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GEORGE HERACLEUS BASILICOS, A GREEK PRETENDER TO A
BALKAN PRINCIPALITY
(End of the XVI — Beginning of the XVII Century)

The meteoric career of the Greek adventurer Jacob Heraclides Basilicos (+1563), and particularly his spectacular ascent to the Moldavian throne as »despot« (1561—1563)¹ naturally impressed his contemporaries. An impression seems to have been made by the unprecedented ease with which this errant Greek scholar and soldier managed to secure the assistance of both Poles and Habsburgs and to force the then voevod of Moldavia, Alexander Lăpușneanu (1552—1561) out of power. This explains why, immediately after the »despot's« dramatic end, various people began to appear in the royal courts of Europe calling themselves heirs to Basilicos's far from genuine titles and claiming his »throne« in Moldavia or Wallachia.² These pretenders were generally in the same line of business as Jacob Basilicos — that is, they were mercenaries and adventurers of various origins, seeking an outlet for their ambitions through fanciful and grandiose initiatives, which, though they generally had no

¹ E. Legrand, *Deux vies de Jacques Basilicos*, Paris 1889; N. Iorga, *Nouveaux matériaux pour servir à l'histoire de Jacques Basilicos l'Héraclide*, Bucarest 1900, and *Histoire des Roumains et de la romanité orientale*, vol. V, Bucarest 1940, 62—103; C. Marinescu, *Jacques Basilicos 'le despote', prince de Moldavie (1561—1563), écrivain militaire*, and *A propos d'une biographie de Jacques Basilicos l'Héraclide, récemment découverte*, *Mélanges d'Histoire Générale*, II, Cluj 1938, 319—380, 381—422.

² Iorga, *Histoire*, 114ff. Consult also the well documented study of A. Pippidi, *Fables, bagatelles et impertinences. Autour de certaines généalogies byzantines des XVI^e—XVIII^e siècles*, first published in *Etudes Byzantines et Post-byzantines*, 1 (Bucarest 1979), 269—305, and reprinted in a recollection of his works titled *Hommes et idées du Sud-Est européen à l'aube de l'âge moderne*, Bucarest—Paris 1980, 253ff. (in particular pp. 260—262).

substantial outcome, would often bring them some material reward in the end. The phenomenon was also connected, of course, with the general climate prevailing in Europe at the time, and above all in Moldavia, where confusion over the mechanisms of succession to power, together with the disorder arising in the status quo through the interference of a great many external factors (the suzerain Ottomans, the Hungarians, the Habsburgs, the Poles, and the Muscovites), encouraged the bold and nourished the hopes of the ambitious.

In this brief study I naturally do not intend to analyse the phenomenon in detail; I shall confine myself to an account of the activities of just one of the Greeks who were involved in this trend—»John George Heraclius Basilicus«. This character is not completely unknown; we do possess some information about him, chiefly thanks to research by Rumanian historians, who have always been interested in the individuals who sought to play some part in the political affairs of the Danube regions.³ I shall also include the hitherto unexploited evidence of chiefly Spanish sources, in the hope of widening the local and temporal scope of this curious form of activity and of placing it in a more specific historical context.⁴

It is difficult to verify the origins of the presumptive »despot«, for he himself never referred to his native land in his various memoranda. Whenever he mentioned his forebears and relatives he piled so many improbable genealogical titles upon them that it is hard to accept his assertions. For instance, in February 1568, he called upon the evidence of a well-known creator of genealogies and imperial titles, Andrea Angelo, to prove that he was the legitimate son of one John Heraclius Basileus (or Juan Heraclio Basileo, according to the Spanish summary of his credentials), Despot and Prince of the Peloponnese, and of »Despina« Trajana, daughter of Balsamonte, the Duke of Cephalonia and descendant of the emperors of Constantinople!⁵ A few years later, in July 1570, he referred to his

³ For the relevant bibliography cfr. Pippidi, *Hommes et idées*, 41 n. 85, 262 n. 40—41.

⁴ A document from the Spanish Archives of Simancas had been published in the collection of A. Ciorănescu, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor culese din Arhivele din Simancas*, Bucarest 1940, 46—48.

