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**Venetian-Ottoman Wars**

EDITED BY STATHIS BIRTACHAS



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On the cover: lantern of an Ottoman galley captured at Lepanto.  
Venice, Armory rooms of the Council of Ten at the Doge's Palace.  
Topwar.ru website of Vjačeslav Špakovsky.



Venice and the Ottoman Empire as warriors. Source: [Roger PALMER, Earl of Castlemaine], *Das von den Türcken außs äusserst bedrangte, aber: Durch die christliche Waffen der heroischen Republic Venedig außs tapfferst beschützte Candia* [...], Frankfurt, Wilhelm Serlin, 1669.



“Oltremarini” (Overseas) Regiments in Venetian service, nicknamed ‘Schiavoni’  
(Vinkhujzen Collection, NYPL)



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# Personal and fiscal *angarie* in Peloponnesian fortification works during the Second Venetian Rule (1685–1715)

by EIRINI VRETTOU\*

**ABSTRACT:** The present study aims to add new knowledge to the history of statute labour in military construction works in the Peloponnese, during the Second Venetian period (1685–1715). This fiscal policy, which took the form of personal service and cash levies, is in fact a very old practice dating back to ancient times. After the loss of Crete, the conquest of Morea was seen as the revival of the Venetian overseas empire. As the aim was, ultimately, the economic exploitation of the area, the Venetians sought to reorganise and strengthen it. The system of statute labour, otherwise known as *corvée*, public service or *angaria*, was introduced in the Peloponnesian peninsula in the same way that it had been previously established in all Venetian overseas possessions. Accompanied by all kinds of injustices, however, it created acute social problems that seriously hampered Venice's aspirations of the uninterrupted economic exploitation of its vast new possession.

**KEYWORDS:** PELOPONNESE, VENETIAN RULE, 1685–1715, FORTIFICATIONS, *ANGARIE*, CORINTH.

**A**fter the loss of Crete, the Peloponnese, a new possession of the *Serenissima* of considerable scale, became especially important in advancing Venice's interests in the Aegean. For this reason, its defence was a fundamental concern of the Senate. Highly qualified engineers were sent to the Peloponnese as a matter of utmost urgency in order to gauge its defensive capacity and reconstruct its defensive network, supplementing it with effective new fortifications.

In the first years of Venetian domination over their new possession, the

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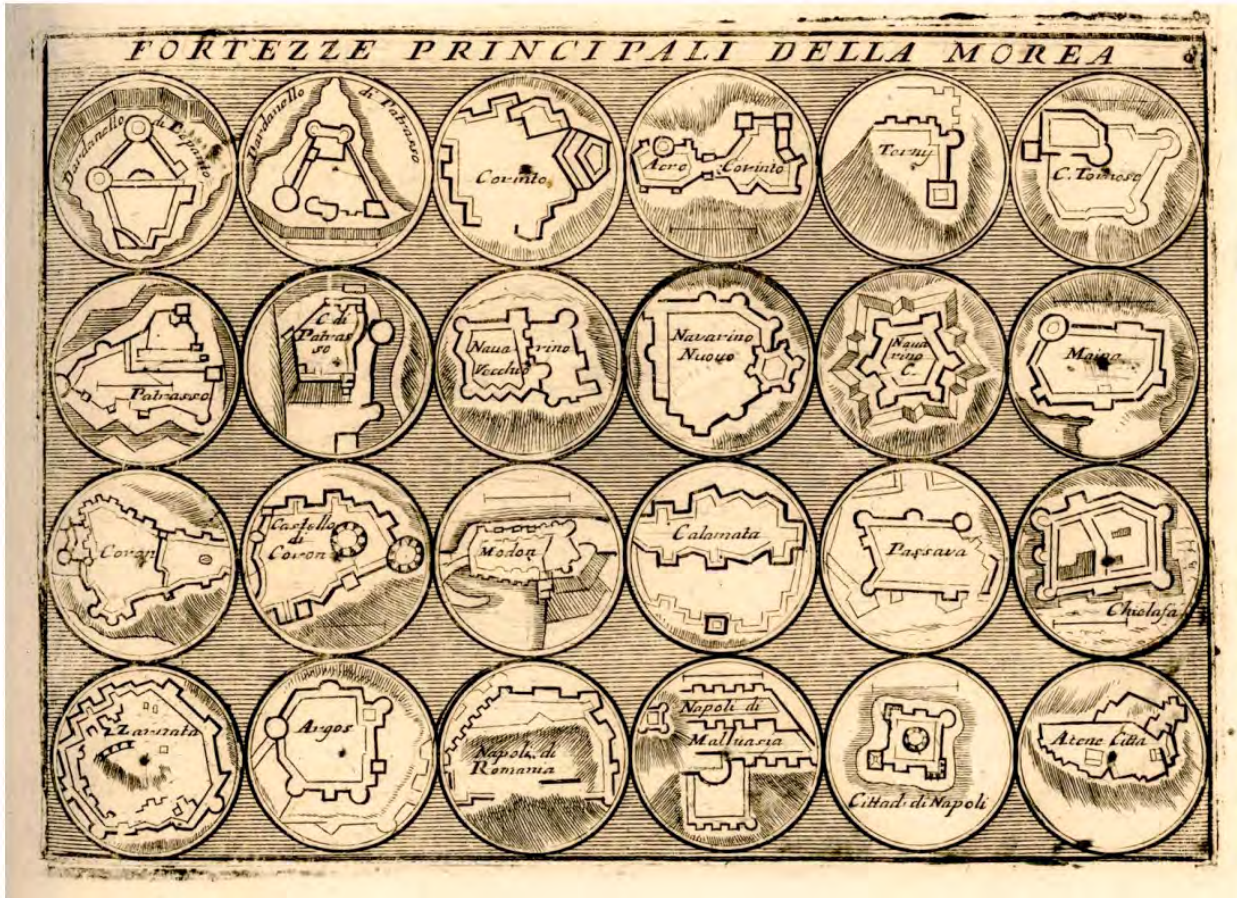
*Serenissima* did not consider restoring or even putting to use all of the defensive fortifications of the Peloponnese. Such an expectation would not have been realistic. It would be both expensive, considering Venice's economic and military priorities, and unnecessary, given its defensive needs at the time. For these reasons, the Venetians contended with strengthening what they deemed were the most crucial defensive positions by funding conservation and restoration works. It is well known that the Peloponnese, in all its administrative divisions, boasted an impressive network of defensive structures: citadels, fortresses and castles built either by the Byzantines, the Franks, the Ottomans or even the Venetians themselves (Fig. 1). Some were even much older, built in the classical or Roman periods, and repaired by subsequent rulers.

