic awareness of a part of the neglected or dissatisfied nobility in the mid-eighteenth century.

It is worth noticing that within the framework of a European and Neo-Hellenic enlightenment, and the economic evolution of the area during the eighteenth century the liberal nobles, who were still members of the Adelphata, separated themselves from the representatives of the Conservative party, declined noble rank and co-operated with the newly arisen bourgeoisie; meanwhile the peasant leadership, itself largely infused with the spirit of Neo-Hellenism, supported the citizens, giving rise to rural-urban combined uprisings, the first in 1780, which was the preamble to that of 1798 - 1800 .

It is significant to examine the political and social framework of the epoch, within the which confraternity churches were structured and functioned. The nobles acted socially and politically within the closed system of the community, according to rules of activity, laws, and the etiquette which the time demanded. In reality, however, the privileges accorded the nobles by the local Venetian administration contained little political power, but had all the elements of subjection to the regime of the Venetian Republic, in which the local administration, while nominally autonomous, and dominated by the noble class, was in effect the servant-body of the Venetian administrators. For this reason, the principle character-

nicipali delle Isole Ionie, Corfu, 1848, vol. 3, pp.35-38.

9. A.C.K.L., Book ... Maregola, op.cit.; A.B.K., Libro Regolamenti ... , op.cit. Cf. G. Machairas, Churches and Monasteries of Lefkas (in Greek), Athens, 1957, pp.14-77.
10. G. Leontsinis, The Bourgeoisie -Peasant Rising on Kythera and the Code of Ordinances of the Peasants' Civil Administration (in Greek), 4th Pan-Ionian Congress, Corfu, 1978, vol. I, 1980, pp.216-243.

stic of the political status-quo on Kythera, and indeed of the rest of the Ionian Islands, until the mid-eighteenth Century, was that of stagnation. Active class-conflicts, however, revealed themselves from the last quarter of the century, when the progressive forces turned against the great landowners and other nobles holding privileged positions under the Venetians. These privileged beings were also the owners of private churches in Chora and on their estates in the country, where the exclusivity of the landowner, religious bigotry and subjection of the serfs were the main characteristics .

Thus , the lower classes, the popolo of Chora and the rural areas, as all the inhabitants of the Island, with the exception of the nobility and Church leadership, were officially called, (the 'third estate' according to European principles) were functioning within a system of local self-government. Its institutions had a democratic basis: free discussion, the voting of all males in the elections of the Proesti

local notables) and Commissi (the representatives of the lower classes), but were in fact until the mid-eighteenth Century somewhat weak, for, while they had the weapons and the gun-powder, they lacked a target. In particular, the significant instruments of local self-government, the Proesti, were overshadowed by the committees of the nobles, conforming with the system of the Venetian Republic. This also happened in regard to the confraternal churches, with the following legal contrast; conservative nobles, collaborators with and harmonised to the foreign regime, followed independent and democratic procedures in their confraternal institutions. This because the institutions' effect was not considered sufficient to influence the status-quo of the island.

Meanwhile, until 1820 the running and administration of the confraternal

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11. C.P.A., Caluci Register, op.cit.; Codex, op.cit.; K.H.A., Minutes of the Election of the Commissi submitted to the Venetian Provveditore, years 1750 - 1798.; G. Leontsinis, op. cit.
  12. C.P.A., Caluci Register, op.cit.; C.O. 136, vols 1391 - 1433, op.cit.; Codex, op.cit.; K.H.A., Minutes of the Election of Proesti and Commissi,

ternity churches was an organised yet liberal procedure. The parish priest, the two church-wardens and the clerk to the members of the confraternity were elected by a secret ballot in which only the confraternity members took part. It was the churchwardens' task to manage the church's property and to report to the members of the Assembly and their own successors. The minutes of the Assemblies were recorded in a special book, called the Maregola and the Assembly itself was known as the scola or synaxis. The confraternity members met in the church at least once every one or two years under the chairmanship of the Archbishop, for the above mentioned elections. At the expiration of their term of office, the incumbents were permitted to stand for re-election, the aim being - in accordance with the spirit of the law - to encourage the parish priests to lead exemplary lives. That this produced satisfactory results there is evidence from the subsequent intense competition for benefices.

