

HISTORICAL DIALOGUE ON CHAM ISSUES

Background

The Program on Peace-building and Rights at Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights organized a "Dialogue on Cham Issues." Participants identified areas of agreement as well as disagreement at their first meeting (October 19, 2013). At the second meeting, which was co-sponsored by the Harriman Institute, scholars from Albania and Greece discussed events in greater depth (February 28, 2014). David L. Phillips, who directs the Program on Peace-building and Rights at Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights, and Alexander Cooley, a Professor of Political Science at Barnard College and Deputy Director for Social Sciences Programming at the Harriman Institute, co-chaired the session. The meeting included scholars and civil society members from both communities.

Statement

Professor Lambros Baltsiotis (Adjunct Lecturer, Research Centre for Minority Groups - Athens, Panteion University) and Professor Pellumb Xhufi (Professor of History, Albania Institute of History) participated in the second meeting. The organizers requested them to prepare scholarly perspectives of about 1,000 words commenting on the following statement:

"Cham-Albanians suffered internment beginning in 1940, killings in 1944-45, and expulsion in 1945. Thousands of Cham-Albanians were killed in 1944 and 1945. These events occurred in a context and cycle of violence. It is alleged that Cham-Albanians were collaborators with the fascist and Nazi governments of Italy and Germany during World War II."

The papers are presented in alphabetical order of the authors' names without comment or editorial intervention.

Response Paper by Lambros Baltsiotis (Panteion University)

Muslim-Chams inhabited the western lowlands of Epirus, nowadays named district of Thesprotia. The community suffered various forms of discriminations, mainly through administrative harassment and violent acts aimed to compel them to participate in the Greco-Turkish exchange of populations. During the second half of 1920's illegal land expropriations carried out by the state affected not only the *ciflik beys* (large landowners) but also mid and small size land owners who constituted the majority of the community, at least those residing in many parts of Chamouria.¹ According to our findings these were the circumstances that led to a gradual

¹ See Y. Glavinias, *Muslim populations in Greece (1912-1923)*. [*Μουσουλμανικοί πληθυσμοί στην Ελλάδα 1912-1923*]. Από την ενσωμάτωση στην ανταλλαγή], Stamoulis, Thessaloniki, 2013, K. Tsiteslikis, *Old and New Islam in*

transformation of a southern Balkan Muslim community to a national minority, a process which more often encountered in the northern part of the region.²

The rift between the two, formerly co-existing, religious communities of the region was already in effect since the mid 1920's. But the cycle of blood and revenge was triggered during the Second World War. When Italy invaded Greece some armed Muslim Chams committed, to a limited extent, atrocities against the Christian population. Their nature included a number of killings and lootings.³ At the end of November of 1941, when the Italian army withdrew, much extended acts of violence occurred this time against the Muslim Chams. Given the fact that many of the Muslim adult males were in exile, Christians committed murders, lootings and rapes under the tolerance, if not the support, of local authorities.⁴

The first period of the Italian Occupation runs without any major incidents⁵. However, beginning in February 1942, Muslim Chams paramilitary forces carried out a number of atrocities, including murders.⁶ The situation worsened in 1943 when Cham forces were organized and Greek guerillas prevailed in the greater mountainous part of Thesprotia. The Cham forces were mainly carrying out joined operations with the Italian army.⁷ Thus, some of these atrocities occurred during these joint operations. In the year 1943, the northeastern part of Thesprotia and large parts of the mountainous areas at the east, were in large part or even completely controlled by the Greek resistance guerilla forces, either right wing or left wing ones.⁸ In the most part of the lowlands of Thesprotia the control of the roads, paths and of citizens' movement in general was in the hands of Muslim Chams. This was another important factor that added animosity in the relations between the two groups. In the majority of the settlements a "choice" of a side in the conflict was necessary in order to survive, and this choice could not be based on anything

Greece. From Historical Minorities to Immigrant Newcomers, M. Nijhoff, Leiden-Boston, 2012, G. Kretsi, "From Landholding to Landlessness. The Relationship between the Property and Legal Status of the Cham Muslim Albanians", *JGKS* 5, 2003, pp. 125-138.

² L. Baltiotis, « The Muslim Chams of Northwestern Greece », *European Journal of Turkish Studies* [En ligne], 12 | 2011, mis en ligne le 13 décembre 2011, Consulté le 20 mars 2014. URL: <http://ejts.revues.org/4444>. For further reading, quite revealing are the archives of the LoN during the exchange of populations dispute, although obviously every document has to be examined in a certain context including Greek Authorities' extortions to certain persons (see i.e. dossier 31152, R84/1924)/

³ Giannis Sarras, *Memories of a tragic period [Μνήμες της τραγικής περιόδου] 1936-1945*, Vasilopoulos, Athens, 2001, pp. 44-45.

⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 51-53. In H. Minga's, *Çamëria, vështrim historik*, Tirana, 2006, p. 150, c. 350 murders are referred to according to an Albanian document. Unfortunately, as it is usual in these works, besides archival classification, no other information on the document is provided, so its accuracy or validity could be supported. On the contrary I. Hoxha, *Viset kombëtare shqiptare në shtetin grek*, Tirana, 2000, pp. 462-497, counting on the basis of the name and place of origin traces less than 70 victims.

⁵ There are some murders of Christians reported in the end of 1941 in three villages.