The Venetians assessed which of these defensive systems could be of practical use according to their defence objectives and proceeded with all the maintenance and modernisation work they considered necessary and within budget. Their assessment was realistic and the plans drawn aimed at being effective, feasible and not financially draining. In fact, a lot of the existing fortresses retained their old form. This was especially the case for fortifications whose location rendered their modernisation counter-productive. Such defensive structures included city walls and castles built in inaccessible, primarily mountainous areas, where the transport and use of cannons by attackers would have been impossible, and where the difference in altitude between the attackers and the defenders would offer the latter a much greater advantage in terms of range. Similarly, certain coastal forts and even parts of fortification works were abandoned. Those structures whose adaptation was deemed unprofitable due to cost, location or diminishing strategic importance (usually in favour of another fort in the area) were also abandoned. To the contrary, in fortification systems and military constructions which made the cut, such as those of Corinth, Nafplio, Monemvasia, Zarnata, Kelefas, Methoni, Koroni, Arkadia, Old Navarino and Rio, the Venetians selectively carried out renovations of different scale. In some cases, alterations or reconstructions applied to the entire fortification, while in others to limited sections which were considered particularly vulnerable. Where deemed necessary, the Venetians would make improvements to the existing infrastructure by simply adding sections and individual elements.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Diana ZAFEIROPOULOU (Ed.), *Κάστρων Περίπλους = Castrorum Circumnavigation*, Athens,





1 Plans of the principal castles and fortresses in the Peloponnese (Morea) at the time of the Morean Wars. Source: Vincenzo CORONELLI, *Morea, Negroponte & adiacenze*, [Venice, ca. 1708].

The region of Corinthia, i.e. the then administrative district of Romania (*provincia di Romania, territorio di Corinto*), was the epicentre of Venetian defensive (re-)organisation. A number of important defensive fortifications already existed in the wider area (the forts of Acrocorinth, Hexamilion, Penteskoufion, Vassilikoi, St Basil, Aginorion, Angelokastro, St George, Polyfengos, Feneos,

Ministry of Culture, 2008, pp. 35–59; Ioanna STERIOU, «Ενας διάλογος σχετικός με την κατασκευή των φρουριών (fortezze)», *Επιστημονική επετηρίς της Πολυτεχνικής Σχολής του ΑΠΘ, Τμήμα Αρχιτεκτόνων*, 6, 2 (1974), pp. 107–111.