Under the British, however, confraternity meetings were not only attended by the Archbishop but also by the British Resident of the Island, and, for the election of the administrative committees, the Archbishop, after consultation with the confraternity members - who<sup>were</sup> on friendly terms with the local government officials - appointed, virtually, whomsoever he liked as either parish-priest or member of the confraternity's administrative board<sup>13</sup>. Thus the efficiency of the secret ballot, which had been maintained for so long, was eventually undermined. And, while the secret ballot of the adelphata was being gradually weakened, the British patronage countered the institutions of local self government by means of legislative adjustment. Although the Proesti continued to be elected by all the male inhabitants of the area around Chora, within the framework of a regular and organised assembly, they later became designated by the central administration of the island, to the extent of

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1600 - 1797.

13. A.C.K.L., Book... Maregola, op. cit.; A.B.K., Libro Regolamenti....,



being assigned police-duties.<sup>14</sup>

The decay of <sup>the</sup> confraternal institutions became noticeable from the beginning of the eighteenth century and was due, basically, to the preceding demographic evolution and subsequent stabilisation of the population and the raising of the economic status of the nobility which led them to the private patronage of churches. So, the ecclesiastical pattern, evolving under the principles of the Eastern Orthodox Church, resulted in the decay of the Confraternity churches, since the personal patronage of the private churches best suited the established and stabilised political situation in all areas under Venetian domination.

According to figures concerning the years 1800 - 1863, a period when the ecclesiastical pattern was consolidated, the private churches active in Kythera rose to between 125 - 135, co-existing with a considerable number of the other kinds of church previously mentioned.<sup>15</sup> Despite this, the confraternity churches constituted one of the main features of the social involvement of the nobility and notables and contributed, with the passing of time, to the maintenance and re-inforcement of the liberal spirit of the islanders. This because the institutions were bound-up with democratic procedures and complemented the island tradition of local self-government. There is evidence for this in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and up to the imposition of the British Protectorate (1780 - 1817), a period of successive social upheavals and reaction on the part of the ruling class, whose aim was the restoration of the <sup>16</sup> ancien regime.

Within the framework of the general political and social reorganisation of the Island, the adelphata, together with the institutions of

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op.cit.; C.O. 136, vols 1365/689, Documents of the Myrtidiotissa Church (1825-1826).

14. C.O. 136, vol. 1340, Circular to the Local Executive Police, 1844 (copy); Ke.H.A. (Kefhalonia Historical Archives), Letter of Appointment of the Proestos N. Kokolis, 16th July, 1844.
15. C.O. 136, vols 1391-1433, op.cit.; C.P.A. Caluci Register, op.cit.
16. K.H.A., Filza di Scrittura..., no 11, 6th March, 1799; A.H.E.S., De-

local self-government—those of the nobility and those of the countryside and neighbourhood of Chora - contributed to the strengthening of the inhabitants' political and social consciousness. To this added the fact that the institutions, being unique as socio-political activities of all classes during the period of Venetian domination, were the springboard for the rise of the liberal spirit which resulted in the awakening of social upheaval at the turn of the century. The nobles who helped the movements, Emmanuel Caluci, Emmanuel Mormori, George Levuni and others, had been raised in the spirit of the confraternity institution. The common leadership of the lower, peasant, classes gave the signal after the expulsion of the Venetian regime: "The liberty of our institutions should continue as it did during the Venetian domination. This is the reason why the confraternity institutions, which aimed at the union of all the people with common goals, ideals, relationships and feelings became, from the first moment the thorns in the flesh of British atronage, because, together with the institutions of local self-government, they were the powder-Key beneath the policy which the British wished to impose on the Ionian Islands. From the begining of the <sup>mid-</sup>eighteenth century, however, those more powerful economically, showed a declining interest in the institution. They were busily building churches of their own. Those economically less powerful, whose allegiance was to the "liberal faction" of the nobles continued to be active in church affairs, using the confraternity churches as bases for matters ecclesiastical, social and political, while the other, privately owned churches were dominated by the personalities of their noble patrons and their followers. In the wake of this trend, and after the crucial years of the 'Enlightenment' and its positive results, the confraternity churches gradually became, simply, ordinary parish churches. Union between the Ionian Islands and mainland Greece finally brought about the abolition of the formal statutory procedures and traditions of the confraternity institution.

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 crees concerning the Administration of the Rural Areas during the Regency of V. Stais, 1818; G. Leontsinis, op.cit.

17. K.H.A., Filza di Scrittura..., op.cit.; K.H.A., Proclamations of G. Levuni, French Vice-Consul on Kythera, 1797.