⁶ This is related with a light food crisis that occurred on that period.

⁷ From summer 1943 with the German forces.

⁸ It is quite important for the comprehension of the situation during that period to keep in mind that in fact the Muslim Cham and Christian armed men, independently of their participation in organized (para) military groups, were involved in personal vendettas, family and village land disputes and power control issues. G. Margaritis emphasizes the fact of this never ending process of retaliations between the two communities and its escalation occurred in 1942 which resulted in the confrontation between the two communities (G. Margaritis, *Chams-Jews: Unwelcomed co-patriots. Data for the annihilation of Greece's minorities [Τσάμηδες-Εβραίοι: Ανεπιθύμητοι συμπατριώτες. Στοιχεία για την καταστροφή των μειονοτήτων της Ελλάδας]*, Vivliorama, Athens, 2005, pp. 153-163.

else but on religious affiliation. However land issue remained the main dispute between the two communities.

Certainly there were parts of the Muslim Cham elite who were consciously guided the community in a consistent collaboration with the Italians. Independent of the participation of the Muslim population in the fascist party that was founded in the region,⁹ or the spread of irredentism, conditions were such that favored a closer relation of the Muslims with the Axis Forces.¹⁰ Of course “collaboration” was not a Cham peculiarity. The alliances of the forces in the area may be conceptualized as a part of the wider phenomenon of WWII, when many nations, ethnic groups and minorities from all over Europe collaborated with Axis, including areas from Bretagne to Ukraine. If there is a distinction to be made is that most of the individuals that took part in these political and military alliances originated from the impoverished southern lands which had none or limited connection with Albanian nationalism.¹¹ On the contrary, individuals and communities who were connected with Albanian nationalism during the Interwar period were turned to the left wing EAM organization and its military branch ELAS.¹²

In the summer of 1943, a couple of months before the Italian surrender in September, Germans took control of the area. This is the period that significant mass atrocities were carried out against the Christian population, most of them in the Fanari (Frar) region, inhabited by Christian Chams.¹³ These were joint German-Cham operations in the area, mostly aimed in assuring food supplies, but resulting in many deaths and extended looting, and in general widespread violence against Christians although a big part of the population and the guerillas had abandoned the area. Most of the killings involving Christian civilians occurred in 1943. Nevertheless, murders, lootings and rapes were not unknown as instruments of conflict resolution between groups, as they were present in Chamouria prior to this war period. Based on indication and not on precise

⁹ Founded in Paramythia in June 1941 (N. Y. Ziangos, *English imperialism and national resistance [Αγγλικός ιμπεριαλισμός και Εθνική Αντίσταση] 1940-1945*, Athens, vol. 1 (1978), pp. 140-141).

¹⁰ Many details for the collaboration of the Muslim Chams with the Axis Forces and the operations they participated can be found in H. F. Meyer. *Blutiges Edelweiß: Die 1. Gebirgs-division im zweiten Weltkrieg*, Ch. Links, 2008. The *Augustus* operation in Fanari is presented extensively. The book collects a large number of German documents, many of them lying in National Archives in Washington DC. For the collaboration, despite the pro-Greek perception, see also the work based on archives of E. Manda, *The Muslim Chams of Epirus [Οι Μουσουλμάνοι Τσάμηδες της Ηπείρου] (1923-2000)*, IMXA, Thessaloniki, 2004. The ELAS colonel and dedicated communist Nikos Ziangos, in his books describes as witness the collaboration issue, the same time he records in detail the atrocities and the massacres against the Muslim Chams for the first time in Greece (N. Ziangos, ..., *op. cit.*, vol. 1 (1978), vol. 2 (1978), vol. 3 (1980), vol. 4 (1980)).

¹¹ Only three out of the 34 members of the notorious “Council” [Këshilli] comes from Filiati region (I. Hoxha, ..., *op.cit.*, p.328). It is quite indicative also to follow the confirmed armed Muslim Cham deaths: I. Hoxha presents a list of dead in action members of the militia. Most of them are coming from Paramythia and the southern part of Thesprotia, with the exception of the villages of Pighadoulia and Elaia (Galpaki) (*ibid*, pp. 449-462).

¹² This is the case of the most settlements in Filiati region, were the landless Muslim farmers were very few and the small businessmen were relatively numerous (see L. Baltiotis, ..., *op.cit.*). Nationalist Albanians, mostly social democrats did not join the pro-fascists, on the contrary, at least those from Filiati region turned to the left and joined EAM/ELAS (for a list of names that, inter alia, lead us to this conclusion, see N. Ziangos, ..., *op. cit.* vol. 1, pp. 137-139, vol. 2, pp. 15-18).

