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Coping with Extortion on a Local Level: The Case of Hilandar's *Metochion* in Zdravikion (Draviskos, Strymon Region) in the Sixteenth Century

Abstract: In the Ottoman Empire extortion on a local level was a frequent practice and it took diverse forms. The Ottoman documents preserved in the archive of the Monastery of Hilandar (Mount Athos) give us a picture of the ways in which its monks struggled to preserve their privileges and protect their large *metochion* at Zdravikion (about 700 *dönüms*). Their basic tax obligation to the "master of the land" (*sahib-i arz*) was paid annually in a lump sum (*maktu'*) ever since 1481, when sultan Bayezid II exempted them from paying the tithe at the express request of the Wallachian voivode Basarab II Ţepeluş. The annual lump sum of 600 *akçe*s accounted for only a half of the total tax burden – they had been relieved of paying the other half by the sultan himself. This privilege was confirmed by all subsequent sultans, most likely until 1569. Local masters of the land (at first *sipahi*s, then *hass* and finally *vakıf* authorities) persistently and in various ways sought to impose the payment of the tithe. This paper presents different arguments they used in the attempt to extort the payment of the tithe and the monks' firm attitude in defending their rights before the *kadı*'s court and the Imperial *Divan*. Monks were able to prove their rights because they conscientiously kept, sometimes for centuries, all the necessary documents relating to their land possessions, producing them as evidence in court proceedings.

Keywords: Hilandar Monastery, *metochion*, Zdravikion, extortion, sixteenth century

The Ottoman conquest of the Balkans dealt a heavy and irreparable blow to the economy of the monasteries on Mount Athos.[1] However successful the Athonite monasteries may have been, as a community or individually, in adapting to the new situation and improving their condition and, however much the Ottoman state, in the first century of its rule, may have sought to ensure a relatively high level of protection and even privileges, it was obvious that the status of the Christian monasteries and their estates was not the same as it had been under the patronage of Byzantine rulers or regional lords.

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[1] A shorter version of this paper was presented at Workshop II: "Does Monastic Economy Matter? Religious Patterns of Economic Behavior", organized by the Centre for Advanced Study, Sofia, and the Centre for Governance and Culture in Europe, University of St. Gallen, held in Sofia, 9–11 November 2018.

The status of the Athonite monasteries' landholdings beyond Mount Athos changed over the centuries. At first, during the best part of the fifteenth century, the monks held the status of "masters of the land" (*sahib-i arz*). And even when reduced to the status of *re'aya* by the end of the fifteenth century, they kept some privileges, the most important of which was the annual payment of an aggregate lump sum (*maktu'*, *kesim*) instead of the tithe (*'öşr*) and other taxes. Such privileges, enjoyed by the confirmed large estates (*metochia*), lasted until 1568/9 and the so-called "confiscation affair", and in some cases and by exception even after that.[2]

Various questions relating to the modes of monastic land tenure and management on Mount Athos under Ottoman rule have been studied for more than two decades based on the surviving Ottoman sources.[3]

The history of Hilandar's *metochion* in Zdravikion shows the ways in which the monks struggled to preserve their privileges, protect their possessions and put a stop to extortion. The sultan's protection and some privileges depended on the influence of Wallachian *voivode*s too. On a local level, the monks were subjected to extortion mostly by "masters of the land" and in these cases usually sought protection directly from the Porte. Another source of their problems were neighbours who held the same legal status of *re'aya*. When the motivation was sheer self-interest: a crop field, a vineyard, a boundary, the use of water, livestock grazing... it did not matter if the claimants were Muslim or Christian. Such disputes were usually settled at the local *kadı*'s court in Zihne.

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[2] A. Fotić, *Sveta Gora i Hilandar u Osmanskom carstvu (XV–XVII vek)* (Belgrade: Balkanološki institut SANU, Manastir Hilandar, Sveti arhijerejski sinod Srpske pravoslavne crkve, 2000), 42–52; A. Fotić, "Sveta Gora u doba Selima II", *Hilandarski zbornik* 9 (1997), 143–162; J. C. Alexander (Alexandropoulos), "The Lord Giveth and the Lord Taketh Away: Athos and the Confiscation Affair of 1568–1569", *Mount Athos in the 14th–16th Centuries* (*Athonika Symmeikta* 4) (Athens 1997), 154–169.