⁵ *Archivo General de Simancas-Sección de Estado*, legajo 1065, doc. nr. 95 (hereafter cited as: A. G. S. — E 1065/95) (a summary of documents and certificates, presented by »Juan Jorge Heraclio, principe de Moldavia y Balachia la Baxa« to the king of Spain in 1573). Information concerning Andrea Angelo and his genealogies we have already from Lorenzo Miniati, *Le glorie cadute dell'antichissima ed augustissima famiglia Comnena...* Venice 1663, 155, 169, and Du Cange, *Familiae Augustae Byzantinae*, Paris 1680, 172—174. Cfr. Ch. Hopf, *Chroniques gréco-romanes inédits ou peu connues*, Berlin 1873, 270, 304ff. *passim*. For a detailed investigation of those accomplishments of the Angelo's family, see Pippidi, *op. cit.*, 258ff. (a genealogical table is inserted between 284—285).

father »Jovanni« as »Re della Servia e Principe del Peloponneso«. Moreover, in 1574, in a letter to Philip II's ambassador in Venice, Diego Guzmán de Silva, he mentioned as one of the Spanish diplomat's protégés his relative (parente) Giovanni Vincenzo, »Disposto della Servia«. ⁶

I do not think that the frequent reference to Serbia in these titles indicates that Heraclius Basilicos was of Serbian descent, but rather that it is probably connected with the relevant genealogical literature of the period (in which, by the way, Andrea Angelo was not uninvolved). ⁸ Likewise, no significance attaches to the references to his other titles, which relate to Moldavia, Wallachia, Albania, and Macedonia. He may have had some obscure links with the Peloponnese, which he brought up quite consistently. If John George Heraclius could be identified with the »Johannes Georgius de Cephalonia« who appeared later (1591—1594) on two occasions contesting the heirs of Andrea Angelo for using the same titles as our own man himself appropriated, ⁹ then we might be able to consider him a Cephalonian. Nevertheless, we can give no credence to the kinship which Andrea Angelo maintained his mother had with the »Duke of Cephalonia« Balsamonte, regardless of this surname's apparent similarity to the well-known (on Zakynthos) Byzantine family Balsamon. ¹⁰

It is probable that his baptismal name John was not genuine either; he probably added it in accordance with the usual practice in the titles of the Wallachian rulers. ¹¹ His surname »Basilicos« is also disputable; it may well have been adjective (since the substantive »Basileus« was also used both for himself and for his father). Indeed, from 1573 onwards he is known consistently as »John George Heraclio« in the sources. ¹² Consequently I consider it somewhat

⁶ A. G. S. — E 1399/71 (undated [probably of July 1570] memorandum despatched to Philip II).

⁷ A. G. S. — E 1511/73 (Rome, April 10, 1574).

⁸ Pippidi, *op. cit.*, pp. 260—261. On the historical links between Serb families and Moldavo-Wallachian voevods cfr. N. Iorga, *Relations entre Serbes et Roumains*, Bucarest 1922, 22ff., 29ff., and Șt. Ștefanescu, *Éléments nobilitaires balkaniques établis en Valachie à la fin du XV^e siècle*, Revue Roumaine d'histoire 8, Bucarest 1969, 891—897.

⁹ Du Cange, *op. cit.*, 173, 174; cfr. Pippidi, *op. cit.*, 263 n. 48.

¹⁰ A. G. S. — E 1065/95. On the Byzantine family of Balsamon see references in D. I. Polemis, *The Doukai*, London 1968, 105.

¹¹ G. Nandriș, *L'origine de lev dans le titre des souverains bulgares et roumains*, Revue des Études Slaves 40, 1964, 159—166. For the use of the title of »despot« by the two great voevods of Wallachia and Moldavia at the end of XIV and the beginning of XV century cfr. V. Al. Georgesco, *L'idée impériale byzantine et les réactions des réalités roumaines (XVI^e—XVIII^e siècle)*, Βυζαντινά 3, 1971, 316—317.

¹² A. G. S. — E 1511/73; E 1584 (S.M.)/289, fol. 8^r—8^v (Naples, April 20, 1604); E 1605, s. n. (Valladolid, February 1606); E 1694, s. n. (Valladolid, January 29, 1605); E 1696, s. n. (Naples, November 3, 1604); E 1706, s. n. (Valladolid, Febr. 1606); E 1978, s. n. (Valladolid, Febr. 11, 1606); *Archives of the Greek Community of Naples, Register n. 4*, fols. 30^v—31^r (Naples, December 27, 1599).