¹³ Christian Chams of Western Epirus, that means Albanian speaking Orthodox Christians, had already identified themselves with the Greek state and/or nation by early 20th century. For a discussion on the reasons of this process see L. Baltiotis, ..., *op. cit.*.

research data, we ascertain that more than 300 Christian civilians were murdered by the Muslim Cham militia or other armed groups.¹⁴

Several months later, when the right wing guerillas of EDES took control of the Thesprotia plains, there were full-scale atrocities committed by them, most of which consisted in murders against Muslim civilians. This wave of atrocities which were carried out was not spontaneous, since they were not singular events. These extermination acts, initiated the summer of 1944, they were repeated in the spring of 1944 and once again in May 1945 when a number of Muslim Chams returned to Greece. The worst massacre that must be noted is that of Paramythia town, where, in the end of June 1944, more than 400 civilians were massacred¹⁵ by EDES forces, by Christian armed groups and by individual persons. The brutality of this massacre was so great that included many babies.¹⁶ There are many “numbers” of the dead persons provided by Albanian writers. However most of them are exaggerating the number of deaths or in them they are including the deaths of armed men or even persons who died after leaving their homes in Epirus and their death was due to the hard conditions they encountered in Albania as refugees.¹⁷ It should be understood that the real number of deaths is quite controversial and the whole debate about it constitutes a par excellence example of the manipulation that may ensue on the basis of it. According to a list, whereby the names of the dead and their place of origin were registered, less than 1200 civilian victims had been identified for the period 1944-1945.¹⁸ During our field work in the area we were able to cross-check and confirm the given numbers for a dozen of villages which are in the middle of the plains.

We note that US and most of all British liaison officers initially turned a blind eye to the atrocities committed, indirectly supported them,¹⁹ or even openly encouraged them.²⁰

¹⁴ A list according to the name and to the corresponding place of origin is cited by I. Archimandritis, *Grief and tears of Thesprotia [Οδύνη και δάκρυα της Θεσπρωτίας]*, Georgiadis, not dated, c. 1955, pp. 161-225, contains 430-450 persons. In most published works the dead of that period are counted to amount at least 800. A similar list counted 780 dead persons, see *ibid*, pp. 225-230. But even N. Ziangos who criticises the lists as full of lies and (Greek) nationalism, in his list counts more than 350 deaths (N. Ziangos, ..., *op. cit.*, pp. 243-269).

¹⁵ Most of them were originating from the town. In a 1974 manuscript of an ex-EDES officer which was published in 2009, the author makes the reference of 247 murders during the first day, apart from the (official) executions (V. Pavlidis, *Albanian Chams of Paramythia region and the Occupation period [Αλβανοτσάμηδες της περιοχής παραμυθιάς και η Κατοχή]*, [Ilion, 2009], p. 140), indicating in our point of view a recording that might had taken place.

¹⁶ According to N. Ziangos, ..., *op.cit.*, vol. 1, p. 259, in one house 30 kids under the age of three were massacred.

¹⁷ Others count twice the killed persons, one time in their place of origin and once more in their place of death.

¹⁸ I. Hoxha, ..., *op.cit.*, pp. 462-497. Actually the list gives us c. 1100 victims. Unfortunately a book published in 2009 with material from the Albanian Archives is not helpful as it includes all the usual malfunctions of non academic work plus those misrepresentations which very often are observed to occur by certain Albanian academics. The presentation of the archival material, the citations, etc., are sometimes misleading and confusing (see K. Dervishi (ed. and comp.), *Masakra në Çamëri*, “55”, Tirana, 2009). According to the writer there are documents counting the killings of 1944-1945 to 804, 1620, 506, 2100, 208 (in Paramythia region) persons (*ibid*, pp. 36-37, 74-75, 217, 222, 232). The heavy losses caused by the expulsion and the conditions of living in Albania are also presented in the book.

¹⁹ See the letter to the Chams militia they co sign in 28th of July 1944 as sited by I. Archimandritis, ..., *op.cit.*, pp. 128-129. We didn't check further for the authenticity of the ultimatum.

²⁰ Colonel Chris Woodhouse, head of the British Military Mission in Greece reported that: "Encouraged by the Allied Mission I headed, Zervas drove the Chams out of their homes in 1944" (cited by M. Vickers, *The Cham issue. Albanian national and property claims in Greece*, CSRC (G109), 2002, p. 6. Then same officer wrote back in 1945 in

Many Albanian writers, with or without an academic background on the subject, are trying to minimize the significance of the collaboration of the rather big majority of the Muslim population,²¹ which of course was not uniform and was expressed in many different ways, by magnifying their participation in the left wing army of ELAS. This is also true for a part of the left wing discourse in Greece in regards to what actually happened there. The rationale of this story is based on the existence of the 4th battalion of the 15th regiment of ELAS, which was named “Turco-Albanian partisans.”²² In fact many of the soldiers of this “mixed” as it was called battalion were Christians²³ and some Muslims were not originating from Greece but from the Muslim Cham villages of Albania and other areas.²⁴ Furthermore, it must be emphasized that this battalion was active for a very limited period and undertook part only in a couple of skirmishes.²⁵ These tactics are aiming to weaken the “collaboration stigma.”

The conflicts in which different ethnic groups are involved has been examined under the auspices of the model in which augmented ethnic violence is conceived to be the result of not only personal conflicts, but also of social prejudices and stereotypes in addition to conflicts in central political scene. These lead to mass clashes. We consider that there are not specific ethnic

an official note that “The Chams deserved what they got but Zervas’ methods were pretty bad” (PRP/FO, 371/48094).

²¹ For different attitudes adopted by Muslim Chams see the works of Sarras, Ziangos and Georgia Kretsi, “The “Secret” past of the Greek-Albanian Borderlands. Cham Muslims Albanians: Perspectives on a Conflict over Historical Accountability and Current Rights”, *Ethnologia Balkanica*, vol. 6, 2002, pp. 171-195

²² Meaning “Muslim Albanian partisans” («Τουρκαλβανοί παρτιζάνοι»). In most of EAM and ELAS brochures though, published at that period for the purpose of defending the rights of minorities in Greece, the term used is simply “Arvanites”.

