

Acknowledgements

HISTORY OF ASVESTOHORION

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Chapter 1

LOCATION OF ASVESTOHORION

NORTHEAST of Salonica, and about 10 kilometers from it, is located our hometown, Asvestohorion, spread out like an amphitheater at the feet of two hills which are the lower continuation of Mount Hortiates, whose terrain is rocky with limestone, barren and arid.

Its inhabitants, according to the last census taken a few years ago, totalled 2,600, of which 1,435 were males and 1,225 were females (composed of about 700 families) as opposed to 4,500 to 5,000 inhabitants in previous years.

Chapter 2

SETTLEMENT OF ASVESTOHorION

WE do not know anything definite about the first settlers of Asvestohorion, where they came from, and how they settled and organized the first community which eventually increased in numbers and resulted in the beautiful township of today.

Who were the first settlers and where did they come from? In spite of my numerous attempts and though I consulted with well known scientists and professors of our college here in order to discover written documents about the first settlers and founders of the original community, as well as where they came from, unfortunately I discovered no written sources.

Whatever was transmitted by word of mouth through the years and whatever tradition was saved for us which is also related by chroniclers, is the fact that around Salonica and its environs at that time there was a large forest area with rich plants which covered the hills all around, extending as far as the town of Hortiati, which was completely unsettled.

Here in this tract of land were located the aqueducts of Hortiati from which Salonica obtained its water since ancient times and even to this day, just as does the great road Egnatia.

This road, which began in Durazzo, Albania passed through Monasteri, Edessa, Pella and a section of it reached Salonica. The other road from Pella, parallel with the shores of Lakes St. Basil and Bolbe, passed by the hot springs of Apollonia and the city of Philippi, connected with the road of Kavalla, and from there continued on to Constantinople.

The section of the road from Salonica took off from the northeastern gate of the Seven Towers past the hill of Kara-Tepe, where Asvestohorion is presently located, continued toward the east and through the path opposite Kamaras-Hortiati, and went past and connected with the central artery by the hot springs of Apollonia.

The fact that there was such a path, which was much shorter than the one around the shores of Lakes St. Basil and Bolbe, reaching the central artery of Egnatia is shown by the work of the Professor of History at the University of Salonica, Mr. Ap. Bakalopoulos, entitled "The Garden of Provatas of the County of Salonica" in the year 1949.

In this book it is said that the Emperor of Nicaea, John Batatses, III who set out against Salonica in the year 1242, left with his army from Constantinople, went via Rentine near Lake Bolbe, and through the highway that leads from Hortiati and the present location of Asvestohorion, and arrived and camped on the foothills of Kara-Tepe with Salonica in front of him. Using this position as a jumping-off point, Batatses destroyed and vandalized everything around Salonica.

This road which he followed to Salonica was a natural road and was used by the postal service in its route from Durazzo to Salonica and to Constantinople. At that time there was no organized security around Salonica and many bandits ravaged the countryside. For this reason an order was given by the Sultan which decreed that this area should be cleared and settled. After a long period of clearing in this area between Salonica and Hortiati, there was established at first a small guardhouse, a Koula, as it was called, where the present St. George's Park is located and it was called the "Koula of the Captain"; and with the passing of time, four more similar guardhouses were built, of which not even their ruins remain today.

In these guardhouses the first volunteer guards were

housed in order to guard not only the aqueduct, but also the mail which passed through where Asvestohorion is today located.

The first leader who was placed at the head of the group of guardhouses lived in the Koula of the Captain, and his name was Tartoufos, later called Tartouhas, to whom is related the present family of Tartouhina of our compatriot Christos Siames.

They were placed in this location as it was considered more secure because of its proximity to Salonica.

The town of Hortiates has been there since the Byzantine era as attested to by the present buildings at the entrance to the Town, remnants possibly of monasteries which were destroyed during the various crusades.

Chapter 3

HIRING OF GUARDS FOR THE AQUEDUCTS AND POSTAL SERVICE

SINCE guarding of the district, the cleaning of the aqueducts, and the protection of the passing mail were serious and demanding duties, priority was given to those who were hired as guards. The men chosen were those of proven fighting ability, fearless and experienced fighters, many of whom, it was known, were in the service of different Beys and powerful Turks.

Those who were in the service of the Beys and Turks were paid well, but were required to protect the life and property of their masters as well as to prevent incursions and thefts

which were perpetrated by armed bands and thieves even from the days before the revolution of 1821, as well as by the poor and hungry.

It is also known from history that the armed bands of guerrillas were scattered all over Greece, refusing to lay down their arms and bend down to their masters, preferring freedom instead of servitude to the Turk, who tyrannized them in various ways, tortured them, beat them and, in the end, even killed them.

The guerrillas, forever pursued by the Turks, were constantly in struggles. They fell upon rich Beys and Turks, beat them and stole their property. This was due to their need for self-preservation as well as that of their hungry and suffering countrymen. Often they succeeded in their endeavors because they were helped by the guards of the Turks who, in some cases, were in complete cooperation with them.

Those of whom were caught, some were killed outright, others were exiled to Asia Minor being considered bad characters and dangerous, particularly those from the Peloponnesus. In the ensuing years, such as during the revolution of Orlof in the year 1775, many of the revolutionaries who were caught were sent to Asia Minor where they lived without being guarded as long as their escape was impossible.

They were mountaineers, fearless and experienced fighters, the first to come to this area and be established as guards of the aqueducts and the mails which passed through there. According to tradition, these people came from Mani of the Peloponnesus. Even today there are among us many families which hail from Mani, such as Mourtzinos family, from which comes our fellow townsman, pastor of the Holy Assumption Church of Salonica, Papaevangelos Mourtzinos.

The fighting family of Peter Mourtzinos was from Mani, of which certain members were placed as guards with us from the beginning. It has been historically proven that the

Mourtzinos family lived in Mani because in the memoirs of Kolokotronis is written "In the year 1821 in the month of March, returning from the Ionian Islands, Kolokotronis arrived in historic Mani and went to Mourtzinos Castle where he was entertained and waited for the proper time for the uprising." Here at Mourtzinos Castle he got together with the first group of fighters. From the Mourtzinos family, many of its members settled here as guards. Another family which originated in Mani is the one which lives near the bridge of the Nursery—that of James Moniatses.

Some of the guards who were placed here also came from those Greek fighters who were exiled to Asia Minor where they lived unguarded by the Turks.

To these guards who belonged to the service of the government and were paid as employees, the government gave many privileges in order to encourage them to be trustworthy and law-abiding. Thus these guards were perfectly free, immune, armed, and were excused from taxes and other obligations to the state. Their language was pure Greek, since they were from Greece.

The various experts whom I consulted often recognize absolutely the value of the living vocal tradition, adding many times that in most places in Macedonia there were not found any historic sources or other ancient documents, and that for their history only those passed down through word of mouth helped and were of service in this respect.