hazardous to relate our own man to contemporaries named Basilicos, quite apart from the fact that this surname was by no means uncommon in the Greek world of the time.¹³ Moreover, in the two cases where I have seen signatures in his own hand the »Basilicos« has been omitted: in the first instance (in misspelt Greek, written in red ink for an imperial effect) in 1574, he signs himself: „Ιωα Γεωργηωσ Δεσπωτας“¹⁴ and in the second (in Italian, in 1604): »Don Joan Georgio Heraclio«. ¹⁵ Also, he lists himself as »Don Georgeus Eracleus« in a record of the Greek community of Naples in 1599.¹⁶

I also consider the surname »Heracleus« to be of doubtful authenticity, though, as we have seen, our Greek adventurer ultimately established it as his own. He probably chose it in order to show his kinship with Jacob Heraclides Basilicos, who was the first to bring the name of the »Homeric« Heraclides. In all probability, George Heracleus (as we shall call him conventionally from now on) was not related to Jacob Basilicos at all. The latter did not include him in his family genealogy in 1558, even though he did include his fraternized private secretary Dimitrios from Thessaloniki.¹⁷ And George's own reference to his relationship with the »despot« of Moldavia are significantly inconsistent. In 1566 his own witnesses affirmed that he was the »despot's« nephew.¹⁸ The following year he himself referred to Jacob as »consobrinum.¹⁹ In 1570 he promoted him to the position of brother (fratello).²⁰ Some thirty years later he

¹³ Cfr. Ioannis Basilicos, to whom one of the last despots of Mistra granted in the middle of the XV century a village in Morea (Sp. P. Lambros, *Κτάλλογος τῶν ἐν ταῖς μοναῖς τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους ἐλληνικῶν κωδικῶν* vol. II, Cambridge 1900, 432). Contemporaries with our adventurer were Giovanni Stefano Basilico and Giovanni-Battista Basilico, who are found among the Neapolitan forces in the naval battle of Lepanto (I. K. Hassiotis, *Οἱ Ἕλληνες στὶς παραμονὲς τῆς ναυμαχίας τῆς Ναυπάκτου 1568—1571*, Thessaloniki 1970, 211, 212). A Greek scribe, George Basilicos „ἐκ τῆς Ἐπταλόφου λενομένης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως“ copist of the *Neapol. gr. II-A-6* of the National Library of Naples in 1569 (M. Vodel — V. Gardthausen, *Die griechischen Schreiber des Mittelalters und der Renaissance*, Leipzig 1909, 71), can probably be identified with a »certo Costantinopolitano greco, ... nominato Giorgio Basilico«, who appeared in 1572—1573 in the Greek and Albanian villages of Calabria (see V. Peri, *Chiesa Romana e »rito« greco*. G. A. Santoro *e la Congregazione dei Greci, 1566—1596*, Brescia 1975, 69 n. 63). Moreover, a possible identification of this Constantinopolitan could be attempted with another George Basilicos, who worked as a scribe of Greek manuscripts in Messina in 1542—1552, but only after the publication of a relevant study announced by Paul Canart, *Les Vaticani Graeci 1487—1962*, 83 n. 15, 149.

¹⁴ A. G. S. — E 1511/73.

¹⁵ A. G. S. — E 1584 (S.M.)/289, f. 8^v.

¹⁶ *Archives of the Greek Community*, loc. cit., f. 30^v.

¹⁷ Legrand, *Deux vies*, 60—61, 62.

¹⁸ A. G. S. — E 1065/95 (»le vieron... yr con el rey, su tío..., y que el rey, su tío, fue muerto«).

¹⁹ Ciorănescu, *op. cit.*, 46.

²⁰ A. G. S. — E 1399/71.

was making no further references to the »despot«, but continued to insist upon his supposed banishment from his »kingdom« by the »tyrant« Alexander (Lăpuşneanu, evidently, though he had died in the meantime), whom he nevertheless referred to as his relation (*su pariente*).²¹

At all events, it seems that he was in some way a colleague of Basilicu's. They were probably in the same line of business: he himself clearly declared himself to be a mercenary when he came to Italy as a »povero cavagliere e soldato sol con la spada e capa«. ²² Allusions to military services proffered by himself and Basilicos together to the Habsburg Maximilian, and to his participation in the events which brought the »despot's« career to a dramatic end at Suceava in 1563, are to be found in a memorandum sent by him in April 1567 from Naples to Maximilian, now Emperor Maximilian II. ²³ It is possible that he was also a scribe of codices (despite his misspelt signature of 1573), a capacity which was not incompatible with his military career, and was also common amongst the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Diaspora Greeks who forged Byzantine documents and created royal genealogies. ²⁴