²³ See G. Margaritis, ..., *op. cit.*, p. 166-167.

²⁴ Usually no more of a dozen names are cited, i.e. B. Meta, *Tragjedia came*, Idrizi, Tirana, 2010, p. 63-65. H. Minga, ..., *op. cit.*, p. 155, cites 15 names, all of them having the characteristic form of the Filiati region. These names are approximately repeated in the late 40s communist organization of the Chams in Albania (B. Meta, *Tensioni Greko-Shqiptar 1939-1949*, Globus R., Tirana, 2007, p. 149). Quite common is the confusion of this unit with other units of the left wing of Albanian resistance army units, such as the “Çamëria”. It seems though that the high numbers of Muslim Chams that fought in the ranks of ELAS, as high as 700 persons, are reproduced by a single report of the British “Colonel Palmer” (April 1945) (B. Meta, ..., *op. cit.*, p. 90). In fact the report of Lieutenant Colonel C.A.S. Palmer refers to the following: “*The Albanian Chamorians claim to have had a battalion of 400 to 700 fighting with ELAS. This was probably so but their efforts are likely to have been directed more against EDES than against Germans*” (PRO/FO, 371/48094). Muharrem Demi, a quasi military unit leader, avoids providing any numbers (H. Minga, ..., *op. cit.*, pp. 166-168). The number of 700 persons, in combination with the 2000 soldiers of the Cham armed collaborators in Palmer’s report (B. Meta, *Tensioni*..., *op. cit.*, pp. 13-138) is widely used. [Once again the reports is as following: “Force 399 estimated the number at 2,000 to 3,000”]. E. Manda counts 20 Muslims in the first period, plus 40 more enlisted in the battalion later, according to the Greek Army Archives (E. Manda, ..., *op. cit.*, pp. 158, 189). The battalion, according to a local writer consisted of, in total, 300 men [this is the usual number for an ELAS battalions], “most of them Muslim Chams from the Filiati and Gropa [=a region at the south west]” (V. Krapstis, *Muslim Chams of Thesprotia [Οι Μουσουλμάνοι Τσάμηδες της Θεσπρωτίας]*, Athens, 1986, p. 75). An ex-EDES officer gives the numbers of 200 or “more than 100” Muslim Cham fighters in the battalion, most of them originating from Filiati region (V. Pavlidis, ..., *op. cit.*, pp. 122, 137, 177) During our own field work together with others colleagues from Panteion University, we found that the elderly ELAS fighters of the area even doubt the number of one hundred fighters. We underline that no dead Muslims ELAS fighters have been recorded (N. Ziangos, ..., *op. cit.*, vol. 4, pp. 339-342).

²⁵ G. Margaritis, ..., *op. cit.*, pp. 198-203.

features that important for inter-group fighting to ensue, but rather that local differences in conjunction with political rivalries in the central political level are responsible for it.²⁶

As we have already argued the expulsion of (Muslim) Chams occurred not only as a result of the Chams' collaboration with the forces of occupation, but rather as an outcome of state policy, a policy which was embedded in the prevailing nationalistic ideology of the Interwar period. The "cycle of revenge" construction we also support is not targeting to relativize the massacres committed by EDES forces and the local Christian population.

The Greek state welcomed the actions of EDES and of the local population. The erasure (muting) process that followed turned the (Muslim) Chams to a "never existed" minority.

Response Paper by Pellumb Xhufi (Albania Institute of History)

Chamuria under Italian occupation

The very day Italy attacked Greece, the Greek authorities had exiled nearly the entire male Cham population into Aegean islands (Crete, Chios, Mitilini, Kokyna etc.).²⁷ When the Greek army came back, November 1940, vicious crimes were committed against Muslim Chams. Around 56 Chams have been killed in Filiates province, other 300 in Paramythia and Igoumenitsa.²⁸ In the middle of November, in Viglitsa, the Greek soldiers killed eight Albanian Muslim men.²⁹ Following their example, Christian people inveighed against the Muslims. In Igoumenitsa they killed Dule Idrizi together with his two boys. The murderers forced the father to dig the grave of his own sons.³⁰ The Greek authorities turned a blind eye to the atrocities committed by local Greeks against Chams.³¹

The pressure of the Greek authorities over the Muslim Chams continued even during its Italian and German occupation.³² On one side, Italians and the Germans did fondle the Albanian dreams on the unification with Albania. In fact, they nominated the notable Xhemil Dino as "High

²⁶ See D. Druckman, "Social-Psychological aspects of nationalism", J. Comaroff and P. Stern (eds.) *Perspectives on Nationalism and War*, Gordon & Breach, Amsterdam 1995, pp. 47-98, A. Cohen, *Customs and politics in Urban Africa*, University of California Press, Berkley, 1969.

²⁷ Giorgos Margarites, *Anepithymetoi sympatriotes. Stoicheia gia ten katastrophe ton meionoteton tes Elladas*, Athena (Bibliorama), 2005, pp. 147, 148; Nikos Zianguou, *O anglikòs imperialismòs kai e ethnike antistasi 1940-1945*, tom II, Athens, 1985, p. 368.

²⁸ B. Meta, *The Cham Tragedy*, Tirana, 2010, p. 59.