Tarsos, Xylokastron).<sup>2</sup> In some of these, the Venetians carried out small-scale repair works. Their biggest concern, however, was the defensive line of fortifications that ran through the Acrocorinth, and which extended from the Lechaion along the Oneia Mountains. In this system, the Venetians carried out extensive repair and modification works that spanned over several years.<sup>3</sup> Their aim was to adapt the existing fortifications to the principles of the contemporary “bastion system”, which had arisen as a response to the introduction and spread of the use of gunpowder from the mid-fifteenth century onwards. Its principles influenced the layout, design and construction of defensive structures of the period throughout Europe.<sup>4</sup>

A true-to-form complex system of bastions would be impossible to construct anywhere in the Peloponnese for a number of reasons, most of them practical. The monetary cost would be too high and the amount of time required for such extensive works to take place would be forbidding. What is more, there was a large number of pre-existing fortifications already in place, which in a sense dictated the shape of any possible outcome, while the geomorphological features of the Peloponnesian landscape were not always conducive to the design of such structures. All of the above contributed to the creation of a distinctly local variation of defensive fortifications in the Peloponnese, which while faithful to the general principles of the bastion defence system, exhibited many quirks introduced or maintained in order to adapt to conditions on the ground.<sup>5</sup>

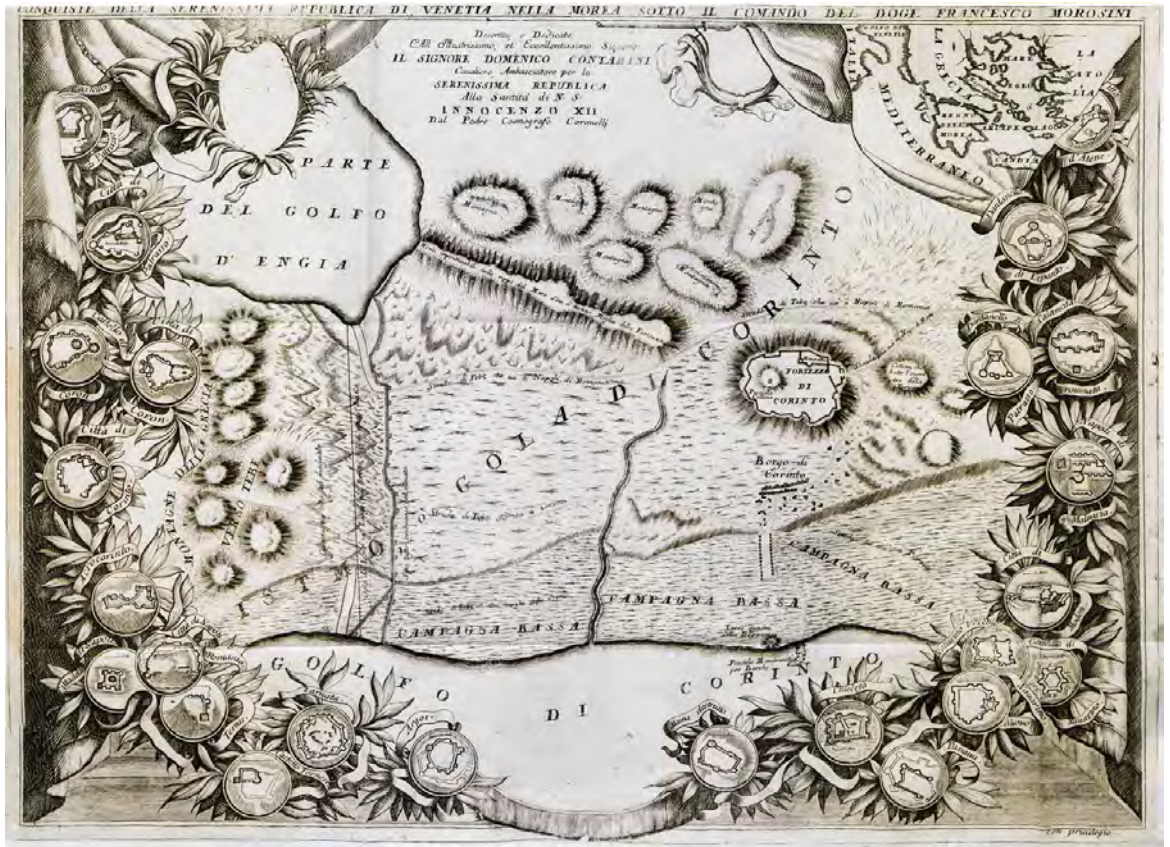
2 Ioannis T. ΣΦΙΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, *Τα μεσαιωνικά κάστρα του Μορηά*, Athens, self-published, 1968, pp. 57–80.

3 Kevin ANDREWS, *Castles of the Morea*, Princeton NJ, The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2006, pp. 135–145.

