

PROTEST 1985

The text cited below is from the Protest of Greek Citizens which was circulated on May 26, 1985, when it was learned that the Özal government (and the municipality of Greater Istanbul) intended to demolish part of the church of St George in the Istanbul suburb known today as Bakırköy. At the time the Protest was officially voiced, this church had the status of a classified monument and was protected by the Treaty of Lausanne, as are all the Orthodox churches of Istanbul and the islands of Imbros and Tenedos.

The church of St George belongs to the Greek Orthodox community of Makrochorion in the Metropolis of Derkoi and occupies a special place in the history of the Greeks of Constantinople. A small seaside town surrounded once by a patchwork of fields and vineyards, Makrochori is situated along the Thracian shore of the Sea of Marmara (also known as the Propontis). Praised by the early fourteenth-century historian Pachymeris as a “shining suburb” of the capital, Makrochori continued until recently to be one of the best known suburbs of Istanbul.

The settlement occupies the site of the Byzantine Hebdomon (a suburb located seven miles to the west of the imperial capital’s center). It was founded in the fourth century by Constantine the Great and was renowned for its palaces and churches, and for the imperial hunts and majestic receptions held at its ceremonial hall, the Magnaura. In its safe anchorages and harbor, fleets both friendly and hostile came to rest. Here Crusader ships, most notably Dandolo’s, found shelter. At the seaside fort Kastelli was the camp of the Theodosian Tagma and on the plain known as the Campus stood the Tribunal, a structure dating to the time of the emperor Valens, where ten Byzantine emperors and two empresses were crowned, and countless dignitaries executed and prisoners massacred. Both John Chrysostom and the fiery Theophilos of Alexandria preached here; emperors declaimed their “speeches from the throne” from Hebdomon’s Tribunal.

The settlement was struck by terrifying earthquakes, invasions and successive destruction at the hands of Avars, Arabs and Bulgarians. It was set ablaze by the Bulgarian khan Krum, razed by the Bulgarian tsar Symeon, and roughly treated by the troops of Michael Palaiologos during

the period of Latin rule. The suburb also preserved from 1025 to 1260 the holy relic of Emperor Basil the Bulgar-slayer in the ruins of the great church of St John the Theologian at Petroskala.

Once famous for its monasteries of St Panteleemon and St Mamas, Hebdomon disappeared from the political stage as the Byzantine court retreated behind the capital city's walls, and Byzantium disintegrated.

*After the capture of Constantinople by the Ottomans, the palaces were left to fall into ruin and later reused as stables. **Only in 1780 did Makron Chorion** (the "Long Village" which stretches from east to west) rise up around the remnants of the Byzantine monastery and the hagiaσμα (holy water shrine) of St Panteleemon. The new settlement would come to be commonly known as Makrochori, the variant Makri-Keuy to Europeans (Makriköy to Turks) until 1923 when the name Bakır-Köy was imposed by the Turkish Republic.*

This is the history of the suburb, now swallowed up by the gigantic Turkish megalopolis. Only one relic of the glorious, centuries-long history of Orthodox Hellenism remains, and that is the church of St George at the center of what was once a flourishing Greek neighborhood.

The first settlers of the modern village were some ten or twelve families from Karpenisi and the nearby Agrapha Mountains (in Central Greece) who, at the end of the eighteenth century, made their new homes here after being driven from their old by brigands under the protection of Ioannina's master, Ali Pasha. The families sought refuge with the Sultan, who was himself at war with their persecutor. They chose the area around the ruined monastery for its fertility and proximity to the sea, and purchased fields from the government. Among the first settlers were Sarantis Yiantsoglou, Ilias Vasolaridis from Kresovo, the Tsikourlides from Postenani, the Zachariadis brothers from Premeti – all from Northern Epirus. The settlers from the area of Karpenisi, led by Konstantis Mallinopoulos of the Agrapha, sent down roots in their new homes as farmers, had children, set their lives in order and prospered. In 1800 Makrochori had an Orthodox guild of vine-growers whose symbols were a hoe and a hand-saw, and could be seen embedded in the walls to the right of the entrance to the church of St George, on the outer wall which may be under demolition as these lines are written.

The church of St George was built in 1832 and inaugurated on the second of May that year by the guild of vine-growers on a plot donated to the community by Sarantis Yiatsoglou, the leading patron and man of property who owned the largest orchard at the heart of the village. The new church was the pride of all Makrochori. St George was considered a local saint in Thrace and was also honored by the Turks, who greeted the arrival of spring on April 23rd, together with the Greek farmers. It was the day on which the government officials first donned their summer clothes.