²⁹ Giannes Sarras, *Istorià-Laographikà perioches Egoumenitsas*, Athena, 1985, p. 631.

³⁰ G. Sarras, *Istorià-Laographikà perioches Egoumenitsas*, p. 631; G. Margarites, *Anepithymetoi sympatriotes*, pp. 149, 150.

³¹ Lambros Baltiotis, "The Muslim Chams of Northwestern Greece", *European Journal of Turkish Studies* (on line), December, 2011.

³² G. Margarites, *Anepithymetoi sympatriotes*, p. 153.

Commissioner” of Chamuria (11 korrik 1941), but the later was deprived of any concrete power and competence.³³ On the other hand, the Italian and the German military authorities supported the Greek quisling government of Tsolakoglou.³⁴ With their permission the Greek government continued to exert its civil, judicial and police competences in Chamuria even under Italian and German occupation.³⁵ Thus, the appointed Greek prefects and police chiefs persisted in their hostile policy, collaborating even with Christian outlaw gangs (Koçnikolla, Ballumi etc.), which terrorized the Muslim populations.³⁶

The Chams thought to create their self-defensive mechanisms. Then the clashes between the two communities started. In 12 January 1942, the chief of police in Paramythia, Ilias Nikos, murdered two prominent Cham personalities, the land-owner Tefik Qemali and the doctor Ahmet Qazimi. Armed Chams retaliated by killing the prefect of Thesprotia, Georgios Vassiliakos.³⁷ In 6th of December was killed another Cham notable, Jasin Sadiku from Margariti. The next day the Christian notable from Spathari, Vasil Çupi and the priest Spyridon Nuçi were killed.³⁸

Very often the conflicts originated from the unresolved problem of the Cham properties confiscated by the Greek authorities after 1923.³⁹ On the eve of the German occupation the Christian paramilitary units joined the EDES ranks. As a result, EDES was born with strong anti-Cham feelings. One of the members of the British military mission remarked at the time, that “the majority of Zervas supporters bore animosity towards the Turko-Albanians even before large scale attacks took place, and as a result, the Turko-Albanians considered their position would be most insecure if Zervas forces controlled Epirus and naturally turned to the Germans support.”⁴⁰

German occupation and the alleged Cham collaborationism

During the “Augustus” cleansing operation (7 July - August 1943), the German forces killed, among others, 472 alleged Muslim Albanian “rebels.”⁴¹ In September 1943, they killed over 40 Christians in Paramythia to revenge 10 soldiers fallen into an ambush. Cham individuals were told assisting the Germans.⁴² Allegedly, disbanded Cham Albanians did participate in lootings

³³ L. Cialdea, *Rassegna politica*, in: “Rivista d’Albania”, fasc. III, 1941, p. 305.

³⁴ Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler’s Greece: the experience of occupation 1941-1944*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1993, pp. f. 70, 71.

³⁵ *Dichiarazione del Presidente del Consiglio Tsolacoglu*, in: “Relazioni Internazionali”, 15 agosto 1942, anno VIII, n. 33, p. 891.

³⁶ G. Margarites, *Anepithymetoi sympatriotes*, p. 154, 158; B. Meta, *The Cham Tragedy*, p. 63.

³⁷ G. Margarites, *Anepithymetoi sympatriotes*, p. 155, 156.

³⁸ G. Margarites, *Anepithymetoi sympatriotes*, p. 160.

³⁹ Report of the High Command of the Italian Armed Forces in Greece (11th Armata), August 3, 1942, in: B. Meta, *The Cham Tragedy*, p. 62; Konstantinos Tsitselikis, *Old and New Islam in Greece: from historical minorities to immigrant newcomers*, Leiden-Boston (Martinus Nijhoff Publ.) 2012, pp. 303, 304; G. Margarites, *Anepithymetoi sympatriotes*, p. 159.

⁴⁰ R. Elsie-B. Destani, *The Cham Albanians of Greece. A documentary history*, p. 347, 348.

⁴¹ Hermann Frank Meyer, *Blutiges Edelweiss. Die 1. Gebirgs-Division im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Berlin, Christoph Links Verlag, 2008, p. 207, 238.

⁴² B. Meta, *The Cham tragedy*, p. 93.

after the German raid through the Christian Albanian-speaking villages of Fanari.⁴³ Earlier, the Christian Albanians of Shën Vlash and Kastrî in Fanar had attacked and looted the Muslim village of Varfan.⁴⁴ Regardless the marginal role the irregular Cham forces may have had in such events, the Greek propaganda made any effort to incriminate for them the Muslim Albanians, in order to prepare their ethnic cleansing in years 1944-5.⁴⁵

While merciless with the rebels, the Germans showed no intention to take a side in the local conflicts between Muslims and Christians. They brought no changes to the local administration. With his order of September 13, the Commander of I Mountain Division, Karl-Heinz Rothfuchs confirmed as governor in Epirus Michalis Tsimbris. The later was being appointed in this office by Italians since 1941. The prefect and the chief of police in Chamuria were also Greeks under the authority of the quisling government in Athens.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, the Muslim Chams created their "Albanian National Council."⁴⁷ But, when the German commander of Igoumenitsa proposed to entrust the administration of the prefecture to the Albanian leader Masar Dino "due to the incompetence of the present Greek administration,"⁴⁸ this proposal has been declined by his superiors. Earlier, the Greek Prime Minister Rhallis had called on Neubacher's representative in Athens "to stop the political activities of Dinos' pro-Italian group in Thesprotia and to appoint a Greek prefect, who should carry out his duties with the support of German Wehrmacht and that of Greek paramilitary groups."⁴⁹ Actually, the Germans concluded that "for foreign policy reasons", a Greek, not an Albanian, should be appointed as prefect of Chamuria.⁵⁰ The Germans did nothing to attract the Cham sympathies by supporting their national claims. Since the very beginning the German authorities made it clear that "the unification of this territory (Chamuria) with Albania which is what the Albanians actually want, cannot be granted."⁵¹