4 For the adaptation of the bastion system and fortification works during the Second Venetian Rule, see ANDREWS, *Castles of the Morea*, cit., p. 13; Ioanna STERIOΤΟΥ, «Υλικό περιβάλλον και δημόσια έργα στον ελληνικό χώρο», in Chryssa MALTEZOU (Ed.), *Όψεις της ιστορίας του βενετοκρατούμενου Ελληνισμού. Αρχαιακά τεκμήρια*, Athens, Hellenic Foundation for Culture, 1993, pp. 485–518; STERIOΤΟΥ, «Ένας διάλογος», cit.; Ioanna STERIOΤΟΥ, «Η εξέλιξη του “προμαχωνικού συστήματος” στις οχυρώσεις της Ελλάδας», in *Αντιδότημα. Studies in honour of Giorgos P. Ekkekakis*, Rethymno, Graphotechniki Kritis, 2013, pp. 277–296; Pietro MARCHESI, *Fortezze veneziane 1508–1797*, Milano, Rusconi Immagini, 1984; ZAFEIROPOULOU (Ed.), *Κάστρων Περίπλους*, cit., pp. 35–55; Sergio POLANO, *L'Architettura militare veneta del Cinquecento*, Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura “Andrea Palladio” di Vicenza, Milano, Electa, 1988.

5 ZAFEIROPOULOU (Ed.), *Κάστρων Περίπλους*, cit., p. 43.





2 Map of Corinth area with floor plans of the Isthmus and the castle of Acrocorinth, framed by floor plans of the main fortresses and castles taken by Francesco Morosini during the Sixth Venetian–Ottoman War. Source: Vincenzo CORONELLI, *Morea, Negroponte & adiacenze*, [Venice, ca. 1708].

As hinted above, the Isthmus and the wider area of Corinth (Fig. 2) were of particular importance to the Venetians. This was true not only for the period of the Second Venetian rule but throughout time. Its fortification and defence were key and, consequently, some of the most skilled engineers of Venice were dispatched to the area: Duca Di Guadagne, Baron Di Stenau, Francesco Vuimes, Principe d'Arcourt, Spar and Milhau di Verneda to name but a few.<sup>6</sup> All recognised the im-

<sup>6</sup> See further Chryssa A. MALTEZOU, «Βενετσιάνικες εκθέσεις για την οχύρωση του Ισθμού της Κορίνθου στα τέλη του 17ου αιώνα», *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Peloponnesian Studies, Sparta, 7–14 September 1975*, Vol. 3, Athens, Society for Peloponnesian Studies, 1976, pp. 101–11.

portance of the area of the Isthmus and agreed that sealing it hermetically would make the Peloponnese inaccessible by land. Ultimately, however, the solutions that were proposed varied widely.

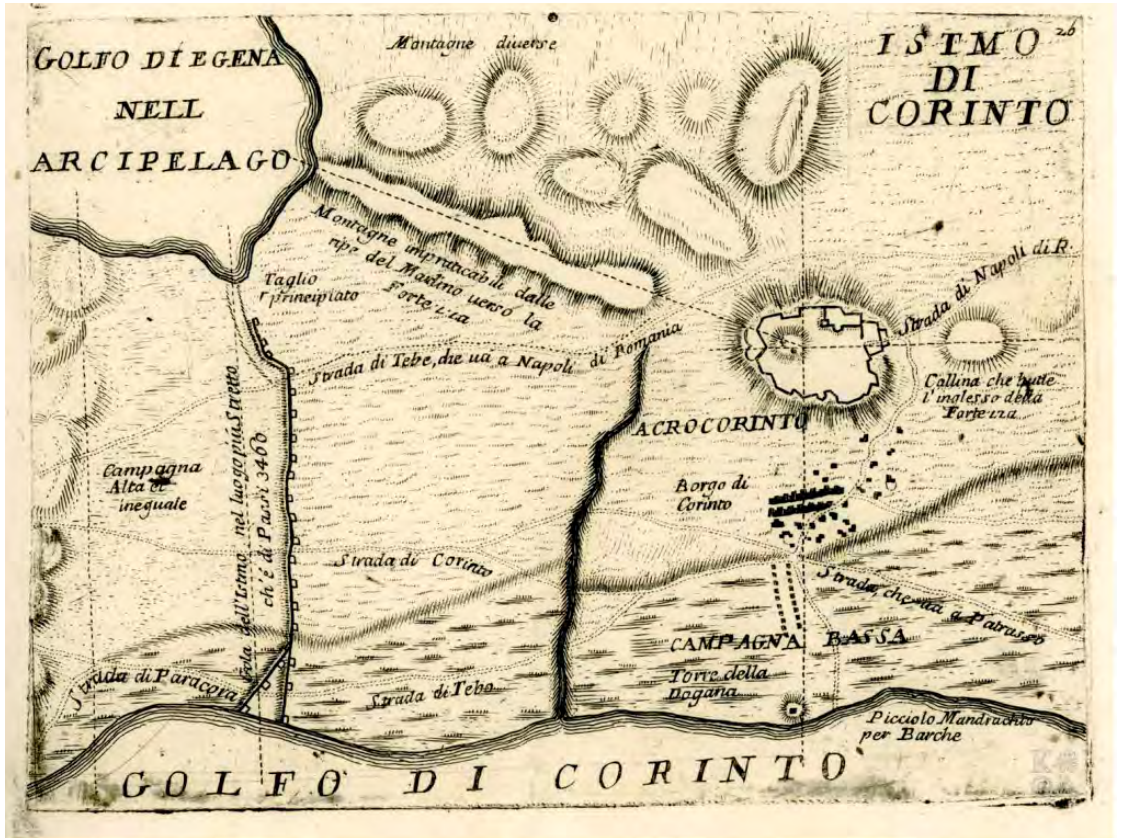
One of the proposals was to repair the Hexamilion wall (Figs. 3-5) or rebuild it from scratch. Undoubtedly, this two-storey wall,<sup>7</sup> which the Venetians considered to be the border between their possessions and the territories of the Ottoman Empire, was one of the largest pre-existing fortifications. Its significance for the defence of the area was critical at the time.<sup>8</sup> Due to the difficult financial position of the *Serenissima*, however, the Examillion wall did not become the main focus of Venetian defence expenditure in the Peloponnese. Instead, the new rulers of the land chose to avoid grandiose plans and proceed with proposals such as that of Stenau, who advocated the construction of a line of temporary fortifications extending from the port of Lechaion along the ridge of the Oneia Mountains.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, this defensive line was reinforced with some temporary structures; however, this was not the best choice as was evident right from the outset. To begin with, the mountains of Xylokeriza did not constitute an insurmountable obstacle, either in volume or height, sufficient to prevent a possible invasion. Further, the

