
GEORGE TEREZAKIS, *Thessaly in the Later Middle Ages: Social Composition and Spatial Distribution of the Population, 12th–15th Centuries (The Medieval Mediterranean 146)*. Leiden: Brill 2026. 773 pp. – ISBN 978-90-04-73816-4

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Spanning a broad chronological arc from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, GEORGE TEREZAKIS' monograph offers a systematic study of the social composition and spatial distribution of the population of Thessaly during the later Middle Ages. The volume is an English translation of the original Greek edition (2022), itself based on the author's doctoral thesis (2013). It largely preserves the structure of that work, with selective revisions mainly limited to additional footnotes, supplementary material, and a rather modest expansion of the introductory sections.

The study engages with existing scholarship on Byzantine and late Byzantine Thessaly, with particular emphasis on settlement patterns, demographic developments, and economic data; within this framework it also sheds light on the transition to Ottoman rule and the associated demographic shifts. It opens with an extensive *Introduction* (pp. 1–24) and an equally detailed *Historical Overview* (pp. 25–49), followed by a shorter *Overview* (pp. 53–63). The latter section defines the concept of the city, examining Byzantine perceptions of urbanity, and surveying the broader presence of urban centres in the Balkans during the early Ottoman period, with particular reference to Thessaly between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries.

The main body of the work is divided into two parts. The first of these (pp. 64–244), entitled *The Cities of Thessaly: Economic, Political and Religious Administrative Centres*, examines both major and minor urban centres. Each chapter is structured around an Introduction and Historiographical Overview, followed by sections on History and Urban Infrastructure, Economic Typology, and Population: Size and Measurement, as well as Forms and Entities of Economic Exchange. This analysis is supported by extensive demographic tables, references to settlements as recorded in the Ottoman tax register of 1454/55, and a detailed examination of socio-economic development based on the same material, culminating in a series of partial conclusions.

Within this framework, the prosopographical table on Larisa (pp. 70–73) is particularly illustrative. While the author rightly notes the fragmentary nature of the evidence, the identification of several individuals remains uncertain. In a number of cases (e.g. Leo Sgouros and the hieromonk Ignatios), secure links to Larisa as place of residence or origin cannot be established. This issue is itself acknowledged by the author (p. 74), particularly for the fourteenth century, where such associations are often indirect. The reappearance of Ignatios in Table 5 (p. 107), now associated with Western Thessaly, also raises questions regarding consistency in prosopographical classification and suggests the need for clearer criteria of inclusion.

A separate section focuses on the region of Domokos and the Agrafa (pp. 225–232), although the latter belongs primarily to the rural rather than the urban sphere. In this context, a more systematic discussion of possible fiscal or administrative privileges under Ottoman rule might have been expected, particularly in light of later historiographical interpretations of the Agrafa as a zone of relative autonomy. However, the limited engagement with this issue leaves a lacuna in the argument, the fuller exploration of which would have contributed to a more nuanced understanding of Ottoman administrative structures.

Part 1 concludes with *General Observations on the Cities of Thessaly* (pp. 233–244), offering a synthetic assessment of the urban development and demographic trends.

Part 2, entitled *The Villages of Medieval Thessaly (12th–15th Centuries)* (pp. 248–386), shifts the focus to rural settlements organised according to geographical units. The analysis follows a coherent set of themes, including Dispersion of Settlements: Population, Size and Measurement, the Economic Typology of Settlements, and Forms and Entities of Economic Exchange, with particular emphasis on monasteries, followed by conclusions. The discussion is supported by extensive tabular material, including population data (where available based on Byzantine sources), as well as useful information on settlement location, taxation, and economic activities. Particularly valuable is the selective use of anthroponyms from the Ottoman register of 1454/55, which provides rare microhistorical insight.

The volume is completed by an extensive Appendix (pp. 387–674), containing consolidated tables of demographic and economic data and offering a notably expansive resource for those inclined to explore it in full, as well as by a substantial bibliography (pp. 675–736) and a detailed index of personal names (anthroponyms), toponyms, and researchers (pp. 737–773).

These features significantly enhance the book's usefulness.