In addition, the Germans looked for avoiding a Albanian supremacy in Chamuria. While excluding the Chams from any role in the local administration, they warned them (Nuri Dino) to abstain from any action against Greeks.⁵² In fact, in 27 February 1944 the Feld-Commander von Botmer reported that "no violent actions against Greeks were to date recorded."⁵³ In this report appeared for the first time the proposal of creating "an Albanian militia with a battalion-like

⁴³ H. F. Meyer, *Blutiges Edelweiss*, p. 498.

⁴⁴ Report by British military forces on the Albanian minority in Epirus, 8 January 1945, in: R. Elsie-B. Destani (ed.), *The Cham Albanians of Greece. A Documentary History*, p. 347; H. F. Meyer, *Blutiges Edelweiss*, p. 498; Lambros Baltiotis, "The Muslim Chams of Northwestern Greece", *European Journal of Turkish Studies* (on line), 12/2011.

⁴⁵ G. Margarites, *Anepithymetoi sympatriotes*, p. 164, 165.

⁴⁶ H. F. Meyer, *Blutiges Edelweiss*, p. 463.

⁴⁷ Raport i Feldkomandantit von Botmer drejtuar Komandës Ushtarake të Greqisë, 10 janar 1944, në: Arkivi i Institutit të Historisë (A.I.H.), J-47, pp. 11-14.

⁴⁸ Chef of Staff of Army Group E to the Commander of XXIIth Mountain Division, 27 February 1944, in: Arkivi i Institutit të Historisë (A.I.H.), J-47, p. 10; Letter of Head of the General Staff Army Group Southeast, 4 January 1944, in: R. Elsie-B. Destani, *The Cham Albanians of Greece. A documentary history*, p. 338.

⁴⁹ Chef of Staff of Army Group E to the Commander of XXIIth Mountain Division, 27 February 1944, in: Arkivi i Institutit të Historisë (A.I.H.), J-47, p. 10.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

⁵¹ Raport gjerman mbi konfliktin shqiptaro-grek në Çamëri, 7 korrik 1944, në: R. Elsie-B. Destani (ed.), *The Cham Albanians of Greece. A Documentary History*, p. 339.

⁵² *Po aty*, f. 13.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

personnel.”⁵⁴ In March, a Cham Albanian unit under the command of Nuri Dino was already alive. But Nuri Dino and his militia are recorded to act only in Albania against FNC partizans.⁵⁵ It seems that the Germans considered disturbing their presence in Chamuria. On the other hand, in Dinos’ battalion the recruits from Southern Albania were much more than the Cham Albanians.⁵⁶ Thus, after the war the Greek officials were clearly wrong claiming that “Nuri Dino put himself and his bands at the service of the Germans and took part in the operations against the Greek patriots of General Zervas who were fighting against the invader.”⁵⁷ Quite the opposite, Dino and other Albanian nationalists kept contacts with Zerva and tried to ally with him against the communist partizans.⁵⁸

On the other side, a great number of Chams mostly in the borderland with Albania joined the ranks of ELAS.⁵⁹ In April 1944 German reports mention the “bolshevik band of Rexhep Plaku”, a famous leader of Cham partizans.⁶⁰ In summer 1944, with 500 Chams was created the 4th Battalion of ELAS’ XV Regiment.⁶¹

⁵⁴ *Po aty*, f. 13.

⁵⁵ A.I.H., J-47: report of General Fehn to the Commaander of German Army in Albania, March 29, 1944; A.I.H., J-47: letter of Prenk Previzi to the Commander of German troops in Albania, March 29, 1944; A.I.H., J-47, p. 32: report of Major Ditmeister about the meeting between General Lanz and the prefect of Gjirokastra, Vehbi Runa, May 11, 1944; A.I.H., J-47, p.53: German report about the situation of the Nuri Dinos’ battalion, Murch 18, 1944.

⁵⁶ A.I.H., J-47, p.53: raport mbi gjendjen në batalionin e Nuri Dinos, 18 mars 1944.

⁵⁷ Letër e J. Romanos, Chargè d’Affaires dy Ambassade Royale de Grèce, London 4th December 1945, in: R. Elsie-B. Destani (ed.), *The Cham Albanians of Greece. A Documentary History*, p. 376.

⁵⁸ A.I.H., J-47: Report of Chef of Staff of XXII Mountain Division, Ritmeister, May 11, 1944; G. Margarites, *Anepithymetoi sympatriotes*, p. 202, 203; B. Meta, *The Cham tragedy*, pp. 71, 72.

⁵⁹ G. Margarites, *Anepithymetoi sympatriotes*, p. 161, 162, 163.