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ponnesian Studies, 1976–1978, p. 270; Eric PINZELLI, «Les forteresses de Morée: projets de restaurations et de démantèlements durant la seconde période vénitienne (1687–1715)», *Thesaurismata*, 30 (2000), p. 387, fn. 21.

- 7 For the Justinian or Hexamilion wall, its history, architectural characteristics and chronology, see Timothy E. GREGORY, *Isthmia V: The Hexamilion and the Fortress*, Princeton, NJ, The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1993; IDEM, «The Late Roman Wall at Corinth», *Hesperia*, 48 (1979), pp. 264–280; Konstantina SKARMOUTSOU-DEMETROPOULOU, «Ιουστινιάνειο τείχος (Εξαμίλιο)», in *Αρχαιολογικές Έρευνες και Μεγάλα Δημόσια Έργα, Αρχαιολογική Συνάντηση Εργασίας, Heptapyrgion Thessaloniki 18–20 September 2003*, Thessaloniki, 2003, pp. 138–140; EADEM, «Νεότερες ανασκαφικές έρευνες στο Ιουστινιάνειο τείχος στην Κόρινθο», in *Proceedings of the 1st Archaeological Meeting of South and Western Greece, Patra 9–12 June 1996*, Athens, 2006, pp. 389–394.
- 8 Angelos NEZERITES, *Λεξικόν της βυζαντινής Πελοποννήσου*, edited by Nikos NIKOLOUDES, Athens, M. & G. Zorzos, 1998, p. 140.
- 9 Eric PINZELLI, *Venise et la Morée: du triomphe à la désillusion (1684–1687): histoire*, Unpublished doctoral thesis, Université de Provence, 2003, p. 424. On the fortifications of the Corinth defensive line, see ANDREWS, *Castles of the Morea*, cit., p. 138; STERIOU, Ioanna, «Υλικό περιβάλλον», cit., p. 497; William R. CARAHER and Timothy E. GREGORY, «Fortifications of Mount Oneion, Corinthia», *Hesperia*, 75 (2006), pp. 327–356; Ioannis E. PEPPAS, *Μεσαιωνικές σελίδες της Κορινθίας και Μορέως*, Athens, self-published, 1993, pp. 157–158; Nikolaos A. LIANOS, «I progetti per la difesa dell’Istmo di Corinto durante il dominio veneto 1687–1715», *Thesaurismata*, 48 (2018), pp. 471–504.