He first appeared on the historical scene in Italy in 1566. He himself maintained that from the time of the clashes which followed the fall of the »despot« (1563) until Lăpuşneanu's return to power (1564) he had been active in the Danube regions in the service of the emperor. ²⁵ There followed a period of »exile« and his eventual flight to the Italian peninsula. From there he intended to continue his journey as far as the court of Philip II of Spain, from whom he hoped to receive a certain amount of assistance towards his »re-establishment«, ²⁶ most probably some kind of financial subsidy. With these aims in mind he succeeded in winning the confidence of the Spanish ambassador in Genoa, Gómez Suárez de Figueroa, who in August 1566 sent him to his colleague in Rome, Juan de Zúñiga (the *Comendador Mayor* of Castile), with letters of recommendation and fifty scudos for the journey. ²⁷ A month later he was to be found

²¹ A. G. S. — E 1694, s. n. (»dize que después que fue hechado de sus reynos y sus señoríos del tirano Alexandre, su pariente«); cfr. A. G. S. — E 1605, E 1706, E 1978, loc. cit.

²² Pippidi, op. cit., 261.

²³ Ciorănescu, op. cit., 47. Regarding the presence of Greeks (unfortunately anonymous) in the camp of Jacob Basilicos, consult Iorga, *Histoire*, 102; cfr. Marinescu, *A propos d'une biographie*, 412.

²⁴ Similar cases in I. K. Hassiotis, *Μακάριος Θεόδωρος και Νικηφόρος οι Μελισσηνοί*, Thessaloniki 1966, 171—182.

²⁵ Ciorănescu, loc. cit. Concerning the confusion in Moldavia caused by Stefan Tomşa's elimination, who had replaced the executed Basilicos, between August 1563 and March 1564, cfr. Iorga, op. cit., 116 ff.

²⁶ Ciorănescu, p. 48; cfr. Al. Randa, *Pro Republica Christiana. Die Walachei im »langen« Türkenkrieg der katholischen Universalreiche (1593—1606)*, 43, and A. G. S. — E 1399/71.

²⁷ A. G. S. — E 1065/95.

in Bologna, where he obtained further letters of recommendation for Rome.²⁸ In December he was in the Eternal City seeking an audience with the Pope, and it was there that he began to look for ways of making his Moldavian claims convincing. He drummed up four Greek witnesses (an Orthodox priest amongst them), who, on 16 December 1566, declared before the apostolic notary Reynero Borman that they were informed (three directly, the priest by hearsay) that »Juan George Heracleo« had been the Prince of Moldavia and of »Balachia la Baxa«, or at least that he had been accorded the honours due to a prince there, and that he and his uncle, the ruler (*rey*), had been placed together in command of a military force of two thousand horsemen and four or five thousand arquebusiers.²⁹

George Heracleus's next port of call was Naples, which was also to become his permanent place of residence. The first thing he did there was have his credentials ratified by the *Gran Vicaria* of Naples and then he despatched them immediately to the Spanish king.³⁰ At the same time he tried to renew contact with Maximilian II by sending him his special representative, Hieronymus Isaac, in April 1567. The way he succeeded in acquiring powerful friends and patrons in Naples within a very short time is truly impressive. In his memorandum to the emperor he mentioned the support he had received from the Viceroy of Naples D. Pedro Afán de Ribera, the Duke of Alcalá (1559—1572), and his already close friend Nicolò-Antonio Caracciolo, the Marquess of Vico.³¹ These relationships must have led to a certain financial ease, which allowed him not only to travel frequently — and long distances, moreover — but also to make use of representatives and private secretaries.

But his long wait in Naples for an answer from the two Habsburg rulers was most unsatisfactory for our restless adventurer, and eventually he returned to Rome, equipped with various credentials from his friends — amongst them certificates from the Archbishop of Palermo, Ottavio Precone, dated 16 November 1567, and from the Neapolitan »Senes« Giulio Cininge, dated 31 January 1568.³² Once there he again tried to meet Pope Pius V, this time through his new friend and colleague Andrea Angelo. A long time before — from the time of Popes Paul III and Julius III — Angelo had secured not only a salaried position,³³ but also a papal bull recognising his right; as heir to Byzantine imperial titles, to nominate

²⁸ A. G. S. *loc. cit.*

²⁹ A. G. S., *loc. cit.* For calling Jacob Basilicos as a king (ῥήγας) by the Greeks, see M. Crusius, *Turcograecia*, Basel 1584, 429; cfr. Legrand, *Deux vies*, p. xvii, n. 1.