In 1864 the church was clad in marble by the Chiote Yiannis Tziras and at the same time the bishop's throne and the pulpit were also constructed. In 1894, damage incurred by the great earthquake which shook the capital was repaired and the area behind the altar enlarged. In 1913 the church interior was decorated and in 1933 the courtyard paved, thanks to the president of the church council at that time, D. Lampridis.

This was a period of cultural flowering for the Greek community which had already produced many prominent figures, such as the physician Theodoros Askepdis, whose tomb is the only one still preserved in the church courtyard, Elenkaki Dionysiadou, Yiankos Mallinopoulos, Sokrates Stavridis, later to become metropolitan of Ierissos and the Holy Mountain, the archaeologist Theodoros Makridis, director of the Archaeological Museum of Constantinople (who conducted the excavations of Byzantine Hebdomon and was the first to publish the important findings), the lawyer Nikos Eftychidis, the educator and founder of the capital's Greco-French Lyceum Christos Chatzichristos, the journalist and politician Stylianos Stavroudis, the poet Virginia Polychroni Evangelidou, the demoticist Yiorgos Rodakis, Iraklis Pintzas, Eva Theodoridou, Yiannis Chalkousis and Eleni Chalkousi, leading actress of the Greek National Theater, and Athena Gaitanou Yianniou, directress of the Parthenagogeio (School for Girls).

Conditions today: *We have briefly described what Makrochori was: its setting, its history, its contribution to the history of modern Hellenism in Constantinople. Today [1985] there are few Greek inhabitants. The number of children who graduate from the Orthodox Community School can be counted on two hands. The remnants of the Greek past are disappearing one by one: the great fallen granite column of Theodosius was covered with earth in order to build an outdoor cinema, the Tribunal has disappeared among the apartment buildings, the Campus where the Byzantine army acclaimed its new emperors and carried them aloft on a*

shield has been turned into a racecourse, the domed church of the Prodomos, St John the Baptist, with its marvelous mosaic pavement has disappeared in order to make room for a Turkish secondary school, while the fate of the only Byzantine cemetery excavated by Makridis and preserved undisturbed until 1915 is unknown. In addition, there remains no trace of Kastelli or the Kyklobion and the coastal road has destroyed the Jucundianaes palaces built by Justinian. And all this has happened in a village where a Greek benefactor donated 200 gold pounds in 1880 for the rebuilding in stone of the wooden mosque which had burned down in 1876. The name of Yiankos Tsorbatzis Mallinopoulos still appears engraved on the mosque's fountain. In 1914, another mosque was constructed near the Christian cemeteries with Kostis Lazaris Zafeiriadis from Tatavla as the head stone-mason.

Today [May 26, 1985], we have been informed that part of the church of St George, a unique, centuries-old historic relic, is being demolished in order to widen a sidewalk. This is happening despite the fact that the Turkish authorities themselves have classified it as a historic monument. Yet another religious establishment of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, a church belonging to the Greek minority of Constantinople, is being destroyed despite the “guarantees” and the “protective” articles of the Treaty of Lausanne, which bears the signatures of the great guaranteeing powers.

For the historical record, we should note what has preceded this act: the demolition of the church of St George at Therapeia, the expropriation for planning reasons of the church of Christ in Galata and of St John on the island of Pringipos, the demolition of part of the church of the Virgin Mary on the same island (used as a parking lot by the horse cabbies and donkey drivers). One need not dwell on the long list of churches, schools, houses and cemeteries which were attacked on the night of September 6, 1955. Let us simply recall that six of these churches were razed to the ground and that the flight of the Greek minority peaked at that time, despite the “guarantees” and “protection” of the celebrated Treaty of Lausanne, which is still in force.

Protest

As Greek citizens we raise our voices to avert by all means the interventions of the Turkish authorities at the expense of the Holy Church of St George at Makrochorion (at the municipality of Bakırköy) in Greater Istanbul. This church, which has been intimately associated with the life of the Greek community from 1830 onwards, continues in use, has

already be declared a classified monument, and represents a symbol of the community's brilliant past.

On this occasion we demand that the Greek government take immediate and effective action. We ask that

- a formal protest be made to the Turkish government to request the immediate cessation of all demolition works (and the construction of a partition wall)*
- Turkey be denounced to international organizations, and*
- Greeks of the United States, Canada, Australia and Europe be mobilized.*

Athens, May 26, 1985

The document is followed by an alphabetically-arranged list of the names of the organizations and individuals who signed the protest (903 signatures, including that of the Academy of Athens, between May 26 and June 20, 1985).

See also the 15 photographs (housed in the APAN) which record the demolition in 1985.