3 Map of Corinth area where the fortification line of Hexamilion is also depicted.

Source: Vincenzo CORONELLI, *Repubblica di Venezia p. IV. Citta, Fortezze, ed altri Luoghi principali dell'Albania, Epiro e Livadia, e particolarmente i posseduti da Veneti descritti e delineati dal p. Coronelli, Venice, 1688.*

implemented works themselves proved to be very complex and extremely costly. It is not the purpose of this article to examine these fortifications in detail. In order to provide an idea of the requirements in terms of manpower, however, it can be briefly mentioned that this was a vertical line of defence (*linea delle fortificazioni in pianura*) with the main fortification situated on the coastal front, west of the port of Lechaion.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Rhys CARPENTER and Antoine BON, *The Defenses of Acrocorinth and the Lower Town, Corinth*, Vol. 3, Pt 2, Princeton NJ, The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1936, pp. 128-281, esp. 153-155; PEPPAS, *Μεσαιωνικές σελίδες*, cit., pp. 157-158.

The Venetians initially thought that this solution would be a realistic pursuit, completed in a relatively short period of time with the “assistance” of a number of local peasants, who would be called upon to provide personal service in the form of statute labour or *angaria*. It was originally estimated that the works would require the labour of about 500 to 600 peasants. It is reported, however, that by the autumn of 1695, roughly 2,000 people had already been assembled for this purpose under the supervision of the *proveditor extraordinario* Giustin Da Riva.<sup>11</sup>

It seems that the task of providing compulsory service in the Corinthian works burdened all Peloponnesian inhabitants regardless of their settlement’s geographical proximity to the construction sites. As Konstantinos Ntokos has pointed out, every villager was required to offer their services in *angaria* for a certain number of days each year. This meant that whenever occasion arose, a percentage of villagers were called upon to offer their prescribed days of forced labour. The distribution of the tasks was entrusted to the village *demogerons* and the *syndics* of the urban communities. The commanders of the militia (*ordinanze*) of each province, assisted by military detachments of dragoons, were responsible for rounding up the workers and dispatching them to Corinth.<sup>12</sup>

In 1698, the year in which Grimani assumed the duties of *proveditor general* in the Peloponnese, 4,000 peasants were charged with labouring on the Corinth works. If we take into account that the population of the whole of the Peloponnese amounted to 40–50 thousand families – the census of 1700 numbered 43,366 families<sup>13</sup> – then we can conclude that out of every ten or so families one person was burdened with the annual *angaria*. Nevertheless, the duty of service in the fortifications of Corinth was only imposed on the rural population, whereas members of urban communities, residents of certain regions and settlements, and a variety of other categories of people, were exempted on the basis of origin or other criteria that will be examined in more detail below. As such, the ratio of recruited individuals to rural families must have been significantly higher at that time. Grimani saw fit to reduce the total number of enlisted persons from 4,000 to 2,400, while the following year he brought this number down to 800 and in

11 PINZELLI, *Venise et la Morée*, cit., p. 424.

12 Konstantinos NTKOKOS, «Οι αστικές κοινότητες και οι αγγαρείες του Δημοσίου στη βενετοκρατούμενη Πελοπόννησο», *Εώα και Εσπέρια*, 4 (1999–2000), pp. 243–280.

13 VASSILIS PANAGIOTOPOULOS, *Πληθυσμός και οικισμοί της Πελοποννήσου, 13ος–18ος αιώνας*, Athens, Emporiki Bank, 1985, p. 170.



the final year of his term in office he only called upon roughly 400 villagers. In the spring of 1699, village mayors and the magistrates of urban communities distributed the *angaria* on a ratio of one person per 14 families. This rationing coincides with the year in which Grimani reduced the total number of conscripts from 4,000 to 2,400.<sup>14</sup>

In order to increase the revenues of the State, while at the same time relieving the peasants from the oppressive nature of the *angaria*, Grimani proceeded to convert it from an *angaria personale* to an *angaria reale*, i.e. demanding payment in lieu of labour. Initially, the measure was implemented for one year and was optional as an alternative for those who wished to avoid personal labour. In a letter he sent to Venice from Patras on 6 May 1698, it becomes clear that Grimani considered the corvée inadequate and ineffective in the case of the Corinth fortifications works. He had noted that the villagers were doing everything in their power to avoid conscription and, ultimately, less than half of them turned up at the site for work. The delays and other effects of this shortage of labour probably harmed the State in the process. Grimani felt that by converting this labour from personal service to a corvée levy would guarantee that the State would secure some benefits for the Corinthian works. The amount to be contributed by each peasant was set at 6 reals, which could be paid in two instalments to the Public Treasury (in this case, the Treasury of Achaia).<sup>15</sup>

As the *angaria* was imposed on a percentage among the villagers per month, the corresponding levy was also collected once a month. In the allocation table for the corvée for the four provinces of Achaia, drawn up on 14 May 1698, it is stated that «cioè estorsare in cassa publica reali sei per cadauno huomo al mese». <sup>16</sup> Grimani estimated that, in this way, it would be possible to collect from all the provinces of Achaia a total of 3,600 *reali* per month. By order of the *proveditor generale* Molin, however, the entire Peloponnese was excluded from the Corinth corvée for four months each year. Consequently, as the *angaria* was in effect for only eight months of the year, the total revenue from the levy was estimated to be 28,800 reals. In order to address the abuses that were often observed in the distribution of the corvée, Grimani put the *syndics* and *demogeros* in charge of

14 ΝΤΟΚΟΣ, «Οι αστικές κοινότητες», cit.