[3] To mention but a few referent titles: Fotić, *Sveta Gora i Hilandar*, 241–396; A. Fotić, "Kassandra in the Ottoman Documents from Hilandar Monastery (Mount Athos), 16th–17th Centuries", *Balcanica* XL/2009 (2010), 57–73; E. Kolovos, "Chorikoi kai monachoi sten othomanike Chalkidike kata tous 150 kai 160 ai" (PhD thesis, Aristotle University, Thessaloniki, 2000); E. Kolovos, "Negotiating for State Protection: *Çiftlik*-Holding by the Athonite Monasteries (Xeropotamou Monastery, Fifteenth-Sixteenth C.)", in *Frontiers of Ottoman Studies: State, Province, and the West*, vol. II, eds. C. Imber, K. Kiyotaki and Rh. Murphey (London, New York: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 197–209; Ph. Kotzageorgis, *He athonike mone Agiou Paulou kata ten othomanike periodo* (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2002); Ph. Kotzageorgis, "Agioreitika metochia ste Lemno kata ten othomanike periodo", *He exaktinose tou Agiou Orous ston orthodoxo kosmo: Ta metochia. Praktika synedriou*, ed. K. Chrysochoidis (Thessaloniki: Agioreitiki Estia, 2015), 107–119.

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Hilandar was granted an estate in the village of Zdravikion in 1318 according to an agreement between Emperor Andronikos II and King Stefan Uroš II Milutin. The *metochion* was confirmed in 1319 and 1321, obtaining further immunity privileges. It was bounded by estates of the Bishopric of Kaisaropoli, a *metochion* of the Great Lavra (the village of Doxompus), a metochion of Karakallou (Dekalista), a *metochion* of Vatopedi (Zavarnikeia ?), estates of the Modinos family, the Angista river and Lake Strymonas. Greek documents refer to the (ζευγηλατεῖον) Zdravikion *metochion* as either the *Old Zdravikion* or the *Other Zdravikion* to distinguish it from the neighbouring Zdravikion, a large estate of the Modinos family. Most of the Modinos estate, about 3,000 *modioi* or about 281 hectares in area, extended from Hilandar's Old Zdravikion in the south and west to the Angista river in the north, but there were fields on the other side of the river as well. Hilandar acquired their land less by gift and more by several purchases in 1320 and 1321. Its *metochion* in Zdravikion is mentioned two more times, in the general confirmation charters of Emperor Dušan of 1348 and Emperor John Palaiologos of 1351: in the former, still as "the village of Zdravikion both" (село Ждравнка ѡ҃ба), and in the latter, as a single Zdravikion.[4]

From 1351 all trace of Hilandar's *metochion* in Zdravikion is lost until 1481. In those hundred and thirty years that saw many clashes, conquests and the transitional period of Ottoman rule in the Balkans, there is not a single piece of information about it. It may be assumed nonetheless that it continued in existence, though, of course, in a different, adapted form and with considerably smaller incomes. It was one of the so-called "six pieces of land" (*altı pare yerleri*), one of Hilandar's six most important privileged *metochia* from 1481.[5]

Even back in Byzantine times, the name of the village was recorded in several different ways, which suggests its Slavic origin.[6] Ottoman documents usually refer to it as *İzdrāvīk, İzdrāvīḳ* (prosthetic "I"), less frequently as Izdravnik (*İzdrāvnīk*) and, in the mid-sixteenth century, a few times as Big Izdravik (*İzdrāvīk-i Büzürg, Büyük İzdrāvīk*). The village still exists under the

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[4] *Actes de Chilandar* I: *Dès origines à 1319*, Archives de l'Athos XX, éd. diplomatique par M. Živojinović, V. Kravari et Ch. Giros (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1998), 67–68; M. Živojinović, *Istorija Hilandara*, vol. I: *Od osnivanja manastira 1198. do 1335. godine* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1998), 218. The medieval history of the metochion has been studied in detail by M. Živojinović, "Hilandarski metoh Zdravik i njegovi raniji posednici", *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* XX (1981), 85–98.