³⁰ A. G. S. — E 1399/71.

³¹ Ciorănescu, *op. cit.*, 48.

³² A. G. S. — E 1065/95.

³³ Fr. Pall, *Di nuovo sulle biografie scanderbegiane del XVI secolo*, *Revue des Études Sud-est européennes* 9, Bucarest 1971, 103.

kings and princes himself.³⁴ And so, with little hesitation, the ambitions of both men were joined — indeed they found themselves to be related, Angelo being Heracleus's »uncle« — and on 6 February in Rome the »processo« was carried out confirming the Greek adventurer's titles and dynastic relations which we mentioned above.

But George Heracleus did not stop there: he embarked upon a long journey from Rome to the empire, intending to travel through Poland to Muscovy. The real aim of the journey is unknown. On his return, he himself declared to Philip II that he had gone to Poland on some (commercial?) business of his own (»per certi nostri negotij«).³⁵ Nevertheless, when he left Rome he took care to take with him a letter of recommendation from the ever-willing Andrea Angelo to the Duke of Muscovy; the letter asked the Russian ruler — whom Angelo as usual made out to be a distant relation — to help John George Heracleus (their mutual nephew!) to recover his »kingdom« in Moldavia and Wallachia.³⁶ It is not out of the question, of course, that George Heracleus intended to try to sound out Ivan IV for possible support in some enterprise along the lines of the previous venture with Jacob Basilicos. But I think it more likely that he simply wanted to secure at least one more source of financial assistance, since his efforts to solicit western rulers had so far brought no results.

Be that as it may, the Greek adventurer never reached Muscovy (I do not know if he even set foot in Poland). Unforeseen mischances, and even more so the trouble caused in north-east Europe by the Russo-Polish conflict, prevented him from completing his journey, and in August 1568 he was shipwrecked during a tempest in the river Elbe. But through his own abilities and the persuasiveness he seems to have been able to exert, he managed to find a new patron — the Duke of Mecklenburg, John Albert (†1576), whose guest he was for a whole year at the Duke's palace at Schwerin. In March 1570, armed with letters of recommendation and a *salvo-conducto* from the German ruler, he went south returning to the Italian peninsula.³⁷ On 1st May he arrived in Augsburg,³⁸ and a month

³⁴ A. G. S. — E 1065/95: »una bulla del Papa Paulo iij, en la qual le concede al Andrea Angelo, que goze de las prehemencias que tenian los emperadores de Constantinopla, como descendiente déellos, y que pueda hazer reyes y principes etc.«

³⁵ A. G. S. — E 1399/71.

³⁶ A. G. S. — E 1065/95.

³⁷ A. G. S., loc. cit.: »Una carta patente en pergamino de Juan Alberto, duque Megapolense, príncipe de Vandalia etc., dada en el su castillode Sverin... Una carta de Juan Alberto... en creencia de Andrés Mikió, su consejero... fecha en Diobanj«, along with a certificate for the shipwreck given by Mark von Mollendorf (Lindberg, August 21, 1568).

³⁸ A. G. S., loc. cit., where a testimony of the Jesuit Gregorio Rosefino »de como (George Heracleus) se confessó el primero día de Mayo y se comulgó el segundo del año de '70«.

later he had recommenced the business of making contact with rulers and diplomats in Italy.

And so he found himself favourably received by the Duke and other high officials in the Genoan Republic, and at the same time he renewed his relations with the Spanish, beginning with the temporary ambassador Guzmán de Silva, whose confidence he gained quite easily. This Spanish diplomat, like Figueroa before him, assured his colleague in Rome, Zúñiga — to whom he sent the Greek adventurer — and also his king, Philip II — to whom he dispatched a memorandum from the »Despot of the Peloponnese and Prince of Moldavia« — that »Juan Gorge Heracleo Basilico« was an upright man »gue trata con llaneza«, and that from the talks they had had together and from his credentials he was certain that this was neither a »burlador« nor a »hombre malicioso«.³⁹