15 ARCHIVIO DI STATO DI VENEZIA (hereafter: ASV), Provveditori da Terra e da Mar (hereafter: PTM), b. 571, filza 849, n° 7.

16 ASV, Grimani dai Servi (hereafter: GS), b. 31, fasc. 82, ff. 8r-8v.

making sure that all those responsible for the levy would not be exempted from it one way or another. For this reason, he called for the keeping of books. In the matter of ensuring the continuation of works in Corinth by supplying a constant stream of labourers, he proposed the deployment of infantry corps (*infanteria*), a practice used in other countries where soldiers were involved in similar works in times of peace, and volunteers in case army numbers were insufficient.<sup>17</sup>

The drudgery of statute labour in Corinth and the difficulties it entailed for the rural population were vividly described by the *proveditore* himself in his final report to Venice:

M'appigliai al partito di far intendere a sudditi, che chi amava esimersi per un'anno dai lavori di Corinto ne saria stato in pieno arbitrio quando havesse contate nella Camera della sua provincia reali sei, estrahendo da essa le copie di partita a chiara cautione del pagamento. La liberta del progetto, l'abborimento ch'hanno a quell'aria insalubre per le molte morti e malatie, il timore del severo castigo ch'havevano veduto praticarsi gli anni a dietro contro le fughe, l'evidenza del risparmio in sottrarsene dove una volta profondavano in occulte estrorsioni di trenta Reali per testa per esimersi il pregiuditio che rissentivano nell'abandono delle loro Case, la necessita dell'operationi per la loro salvezza et infine la cortesia dell'accogliamento accompagnata da una dolce, ma insinuante efficacia di si ben vive ragioni, promossero il pronto volontario concorso delli quatro territorii d'Achaja che in scrittura firmata da sindici delle Communita e da Primati delle ville ricercarono il gratioso indulto, e seguitatone poi l'eseempio da tutte le altre provincie riscosse [...].<sup>18</sup>

According to this report, the substitution of manual labour with a monetary contribution was a measure that was welcomed with relief. The syndics of the communities and the mayors of the villages of the four provinces of Achaia were the first to declare in writing their intention to participate, with all the remaining provinces soon following suit.<sup>19</sup> In March 1699, Grimani reported that from a total of 2,400 men who were called to offer public service to the ongoing works in Corinth (over eight months in a year), about 600 opted for *angarie personali*, that is, offered personal labour, while the remaining 1,800 chose to pay the sum

17 ASV, PTM, b. 571, filza 849, n° 7.

18 Spyridon LAMPROS, «Εκθέσεις των Βενετών προνοητών της Πελοποννήσου εκ των εν Βενετία Αρχείων εκδιδόμενα», *Δελτίον της Ιστορικής και Εθνολογικής Εταιρείας της Ελλάδος*, 5 (1900), pp. 460–461 (Relatione del nob Homo ser Francesco Grimani ritornato di Provveditor General dell'Armi in Morea).

19 Cf. ΝΤΟΚΟΣ, «Οι αστικές κοινότητες», cit., pp. 252–253.



4 View of the city of Corinth and the castle of Acrocorinth, the Venetian fleet in the Corinthian Gulf, the Turk's camp routed, and the way to the Isthmus and the Hexamilion walls. Source: Bernard RANDOLPH, *The present state of the Morea, called anciently Peloponnesus* [...], London, William Notts, Thomas Basset & Thomas Bennet, 1689.

of 6 reals. Grimani estimated that by the following May, when the annual work cycle would be completed, the total amount to have found its way into the State's coffers would be approximately 86,400 reals.<sup>20</sup>

The "Archivio privato Grimani dai Servi" (kept in the Venetian State Archives) preserves significant information on the nature of statute service in the fortifica-

<sup>20</sup> ASV, PTM, b. 571, filza 849, n° 42.

tion works of Corinth for the years 1698 and 1699, thanks to the allocation tables it contains. These documents are very important, as they provide us with basic information on the number of villages and individuals that were liable to the system of *angarie* and, thus, obliged to contribute either in personal service or with the sum of 6 reals each month. Other extant allocation lists are scarce; however, they tend to provide additional information in the form of the number of families that were subject to the *angarie*. This allows us to speculate that the distribution of this burden among the inhabitants of each settlement was based on the total number of families residing in each one. In some cases, in fact, the allocation lists for the corvée were the same ones used for the *angaria* of the dragoons (*compartiti*), which was calculated on a per *famiglie* basis.<sup>21</sup>