[5] Hilandar Monastery Archive, Turcica (hereafter HMAT), 7/2 (published in V. Boškov, "Dokumenti Bajazita II u Hilandaru (Sveta Gora)", *Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju* XXXI (1982), 152–153).

[6] Živojinović, "Hilandarski metoh Zdravik", 85.

name of Draviskos, on the left side of the former lake, on one of the tributaries of the Angista.[7]

In Ottoman times Zdravikion was situated in the Edirne (Pasha) *sancak*. In the fifteenth century it belonged territorially and administratively to the *vilayet* of Keşişlik. Towards the end of the century, and from 1491 certainly, it was in the *nahiye* and *kaza* of Zihne until the end of the sixteenth century and probably even for some time afterwards.[8]

According to the imperial survey registers of 1454/5 and 1478/9, Zdravikion was the largest village in the area with more than 150 almost exclusively Christian households. Even though the *metochion* of Hilandar almost certainly existed even then, the imperial registers make no mention of it. In 1454/5 the revenue of the village was divided among four *timar*s. The village belonged to *timar*s for much longer afterwards. About 1535 it formed part of the *timar* of Mustafa, *nişancı* of the Sublime Porte. In early 1539 the estate was still referred to as the *hass* of the *nişancı*. Then it became an imperial *hass*, judging by the firman of 1552. It was at that time (1549–1557) that a large charitable complex, the *vakıf* of sultan Süleyman the Magnificent, was being built in Istanbul. Zdravikion was one of the villages the revenue from which was intended for the maintenance of the famous Süleymaniye mosque and the imperial *'imaret*. In the

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[7] *Topographic map of Greece*, 1:50,000 (Army Geographic Service, 1949–1955); P. Bellier et al., *Paysages de Macédoine, leurs caractères, leur évolution à travers les documents et les récits des voyageurs*, présenté par J. Lefort (Paris: De Boccard, 1986), 260; E. Krüger, *Die Siedlungsnamen Griechisch-Makedoniens nach amtlichen Verzeichnissen und Kartenwerken* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1984), 104, 170, 547, 561; *Turski dokumenti za istorijata na Makedonija. Opširen popisen defter za vakafite vo Paša sandžakot od 1568/69 godina*, t. XI, vol. I, transl., ed. and comment. by D-r A. Stojanovski (Skopje: Državen arhiv na Republika Makedonija, 2008), 257; HMAT, 1/1a, 1/8a, 7/12, 7/14, 7/16, 7/17, 7/18, 11/5, 6/3, 6/7, 6/9, 7/23). There are documents in which its name is severely distorted or some letters are omitted, such as, e.g., *Erzenova*, which used to be the cause of misidentification (HMAT, 7/19, summary in V. Boškov and D. Bojanić, "Sultanske povelje iz manastira Hilandara. Regesta i komentar za period 1512–1601", *Hilandarski zbornik* 8 (1991), 179).

[8] *Turski dokumenti za istorijata na makedonskiot narod. Opširen popisen defter od XV vek*, IV, transl., ed. and comment. by D-r A. Stojanovski (Skopje: Arhiv na Makedonija, 1978), 304–306, 308, 337, 339; H. Lowry, "Changes in Fifteenth-Century Ottoman Peasant Taxation: the Case Study of Radilofo", in *Continuity and Change in Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman Society*, Papers given at a Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks in May 1982, eds. A. Bryer and H. Lowry (Birmingham, England – Washington, USA: Univ. of Birmingham – Dumbarton Oaks, 1986), 36; H. Lowry, "The Fifteenth Century Ottoman *Vilayet-i Keşişlik*: its Location, Population and Taxation", in *Humanist and Scholar. Essays in Honor of Andreas Tietze*, eds. H. W. Lowry and D. Quataert (Istanbul – Washington: The Isis Press – The Institute of Turkish Studies, 1993), 15–26; HMAT, 1/1a, 7/7a, 7/12, 7/15, 6/2, 6/14, 11/5, 12/7/7 etc.