The new factor now in the false Greek despot's favour was undoubtedly the Turko-Venetian war over Cyprus (1571—1573) and the general climate of crusading euphoria prevailing over the Italian peninsula at the time, most of all amongst the Spanish king's lieutenants. Which is why Heracleus wrote to Philip II, mentioning the Christian (Spanish) armada, which, as was by now the general conviction, was soon to set sail for the Greek Levant, and asking permission to take part — under somewhat obscure terms, it is true — in the great operation. He maintained that his own contribution would be to exploit the respect the enslaved Greeks felt towards their old masters (»el loro padroni antichi«) and to stir them up against the Ottomans. He combined this commonplace idea, which was suggested by a good many other Greeks during the period of the Cypriot war, with a rather more concrete plan for the landing on Mani of four to six thousand Spanish soldiers, to be commanded by himself. To appear even more convincing he referred to the fact that in a similar operation, undertaken some time previously by the emperor Charles V (i. e. Andrea Doria's campaign in the Peloponnese in 1532) some »principi greci« had also played a part, amongst them »il Principe di Macedonia« and his own father »Jovanni, Re della Servia et Principe del Peloponneso«.⁴⁰ This was probably unfounded; unless these titles had been assumed later by insignificant Greek or Albanian mercenaries (*stradioti*). Heracleus also argued that if Charles V then had made the most of his »vittoria« (i. e. the occupation of Coron and the shortlived conquests of Patras, Rio, and Antirrio) and used the Greek leaders collaborating with him to stir up the Peloponnesians, he would then manage to liberate the whole of Greece. But this was no new idea, for it was widespread amongst the Greeks of the Diaspora in Italy and particularly among-

³⁹ A. G. S. — E 1399/70 (Guzmán de Silva to Philipp II, Genua, July 19, 1970).

⁴⁰ A. G. S. — E 1399/71.

gust the Greek community of Naples, which was largely composed of refugees from Coron and Patras.⁴¹

The declaration of war over Cyprus gave our Greek adventurer the opportunity to address himself to the Venetians at the same time, offering the same services to them as well. Even before he left Genoa and in the full knowledge of the Spanish ambassador, he sent a letter to the Doge Alvise Mocenigo, written by his secretary Domenico Anselmo on 4 October 1570, asking permission to go to Venice — in order to set out his proposals at first hand — or even to be entrusted with some mission in Greece itself. It is characteristic that in this letter »Ioannes Georgius Heraclius Basilicus« did not only use the titles he had hitherto claimed from Moldavia and Wallachia and the Peloponnese but he added to them his supposed descent from the Roman and Byzantine emperors and also his self-promotion to the position of Grand Magistrate of the Order of St George,⁴² obviously usurping »dignities« which his friend Andrea Angelo — the chief instigator of these spurious titles — had intended for others, as we shall see.

The Venetians permitted the Greek adventurer to present his proposals in person, but they do not seem to have attached much importance to his proffered services, despite the fact that they were prepared to show considerable interest at that time in any proposals that might help the war effort. George Heraclius then moved on to his next target: he went to Rome and through the propitious intervention of Juan de Zúñiga was received by Pope Pius V. We do not know exactly how true was his assertion that the pontiff was particularly well-disposed towards him because he had known his late father, but it is a fact that Pius referred him, with a favourable letter of recommendation, to Don Juan de Austria⁴³ — not in order to get rid of him, but because all proposals for intervention and operations in the south Balkans at that time were referred to the head of the Holy League.

It seems that all these activities on the part of the Greek adventurer took a considerable time, for by the time Don Juan had reached a decision the Christian alliance had collapsed and the Venetian-Turkish peace treaty had been signed (in March 1573). Of course, Heraclius wasted no time: by a special *processo* in Rome on 6 March 1573, he secured a new recognition of his royal titles (once again his chief advocate being Andrea Angelo). Almost simultaneously he also acquired a passport from Don Juan and a letter of recommendation, in order to travel to the Spanish court.⁴⁴ There he finally managed to realise a fundamental ambition: to obtain, on 30 November 1573,

⁴¹ Some indicative cases in Hassiotis, *Oi «Έλληνας, 37ff., 76ff., 125—127.*

⁴² E. Hurmuzaki, *Documente privitoare la istoria Românilor*, vol. viii, Bucarest 1894, pp. 48, 158; *cf.* vol. xi, 1900, 80—81, and Pippidi, *op. cit.*, 41, 262.

⁴³ A. G. S. — E 1511/73.

⁴⁴ A. G. S. — E 1065/95.