⁶⁰ A.I.H., J-47, p. 40: raport i Korrespondentit ushtarak Hans-Georg Ram mbi operacionin e forcave alpine gjermane, 25 prill 1944.

⁶¹ FO, 371/48094. Report by lieutenant Colonel C. A. S Palmer on his visit to northern Greece, 9-14 April 1945; R. Elsie-B. Destani (ed.), *The Cham Albanians of Greece. A Documentary History*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2013, pp. 354, 355.

The Cham Golgotha

When in June 1944 the German troops left Chamuria, the XVIth EDES Brigade, around one thousand armed people, entered Paramythia. For 5 days the city was transformed in a horrendous slaughter, where Muslim men, women and kids were indiscriminately and mercilessly executed.⁶² The number of those innocent victims amounted to 600 since the very first days. After the Commander of XVIth Brigade, Kranias, entered the town, other 34 Chams surviving the first wave of the mass hysteria were butchered under his order.⁶³ The same fate suffered another Cham stronghold, the beautiful city of Margariti. The bishop of Paramythia was among the protagonists of the genocide, using his inflammatory anti-Albanian rhetorics.⁶⁴ In August 28, 1944, Zerva's gangs killed 49 men and eight women in Parga. In September 14, other 47 men were executed in Philiates. Three days later 51 people were massacred near the hospital in Philiates and at the Shejla River. Thus, in Philiates a total of 259 people were killed or disappeared.⁶⁵ Then the killings spread out in Koska, Karbunara, Dragoumi, Kardhik, Spatar etc. In October, the EDES forces encouraged by General Scombie, Chief of the British mission, passed over Kalamas river, violating the Caserta Agreement (Saraphe-Zervas Agreement, August 1944). In fact, the territory near the border with Albania was put under the control of IVth Battalion of 15th EAM Brigade. This battalion was composed by local Muslim and Christian Albanians.⁶⁶ According to the communist leader of Epirus, Vlachopoulos, Zervas pretended that the IVth Battalion" was an autonomous "Turko-Albanian unit." This way he justified the EDES spill-over in Northern Chamuria and the crimes committed there by his troops.⁶⁷ But even in those dramatic circumstances the EAM leaders didn't lift a finger to help the Cham Albanians.

But in autumn 1944 new fighting started between EAM and EDES. Zervas' defeated forces took refuge in Corfù, while around 4 thousand Chams returned from Albania under the EAM warranty. But in February 1945, Zervas troops came back to Chamuria, this time as regular army of the liberated Greece. The massacres against the Chams had a new, equally horrendous, edition.⁶⁸ Thus, in March 1945 the whole Muslim Albanian minority, with very few exceptions, was over the border.⁶⁹ It seems that in 1944-5 Thesprotia was inhabited by around 22,000 Albanian Muslims. But nobody knows the number of Muslim Albanians who left Chamuria over the 20th century. Actually, it is very difficult task to obtain accurate statistical data of a population subject to political pressures, which resulted in continuous emigration.⁷⁰

Once the Chams' expulsion was accomplished, with the "urgent and secret direction" 50862/16 in February 1947, the Greek Ministry of Defense ordered the prefects of Thesprotia to wipe out

⁶² B. Krapites, *Oi mussulmanoï Tsamides tes Thesprotias*, Athina, 1986, pp. 131, 132.

⁶³ G. Margarites, *Anepithymetoi sympatriotes*, p. 165, 166.

⁶⁴ H. F. Meyer, *Blutiges Edelweiss*, p. 621; B. Krapites, *Oi mussulmanoï Tsamides tes Thesprotias*, p. 115.

⁶⁵ "Bashkimi", Albanian newspaper, Tirana, December 30, 1945.

⁶⁶ G. Margarites, *Anepithymetoi sympatriotes*, pp. 166, 168, 198.

⁶⁷ Letër e Sekretarit të PKG për Epirin, Orfeas Vllahopoulos, 14 tetor 1944, në: G. Margarites, *Anepithymetoi sympatriotes*, p. 200, 201.

⁶⁸ FO, 371/48094. Report by lieutenant Colonel C. A. S Palmer on his visit to northern Greece, 9-14 April 1945; R. Elsie-B. Destani (ed.), *The Cham Albanians of Greece*, p. 355.

⁶⁹ FO, 371/48094. Report by lieutenant Colonel C. A. S Palmer on his visit to northern Greece, 9-14 April 1945; R. Elsie-B. Destani (ed.), *The Cham Albanians of Greece*, p. 355.

⁷⁰ Konstantinos Tsitselikis, *Old and New Islam in Greece: from historical minorities to immigrant newcomers*, Leiden-Boston (Martinus Nijhoff Publ.) 2012, p. 85.

of the Male Registration Roll the names of Muslim Chams.⁷¹ It was the last move for effacing a history and its memory.