Certain aspects of the study would have benefited from further refinement. At times, the analytical density appears disproportionate, and a more concise and tightly structured presentation might have enhanced the overall clarity of the monograph. The bibliography also suggests a somewhat limited engagement with recent scholarship. In particular, the studies of KOTZAGEORGIS on the early Ottoman presence in the region, drawing on the Ottoman archives of the Monastery of Great Meteoron,¹ are not incorporated, notwithstanding their clear relevance. Similarly, reliance on earlier editions of sources (by HEUZEY, LAMBROS, ASTRUC, as well as MIKLOSICH and MÜLLER in *Acta et Diplomata*) is not always fully balanced by recourse to more recent critical editions, such as those by SOFIANOS and DEMETRAKOPOULOS. Further issues include a limited treatment of abandoned lands in the fourteenth century and of the role of the plague in settlement abandonment and demographic decline.² References to the Jewish presence in Thessaly likewise remain rather fragmentary; the case of the Jew (A)Namer, attested in the relevant documents of the Monastery of Lykousada, could have served as a useful example.

At a more detailed level, certain interpretations invite reconsideration. The identification of the nun Hypomonē, wife of the *sebastokratōr* John Doukas and *ktētor* of the Monastery of Lykousada, as being of Vlach origin (pp. 35, 88, 91–92) appears to reproduce an earlier scholarly assumption not securely grounded in contemporary sources such as George Pachymeres. Likewise, the reference to supposed remains of a Byzantine church in Trikala (pp. 96–97) lacks clear archaeological substantiation, as no systematic excavation has been undertaken in the town's fortified acropolis, and the identification of relevant ecclesiastical sites remains, for the time being, uncertain. On p. 121, the interpretation of the bishopric of Stagoi's holdings appears to conflate territorial boundaries with property, as the cited toponyms more plausibly form part of its *horothesia*, that is, reference points marking the delimitation of its boundaries.

1. PHOKION P. KOTZAGEORGIS, Επανεκτιμώντας την πρώιμη οθωμανική παλαιογραφία και διπλωματική. Εννέα έγγραφα από το αρχείο της Ιεράς Μονής Μεγάλου Μετεώρου (1394–1434) (Επιστημονικά δημοσιεύματα 2). Meteora 2022.

2. Cf. the earlier studies by HÉLÈNE ANTONIADIS-BIBICOU, Villages désertés en Grèce. Un bilan provisoire. In : Villages désertés et histoire économique, XI^e-XVIII^e siècle (Les hommes et la terre 11). Paris 1965, pp. 343–417 ; EADEM, Mouvement de la population et villages désertés : quelques remarques de méthode. In : Actes du XV^e Congrès International d'Études Byzantines, vol. 4. Athens 1980, pp. 19–27.

Similarly, the prosopographical material in Table 5 (pp. 101–107), presenting 85 individuals associated with the region of Trikala from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, calls for a measure of caution. In particular, Voulpavos and Pegonites are recorded as landowners in 1340, whereas the documentary evidence associates their names with *stasia*, in other words, lands already abandoned by that time. Likewise, Gymnos, mentioned for the year 1382, appears to have been already deceased, as the synodical document of Neilos, metropolitan of Larisa, refers to his daughter. Finally, the absence from the list of John Migiaris, a figure associated with Western Thessaly, is perhaps noteworthy. He was a significant public figure, responsible for a cadastral survey (*apographikē katastasis*) under the Sebastokrator Stephanos Gabrielopoulos and, possibly earlier, under the Sebastokrator John II Doukas. With regard to Pegonites, the author further notes: ‘A dispute between Michalakes and Pegonites reveals an attempt to increase agricultural production by expanding tillable land. Records show that Michalakes had encroached on a piece of untilled land belonging to Pegonites, carrying out certain improvements to turn it into arable land’ (p. 108). However, a closer reading of the relevant document would seem to point to a somewhat different interpretation: Pegonites appears to have been already deceased at the time of Michalakes’ action, who is in fact encroaching upon the latter’s *stasion*, described as *chōraphion dēmosiakon*, i.e. public holding. The land in question had, following Pegonites’ death, already become overgrown, wooded, and inaccessible (ἄλσώδης, λογγώδης καὶ ἄβατος), a condition that rather alters the interpretative framework of the case.