Philip II's sanction for a regular salary of twenty-five gold scudos a month from the coffers of the Viceroy of Naples.⁴⁵

One might expect that this financial allowance — which, after all, had been granted him without any evident obligation on his part towards the Spanish authorities — would have persuaded George Heracleus to abandon his fruitless efforts to gain recognition of his titles and other claims. However, the restless Greek persisted. In January 1583 he appeared once more in Rome, flaunting his titles (»Prince of the Morea, Despot of Moldavia, King of Macedonia and Albania« etc., not to mention »Grand Master of the Order of St George«) and seeking their recognition by Pope Gregory XIII. But this time in the Angelo family he found not advocates but opponents: after Andrea Angelo's death in 1581, his nephew and heir Pietro Angelo Flavio seized upon Heracleus's self-promotion to the rank of Grand Master of that apocryphal order (the origins of which were quite unhistorically attributed to the emperor Constantine the Great) as an opportunity to contest him most stubbornly at the Holy See, laying claim himself to both the »rank« of Grand Magistrate and the title of Prince of Macedonia. The confrontation between the two »titulars« took place on 20 and 21 January 1583, with equally disheartening results for both of them.⁴⁶

Heracleus still would not give up. On 10 and 12 May 1584 he sent letters from Naples to the Cardinal of S. Severina, Giulio-Santoro, and the Secred College, referring to his devotion to the Holy See in order to seek vindication of the titles he claimed.⁴⁷ But in vain: in October 1591 Pietro Angelo had his revenge, by obtaining from the Curia an openhanded recognition of the rank of Supreme Magistrate of the Order of St George »contra Johannem Georgium de Cephalonia, qui magni magistri dictae militiae titulum simul usurpaverit«. ⁴⁸ The decision did not, of course, mention all the surnames and other titles of Angelo's opponent. But I think we may be certain that the two people — with the same name of »John George«, in the same contestation, and with the details of the previous dispute against Pietro Angelo (in 1583—84) quite certain — were one and the same. At all events, the same John George soon found himself (in 1593) confronting yet another Angelo, Pietro's son Giovanni-Andrea Angelo Flavio Comneno. This man finally managed not only to have his titles recognised by the Curia (and with additions!) but also to have his rival committed to prison.⁴⁹

And thus Heracleus's way towards this vain goal was finally barred. He was restricted to the salary he received from the Spa-

⁴⁵ A. G. S. — E 1696, s. n. (notary certificates and documents, relating to Philip's royal decree issued at Pardo, al último de noviembre 1573).

⁴⁶ J. Krajcar, *Cardinal Giulio Antonio Santoro and the Christian East*, Rome 1966, 58, 60.

⁴⁷ Pippidi, *Hommes et idées*, 263; cfr. Krajcar, *op. cit.*, 58 n. 66.

⁴⁸ Pippidi, *op. cit.*, 263 n. 48; cfr. Du Cange, *Familiae*, 174.

⁴⁹ Du Cange, *op. cit.*, 174.

niards and to a discreet presence in the Greek community of Naples. Only towards the end of 1599 was he to be found amongst the leaders of the Confraternity, involved in activities aimed at safeguarding the Orthodox element against its inevitable integration with the Italian environment.⁶⁰ All the same, Heracleus never stopped using his old titles (with the significant exception of the fateful title of Grand Magistrate of the Order of St George), at least on the documents he submitted to the Spanish authorities between 1603 and 1606. During this period he was trying to obtain an increase in the allowance which had been ratified in 1573, from twenty-five to fifty gold scudos a month, always on the grounds of his banishment »de sus reynos y señorios« and his inability to maintain his poor family in Naples »conforme a su calidad y nacimiento«. ⁶¹ The Spanish, for their part, eventually approved a small increase of five scudos a month in February 1606, but omitted all the rather aged »despot's« titles from the relevant documents, since they clearly found this ostentation meaningless.⁶²

A brief outline of the career of this Greek adventurer may seem to the modern reader to lack any historical interest. The moral repugnance aroused in the contemporary researcher by the ease with which such adventurers so grossly tampered with the historical past in order to promote their own selfish ambitions must also, no doubt, have a negative influence. Nevertheless, there is something to be said for studying their behaviour, for it offers more than the limited interest usually to be found in individual cases, with which the historian anyway does not always concern himself. The activities of these people were not limited by their social environment — in this particular case, by the microcosm of the Greek Diaspora in the West. Besides, all these endeavours to acquire titles were not aimed at the realisation of political ambitions (like those of Jacob Basilicus), so much as at social distinction in an environment — particularly Spanish—occupied Naples — in which noble lineage was a pre-requisite for entry into the still feudal social hierarchy of the country which was sheltering them. And it is significant that ultimately the Greeks of Naples were integrated into the local environment with those class distinctions brought about by the acceptance or non-acceptance of (usually spurious) deeds and documents attesting to family titles, lost »baronies« and fortunes, etc.⁶³ Despite their counterfeit origins these adventurers expres-