The role of British mission

The cleansing operations of Zervas' EDES have been followed, encouraged and justified by the British officers, who played a highly controversial role in resistance politics⁷². With cynical conciseness, Colonel Montague Woodhouse, member of the British Mission close to Zervas, reported at the time: "Zervas expelled the Chams from their houses in 1944...There was a huge bloodshed that accompanied the action, and the aim was to forcefully expel the unwanted Albanian population out of its Motherland."⁷³ Later, 16th October 1945, Woodhouse assessed: "Zervas encouraged by Allied Mission under myself, chased them (the Chams) out of their homes in 1944 in order to facilitate operations against the enemy...The Chams deserved what they got, but Zervas' methods were pretty bad-or rather, his subordinate officers got out of hand. The result has been in effect a shift of populations, removing an unwanted minority from Greek soil. Perhaps it would be best to leave things at that."⁷⁴ Differently from Woodhouse, the member of British mission to Tirana, Colonel Palmer, made a serious effort to explain the reason of this anti-Cham Greek hysteria: "The attacks which admittedly took place on 12/13 March 1945 came as a continuation of the extreme anti-Albanian feelings of the Greeks in that area rather than from any further provocation on the part of the Albanians themselves. As a result of this further attack there are now no Albanians left in Greece."⁷⁵ According to him, the Chams lived in the most rich part of Thesprotia, "consequently, there has always been a feeling of hatred and envy on the part of the Greeks of that area towards the Chams." Colonel Sarandis, the Zervas' closer collaborator, made himself the best interpreter of such a hatred when he stated to Palmer that "the Albanians had richly deserved everything they had got by reason of the Greeks...Should the Albanians return now to their homes similar action against them by the Greek population would take place, and could not be prevented by the authorities. Such was the hatred of the Greeks for this minority that elements of ELAS and EDES would unite and drive them out again". Palmer's conviction was that the Greek hostility against the Chams sprang from the persistent claims for annexing Southern Albania, which claims "go far beyond...and gave the impression of irresponsible and baseless claims initiated because of the very marked hatred of the Albanians. This latter sentiment is very strong and is directed not only at the Chams but at all Albanians in general."⁷⁶ Impressed by the dimensions of the Cham tragedy, Palmer suggested to start investigations, but he encountered the very cut answer of his superior: "I cannot see that there can be any great advantage in holding this investigation for the following reasons: There are now virtually no Chams on the Greek side of the border, and as long as they remain in Albania

⁷¹ K. Tsitselikis, *Old and New Islam in Greece*, p. 199.

⁷² Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece: the experience of occupation 1941-1944*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1993, p. 138.

⁷³ B. Meta, *The Cham Tragedy*, p. 89.

⁷⁴ R. Elsie-B. Destani (ed.), *The Cham Albanians of Greece*, p. 373.

⁷⁵ FO, 371/48094. Report by lieutenant Colonel C. A. S Palmer on his visit to northern Greece, 9-14 April 1945; R. Elsie-B. Destani (ed.), *The Cham Albanians of Greece*, p. 355; B. Meta, *The Cham Tragedy*, p. 91.

⁷⁶ FO, 371/48094. Report by lieutenant Colonel C. A. S Palmer on his visit to northern Greece, 9-14 April 1945; R. Elsie-B. Destani (ed.), *The Cham Albanians of Greece*, p. 356.

there are not likely to be any further incidents...I suggest that it would be in the general interest to let sleeping dogs lie on this specific point.”⁷⁷

Conclusions

The 1944-5 Cham expulsion has nothing to do with their alleged collaborationism, as some Greek historians still claim⁷⁸. Many Greeks, many Christian Albanians of Chamuria collaborated with Italians and Germans. The latter armed the Vlach minority and created a “Roman Legion” in Thessaly, which became extremely despicable for its crimes.⁷⁹ However, this case was not used for exerting an ethnic cleansing campaign against the Vlach population of Greece.⁸⁰ The fact is that in the interwar period, Greece carried out a discrimination and isolation policy vis-à-vis the Cham minority.⁸¹ The expulsion of Muslim Chams occurred rather as an outcome of state policy, a policy which was embedded in the prevailing nationalistic ideology. The expulsion of Chams was part of a policy of the Greek state to exercise its alleged right to oust “non-Greeks” from its territory.⁸² The dominant perception was that the lands near the border had to be Greek, not only because they adjoined the frontier of another state, but also because it was inconceivable after the Lausanne Treaty that a non-Greek in every sense (i.e. religion and language) could own Greek land, or simply exist inside Greek territory, while claiming not to be Greek.⁸³

⁷⁷ FO/374, Albania, file 544, 1945: 23 maj 1945.

⁷⁸ Kyriakos D. Kentrotis, *Der Verlauf der griechisch-albanischen Beziehungen nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg und die Frage der muslimischen Tschamen*, in: “Balkan Studies”, Thessalonike, nr. 34/2 (1993), pp. 293, 294.

⁷⁹ M. Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece*, p. 111.

⁸⁰ B. Meta, *The Cham Tragedy*, p. 92.

⁸¹ “Während die christlichen Albanophonen als potentielle **Griechen anderen Dialekts**’ stärker assimiliert wurden bzw. sich in die griechische Gesellschaft integrierten, betrieb die griechische Regierung gegen die muslimischen Albanophonen eine Politik der Ausgliederung”, Georgia Kretsi, *Austauschbar-nicht austauschbar: Albanophone Muslime (Çamen) und andere Grenzbevölkerungen des Epirus der Zwischenkriegszeit im Kräftefeld zwischen ethnischer Identitätskonstruktion und Entmischungspolitik*, “History and Culture of South Eastern Europe”. An Annual Journal, Bd. 4/2002, p. 3.

⁸² Lambros Baltiotis, “The Muslim Chams of Northwestern Greece”, *European Journal of Turkish Studies* (online), 12/2011.

⁸³ *Ibidem*.