An apparent oversight may account for the incorrect dating of the Synod of Zavlantia concerning the Monastery of Porta Panagia, variously placed either in 1382 (pp. 98 n. 179, 99, 140, 152) or in 1381/82 (pp. 43, 105–106, 109 n. 218, 267 n. 48), although the author is evidently aware that it took place in November 1381. A similar inconsistency may be observed in the use of the term Wallachia in place of Vlachia (pp. 127, 168), even though elsewhere the author correctly refers to medieval Thessaly as Vlachia or Great Vlachia (pp. 27, 36, 38, 40, 45, 47, 336).

The reader may also wish to approach with a certain degree of caution the personal names cited by the author (pp. 133–134, n. 57), drawn from codices of the monasteries of Great Meteoron (MSS 556, 559, 593, 596) and Varlaam (MS 37), as it is not entirely clear that these manuscripts were copied in the region, nor that the individuals recorded therein can be securely connected to the Stagoi area. Given the relative ease with which

manuscripts circulated across regions, a more cautious approach to local attribution would seem advisable. The question of the settlement of Serbs in Thessaly, and more specifically the number of such settlers as presented by TEREZAKIS (p. 149), requires similar caution, as there is insufficient evidence to substantiate significant population movements into the region following the Serbian conquest, with the exception, of course, of certain officials in the service of Stefan Dušan or Symeon Uroš, together with their families.

In the same context, the author refers (p. 143) to the Serbian-derived taxes *pozovitsa* and *preselitza*, attested in the *chrysobull* of Stefan Dušan for the Monastery of Lykousada (1348), without, however, offering any analysis or interpretative discussion, despite the fact that relevant scholarship has already drawn attention to their significance.³ Related considerations apply to interpretations concerning monastic jurisdiction, particularly in relation to Lykousada and the abbot, archimandrite, and protosynkellos Euthymios (p. 149), which may be refined by closer attention to the specific context of patriarchal *stavropegia*, rather than a more generalised conception of regional authority. Similarly, the supposed rivalry between the monasteries of Porta Panagia and Dousiko (pp. 275–276) appears somewhat overstated in light of the broader evidence, which points instead to a more complex and at times complementary relationship.⁴

Topographical identification also presents occasional difficulties, as certain settlements appear to have been mislocated, with implications for broader economic interpretations. A case in point is that of the metochion of Kalogeriane and the related toponyms of Voxista, Klinovista, the site of Goulenos, and Hyaleas, which lie in the lowland zone east of Trikala, in relative proximity to the city, rather than in the mountainous massif some fifty kilometres or more to the west, as the author argues (pp. 107, 254, 271).

Occasional oversights are to be expected in a work of such extensive chronological and thematic scope but do not significantly diminish its overall value. TEREZAKIS' monograph is a well-documented and methodologically consistent study that contributes to the discussion on continuity and

3. See ANASTASIA KONTOGIANNOPOULOU, Φορολογικές πληροφορίες για τη Θεσσαλία από προνομιακά έγγραφα του 13ου και 14ου αιώνα. Βυζαντικά 29 (2010) pp. 163–177, at 175.

4. For the issue, see NIKOLAOS OIKONOMIDES' view as reported in PHOTIOS DEMETRAKOPOULOS, Τὸ σιγίλλιο τοῦ πατριάρχου Ἀντωνίου Δ' (1393) γιὰ τὴ Μονὴ τοῦ Σωτήρος τῶν Μεγάλων Πυλῶν. Συμβολὴ στὴ διπλωματικὴ καὶ στὰ τοπωνυμικὰ τῆς Δυτ. Θεσσαλίας. Τρικαλινά 19 (1999) pp. 31–52, at 37–38.

change in late medieval and early Ottoman Thessaly. It makes a significant contribution to scholarship. Of particular significance is its exploitation of material from the early Ottoman period, and especially the first Ottoman census, thereby substantially advancing and broadening the relevant field of research.

Keywords

medieval and Ottoman Thessaly