Ottoman documents from Hilandar it is referred to as part of Süleyman's *vakıf* in 1560, 1575 and 1576.[9]

The core estate was termed *çiftlik* and it encompassed three *çift*s. It was an area of land which could be ploughed by three pairs of oxen (*üç çiftleri yürir imiş*). If the average size of a *çiftlik* was between 60 and 150 *dönüm*s, its area should not have exceeded 450 *dönüm*s, but a *hüccet* of 1492 is clear that the estate in Zdravikion was much larger, about 700 *dönüm*s, or a little more than 64 hectares.[10]

In 1492 the *çiftlik* was bounded as follows: on the east – by the *mülk* (private property owned in freehold) of Yaso, son of Belumi (if the reading is correct?) and a ruined church; on the north – by papa Yani's flourmill and the public road; on the west – by the field of Filato (?), son of Sotir, a boundary stone and the fields of Kosta and Dimo; and on the south – by the public road and the Zdravikion village boundary. The *vakıfname* of 1569 describes the boundary in less detail: "on one side, the said village [Zdravikion], on one side, the stream (*mesil-ma*), on one side, the mountain, and on one side, the public road."[11]

Literally speaking, the term *çiftlik* denoted agricultural land. As on the other *çiftlik*s in the Strymon river valley, the most common crop was wheat. The monks of Hilandar, however, did not grow grain crops only. In early 1490, the large *metochion* also included vineyards. Between 1542 and 1567 certainly, and probably even before, there were a vineyard (one or more), a flourmill (at least one) and beehives. At the time of the confiscation and redemption of monastic estates in 1568/9, and from then on until 1596, only vineyards and vegetable gardens (*bagat ve zemin-i bostan*) were recorded in connection with the *çiftlik*. Unlike the imperial survey registers, the *vakıfname* of March 1569 makes no mention of vegetable gardens, and records only one two-*dönüm* vineyard.[12]

In 1569 there were on the *çiftlik* a house (*ev*), a stable, a barn and a hay barn. At least this is what the *vakıfname* tells us. Information about livestock is scarce, but there must have been some, as suggested by the stable and the barn. As early as 1504 there was a shelter for (water) buffalos (*su sığır*), and it is also

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[9] Fotić, *Sveta Gora i Hilandar*, 389–390; *Turski dokumenti za istorijata na makedonskiot narod*, 304–306, 308, 337, 339; *Turski dokumenti za istorijata na Makedonija*, 257; Lowry, "Changes", 36; Lowry, "The Fifteenth Century", 24–25; HMAT, 1/2, 1/1a, 7/7a, 7/19, 1/24, 7/20, 1/26a, 1/29a, 7/23, 7/27, 1/58, 1/60a.

[10] HMAT, 7/12, 7/14, 7/15, 7/16, 7/17, 12/7/7), 1/1a. *Hüccet* HMAT 1/1a was partially used in Boškov, "Dokumenti Bajazita II", 139, 142, 143, 145. Instead of 700 *dönüm*s, as recorded in the *hüccet*, V. Boškov gave the wrong size of 100 *dönüm*s (?!) (p. 142), which was later quoted in the literature (Živojinović, "Hilandarski metoh Zdravik", 96).

[11] HMAT, 1/1a, 11/5.