⁶⁰ *Archives of the Greek Community, loc. cit.*

⁶¹ *A. G. S. — E 1694, doc. cit.*

⁶² The relevant »consulta« of the State Council in *A. G. S. — E 1978, doc. cit.*. A draft of the royal decree to the viceroy of Naples, count of Benavente, in *A. G. S. — E 1706, doc. cit.*

⁶³ Cfr. I. K. Hassiotis, »Sull'organizzazione, incorporazione sociale e ideologia politica dei Greci a Napoli«, 'Επιστ. Ἐπετηρίς Φιλοσοφικῆς Σχολῆς Πανεπ. Θεσ/νίκης 20, Thessaloniki 1981, 443.

sed a political ideology, which, by resurrecting long-gone or forgotten Byzantine grandeurs, kept open the indisputably political problem of their homeland after the Ottoman conquest. Their rôle, of course, was not as important as the relevant movements championed by military men, clerics, and scholars, who were active in the European courts or in humanist circles. Nevertheless, it had a certain importance of its own, not only because the activities of both types of people came together in similar aims, but also because these »titulars«, through their supposed dynastic connections with Albanian, Serbian, Bosnian, Dalmatian, and Moldo-Wallachian »despotic« or »imperial« families, promoted a political system — albeit a utopian one — which embraced all or most of the Balkan peoples.

Il^{mo} 15^o mes

E 1511

ARCHIVO GENERAL
DE
SIMANCAS

Poi la mia parente di Venetia accompagnata dalla famoſa^a Carta
di v. s. l. Roma ad il^{mo} 5. partafciadova della c. m. del Re di Spagna
giuſti a ſaluanato? Roma domo dno s. partafciadova per ſua Carta
ſua preſa la mia protectione. et mi fe ſacior li giur^a a ſua Santita
quale hauendo ſucceſo l'animo mio per la Cognofcenza che hanno hauo
to la bona men^a del s. mio padre, mi ſpedi per l' Alt^a del s. Don
Gianni d' Austria ad' ora generale della Lega de l'ra i miei racom^a
Come anchora fe il ſimile per ſua gra dno s. partafciadova che ad
Contento del favor famoſo con ſua Santita volte molto en famio
mi appropo ſua Alt^a quale mi ſuccarane alcuni di l' oratione mande
? Napoli, Marce poi la Condition della guerra per la pace cōche
ſa ha venetiani et il turco, vedendo ſua Alt^a che per all' ora ad i
poſſon far altro? lauante domo io hauonia poſſato ſar qualche ſua
frutto con quei popoli del Peloponnoſo, mi mandò ? Spagna della
E. M. del Re. quale hauendo con la ſolita quodora et l' oratione
Coardoroſo il mio ſua animo al punto di Dio, et della ſua Con
ua. ſi degno darli un ſuocramiento che poſſa dno de Can
lion nel regno di Napoli, doue al patre giacendo al B. ſono per
Andoe et abouandomi di ſolagio con ? Roma Cognofcendo l' obliſto
quand^a che dno a v. s. l. per le merce Cracelloni che poſſo
ſua eſſere ſtato bona Cauſa che habbi hauo dno ſuocramiento
ad poſſando preſentialmente farlo ho voluto in queſta mi ſaciar
le ſua mari et diſparabile quanto ſo e. poſſo del favor ſua
all' f. s. Gio: Vincenti diſpoſo della ſerua mio Parochi quale ſua
? me ſi ſeme molto Oblig^a alla Cortia di v. s. l. alla quale
ſupplico mi mantenghi nella ſua bona gra Copi Com. ha fatto off
paſſato ricordandoli che ſempre li ſua. Stato et ſua con la gra
del B. affon^a gaitore, di Roma il. 9. x. ap^a 1574

affon^a gaitore. Di v. s. l. Il^{mo}

Giò: Heracleo, despota del
Peloponneso, ambasciatore della Molcaua