[12] HMAT, 7/44a, 1/2, 1/29a, 6/2, 6/3, 6/7, 6/9a, 6/14, 7/22, 7/23, 7/34, 12/37/57, 6/8, 6/10, 6/11, 6/12, 11/5; T. C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı, Osmanlı Arşivi, Tahrir Defterleri 723, 1053; Fotić, *Sveta Gora i Hilandar*, 390.

known that in 1537 the monks gave up oxes (*kara sıgır öküz*) in order to restore possession of a vineyard. They raised sheep without having to pay taxes, at least not until 1505.[13]

All the above concerns the large *çiftlik* and whatever came with it. Apart from it, Hilandar owned some other real property within the village boundaries of Zdravikion. First of all, a 40-*dönüm* crop field known as *Şahin-oglu*'s field. In early January 1496 the monks of Hilandar exchanged their 50-*dönüm* field in the village of Patos for it. Before the exchange it had been a freehold property (*mülk*) of the *zaim* Mahmud Bey, son of 'Osman Bey. If it had a common border with Hilandar's large *çiftlik* at all, they were separated by the public road. The road bounded it on three sides, and the boundary marker on the fourth side was a fig tree.[14]

Hilandar did not enlarge the estate further until November 1575. The monks purchased a 12-*dönüm* field, whose boundary was "known to the neighbours", from a certain papa *Drāmetōn* (*?*) for 400 *akçe*s. Of course, they also had to pay the title deed tax (*resm-i ṭapu*) to the *cabi* of the *vakıf*, Mustafa Çelebi.[15] The following year the usufruct of a 3-*dönüm* vegetable garden and the flourmill built by the monk Mardarije was transferred to the monks of Hilandar. The only condition set for them to fulfil by the *mütevelli* Mehmed and Mustafa Çelebi, *emin* of the *mukata'a* of Zihne, in this case probably acting in his capacity as *cabi* of the *vakıf*, was the regular annual payment of a 60-*akçe* for the rent (*mukata'a*) to the *vakıf*.[16]

The obligations of the monks residing on the core *metochion* in Zdravikion to the "master of the land", be it the *sipahi*, the *hass emini* or the *mütevelli* of the *vakıf*, remained unchanged until 1569: instead of the tithe (*bedel-i 'öşür*), they paid the fixed annual lump sum of 600 *akçe*s (*ber vech-i maktu'*). The amount had probably been set as early as 1481 when Wallachian *voivode* Bassarab III Ţepeluş procured some privileges for Hilandar. At his express request, Bayezid II exempted six major Hilandar's *metochia* (*çiftlik*s) from paying the tithe. And that was not all. He cut by half the *maktu'* (annual lump sum) set for those estates. This was a precious privilege because the *maktu'* for most estates had not changed for at least half a century. Hilandar was the first Athonite monastery on behalf of which a Wallachian *voivode* requested that its *metochia*, and all of them, be exempted from paying the tithe (*'öşr*). As for the *maktu'* being cut by half, no source can confirm such a privilege having been granted to any other Athonite

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[13] HMAT, 12/37/57, 6/8, 6/10, 6/11, 6/12, 11/5; 1/8a, 1/25, 7/9; Fotić, *Sveta Gora i Hilandar*, 390–391.

[14] HMAT, 1/4. The document was mentioned in Boškov, "Dokumenti Bajazita II", 142, 145, where the village name Pato was read as Panik.

[15] HMAT, 1/58.

[16] HMAT, 1/60a.

monastery! By the way, tax payment in a fixed lump sum was first mentioned only in a firman of 1503, which is explicit that the amount of 600 *akçe*s is only one half of the due amount, the other half being fully written off. All subsequent sultans, Selim I, Süleyman the Magnificent, at first Selim II as well, confirmed this privilege and did not raise the fixed tax despite a heavy decrease in the value of the *akçe*.[17] After the "confiscation and redemption affair", in January 1569, the payment of taxes in a lump sum was supposed to be abolished and the monks subject to paying the tithe, the *salariye* and all other taxes like the rest of the *re'aya*. Other examples show, however, that this measure was not strictly implemented and that lump-sum tax payment was kept here and there. As far as the *metochion* in Zdravikion is concerned, documents cannot confirm either.

The "masters of the land", ever dissatisfied with such low taxes, kept trying to introduce the tithe, sometimes asking permission from the Porte or from the *kadı* of Zihne, but usually without asking anyone, but instead acting wilfully and enforcing coercion. Owing to firmans and other official documents that the monks of Hilandar kept with care and produced as evidence in court, they always won their case. Sometimes without any difficulty, sometimes only after years of haggling and fighting against intrigues. At least, that is what the surviving documents are telling us.

The earliest surviving document pertaining to one such case is a *hüccet* of 1490. *Sipahi*s complained to the sultan, and he ordered that the case be looked into and that both parties submit evidence. The *kadı*s of Serres and Zihne confirmed the monks' privileges.[18] Two years later the *sipahi*s Koçi and 'Ali worked out a clever way to extort the tithe if not from all then from most of Hilandar's crop fields. In the fundamental and one of the most important fifteenth-century orders of the sultan, the one issued in 1481, privileges had been granted to "six pieces of their land" (*altı pare yerleri*), among which the estate in Zdravikion figured as one piece. The *timar*-holders chose to bypass the facts by interpreting the phrase "one piece of land" as meaning one field. Although well aware that according to the imperial survey register the phrase referred to the whole *çiftlik*, they manipulated the factual situation and wilfully collected the tithe from all fields but one. The case was brought before the Imperial *Divan* but the interested parties kept interpreting the sultan's decree in their own favour. When the monk Grigorije, son of Sava, submitted to the *kadı* court of Zihne evidence for the exact boundary of the *çiftlik* subject to the privileges, the *sipahi*s defended themselves by claiming that they had not known its exact size. A commission composed of the *kadı* of Zihne, *mevlana* Emir Ishak, and four *sipahi*s from near-

[17] HMAT, 1/1a, 1/2, 1/24, 1/26, 1/29a, 6/1, 6/2, 6/3, 6/7, 6/9a, 6/14, 7/2, 7/7a, 7/12, 7/13, 7/14, 7/15, 7/16, 7/22, 7/23), 7/25, 7/27, 7/34, 12/7/7, 12/7/18. The amount of 604 *akçe*s occurs two times, most probably by scribal error (HMAT, 1/26a, 7/17).

[18] HMAT, 1/2; Fotić, *Sveta Gora i Hilandar*, 392.

by villages made an on-site inspection. They finally established that the monks of Hilandar were in the right, and the *kadı* ruled that the *timar*-holders must return the unlawfully collected tithe.[19]

When, in 1506, the monks turned some of their crop fields into vineyards, vegetable gardens and gardens, the *sipahi*s tried to collect the tenth of the produce at least from that land. However, the sultan ruled that the change of land use within the *çiftlik* of Hilandar did not interfere with the prescribed lump sum in any way, and banned the *sipahi*s from extracting more than the amount laid down in the imperial survey register. It seems that the *sipahi*s, motivated by the planting of new vineyards and vegetable gardens, were not ready to give up their intention easily. Thus, in 1513, upon the accession of Selim I, the monks renewed their right to lump sum payment and procured the order forbidding the *sipahi*s to disturb them on that account. They did the same in 1520. In 1529 they managed to obtain a general decree forbidding the *sipahi*s to demand more than prescribed, but it is not clear whether the reason for their action was the *metochion* in Zdravikion or some other of the remaining five *metochia* that enjoyed the same privileges.[20]

The monks had much more trouble coping with the *nişancı* Mustafa after their land within the village boundaries of Zdravikion became his *hass*. In 1535 this prominent court official managed to have the privileges enjoyed by the *metochion* revoked by the Porte and the tithe imposed. But the monks did not give up. A year later, despite the fact that the *nişancı* had the sultan's decree, the monks Nikifor and Zaharije proved the monastery's rights at the *kadı*'s court of Zihne by submitting as evidence the earlier orders (*hükm*s) issued by Bayezid, Selim and Süleyman. Based on the *kadı*'s *hüccet*, they sent representatives to Istanbul together with those of the well-known monastery of Kosaniçe (Panagia Ikosifinissa), whose property rights in Zdravikion had also been injured. Namely, the monastery of Kosaniçe had a *çiftlik*, a vineyard and a church in Zdravikion. The result of their joint efforts was the restoration of the earlier privileges. But the *nişancı*'s men did not give up either: they demanded the tithe again, in 1538 and 1539, but, as it turned out, both times without success.[21]

The troubles with the "masters of the land" extracting more than the prescribed lump sum were the reason that the monks of Hilandar turned to the Porte in 1542, to the *kadı* of Zihne in 1545, and again to the sultan in 1551, 1552, 1560, 1562 and 1567. In all these cases their privileges were confirmed,

[19] HMAT, 1/1a; Fotić, *Sveta Gora i Hilandar*, 392.

[20] HMAT, 12/7/7, 7/12, 7/15, 7/17.

[21] HMAT, 7/19, 1/24, 7/20, 1/26, 1/26a; T. C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı, Osmanlı Arşivi, Tahrir Defterleri 723, 1050; Fotić, *Sveta Gora i Hilandar*, 393.

even when Zdravikion became an imperial *hass*, and then a *vakıf* village of Süleyman the Magnificent's great imperial *vakıf* in Istanbul.[22]

It was not only *sipahi*s that caused the monks troubles. As in any other *metochion* of Hilandar's, it was immediate neighbours that sometimes attempted to grab some of its land. The earliest such case was an encroachment upon the public road that the monks of Hilandar used to fetch water. In 1491 the neighbouring *timar*-holder Tatar Mahmud turned the public road and, as it seems, a part of Hilandar's crop field into his yard. It was only a sultan's order that enabled the monks to reclaim their land and the right to use the road as the common good.[23]

Much later, in 1533, a certain Grdan and a few other Christians cast a covetous eye on some of Hilandar's land. To prevent damage and disturbance, the monks were forced to seek protection from the sultan.[24]

Only a few months later, another dispute arose, this time with the Zdravikion villagers Yani, son of Paraskevo, Paraskevo, son of Dimo, and Kosta, son of Paraskevo. They had planted a 100-dönüm vineyard on a crop field of Hilandar's without permission, using the land unlawfully until January 1534 when the monks forced them to pull out of their land based on the imperial order and the resulting *kadi*'s *hüccet*.[25]

In 1537 the monks were in a dispute with a certain Todor, a villager of Zdravikion, who had been using the monastery's vineyard for twenty years. They were restored to the possession of their vineyard, but as a result of a settlement. They had to give Todor two oxen as compensation for the effort he had put into embedding the poles.[26]

There were also cases of power abuse by specially assigned imperial officials. Thus, in 1589 they demanded, contrary to custom, that the monks hand over grain surpluses, claiming that they were selling them, which was forbidden. The monks kept proving that they used the grain for their own needs only.[27]

The Ottoman documents preserved in the archive of the Hilandar Monastery give us a picture of the ways in which its monks struggled to preserve their privileges and protect their large *metochion* at Zdravikion. This paper presented different arguments they used in the attempt to extort the payment of the tithe and the monks' firm attitude in defending their rights before the *kadi*'s court and the Imperial *Divan*. Monks were able to prove their rights because they consci-

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[22] HMAT, 7/22, 1/29a, 7/25, 7/23, 7/27, 12/7/18, 7/34.

[23] HMAT, 7/5; Fotić, *Sveta Gora i Hilandar*, 393.

[24] HMAT, 7/18.

[25] HMAT, 12/8/21.

[26] HMAT, 1/25; Fotić, *Sveta Gora i Hilandar*, 393.

[27] HMAT, 7/44a.

entiously kept, sometimes for centuries, all the necessary documents relating to their land possessions, producing them as evidence in court proceedings.

The history of Hilandar's *metochion* in Zdravikion can be followed in Ottoman documents continuously from 1481 to 1589. After that year there is no further news about it. It does not figure in an extract from the 1598 imperial survey register and neither do the other Hilandar's *metochia* in the Strymon region, except the one for Serres.[28] The answer to the question as to what happened to Hilandar's *metochia* in the Strymon region will have to wait until new sources come to light.

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28 HMAT, 12/12/15.

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