There is no doubt that the information contained in the allocation lists (*compartiti*) of the Grimani archive is significant because it allows us to form a picture of the fiscal processes of the corvée levy. The fact that these lists have survived at all to this day is extremely fortunate. There are, however, significant gaps that preclude the formation of a complete picture. First of all, they do not extend for the whole duration of the fortification works, and second, they do not provide information for the entire territory of the Peloponnese for the same length of time. As a result, it is difficult to compare data from different territories and different time periods in order to arrive at detailed conclusions. For instance, while there are data concerning the imposition of *angarie* in the province of Achaia in the spring of 1698, in the wider region of Messenia in the spring of 1699, and in Laconia at the end of 1698 and the beginning of 1699, at the same time there is lack of information for the administrative district of Romania, where the option to trade statute labour with a fiscal levy was never introduced, possibly because of the province's geographical proximity to the construction site.<sup>22</sup>

Circling back to the issue of *angarie* in the Corinth fortification works, in the spring of 1698, a total of 600 men from various provinces of the administrative district of Achaia were called upon to provide their services in the extensive works that were in progress at the time.<sup>23</sup> The "Grimani dai Servi" archival series contains the four allocation lists relating to the number of men recruited from the

21 ASV, GS, b. 31, fasc. 82, ff. 54r-56v and ff. 107r-108r.

22 ASV, PTM, b. 571, filza 849, n° 31.

23 ASV, GS, b. 31, filza 82, ff. 8r-v.



*territorii* of Patras, Gastouni, Kalavryta and Vostitsa. Under the instructions of the local syndics, the recruits presented themselves before the *proveditore general* Francesco Grimani. More specifically, in a document dated 4 May 1698 it becomes clear that this *angaria* concerned 98 villages from the province of Patras, from which a total of 82 men were to be recruited. Since the option to transform this obligation from *personale* to *reale* was in effect, it was estimated that should each villager opt to pay the 6 reals for each month of personal service, this particular province would yield the State coffers the amount of 492 reals in total «per ogni mese», that is, in case all men chose this option.<sup>24</sup> If we refer to the census of 1700,<sup>25</sup> we find that the *angaria* affected 1,626 peasant families. Furthermore, if we subtract males aged 1–16 years old, those who lived in towns, and those who belonged to the age category of *vecchi*, i.e. were over 60 years old, it can be estimated that the number of men who were subjected to the *corvée* was roughly 1,782. These numbers are approximate, since the age limits for statute labour in the Peloponnese at the time are not entirely known. It has been speculated that men between 16 and 60 years of age were eligible for the *corvée*, as was the case in other areas under Venetian rule. The age of 50, however, has also been suggested as the upper limit of eligibility.<sup>26</sup> If this was the case, the number of villagers liable to serve would be reduced to 1,584 men.

Similarly, in a document of the same period (16 May 1698) for the area of Gastouni, the data shows that a total of 205 men from 163 villages were called every month.<sup>27</sup> Comparing this with the population data available from the Grimani census, it appears that the system of *angaria* burdened approximately 3,194 rural families. From a pool of 4,166 men aged 16–60 years old who lived in this administrative district, approximately 3,339 were subjected to *angaria*. All were inhabitants of rural areas, while city dwellers and monks were excluded. If we assume that 50 years was the age limit, we will have to deduct from this total another 400 or so men.<sup>28</sup>

For the region of Kalavryta, the data shows that 288 people from 83 villages

24 *Ibid.*, b. 31, filza 82, ff. 12r-v.

25 PANAGIOTOPOULOS, *Πληθυσμός και οικισμοί*, cit., pp. 276-278.

26 Georgios V. ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΥ, «Ειδήσεις για την επιβολή των αγγαρειών στην *provincia di Laconia* κατά την περίοδο της Βενετοκρατίας», *Λακωνικά Σπουδαί*, 13 (1996), pp. 413-415.

27 ASV, GS, b. 31, fasc. 82, ff. 13r-14r.

28 PANAGIOTOPOULOS, *Πληθυσμός και οικισμοί*, cit., pp. 271-275.

were called to Corinth each month.<sup>29</sup> A total of 3,295 families were involved, and 3,894 men are estimated to have been recruited. If we accept the age of 50 as the uppermost limit of eligibility for the *corvée*, we will have to eliminate from the total 501 men.<sup>30</sup>

The list concerning the allocation of people to the same *angaria* for the area of Vostitsa imparts that the calculation of the number of villagers to serve in Corinth was based on the number of families that lived in each settlement: «comparto per li huomini che servir devono nelli lavori di Corinto, cioè secondo il numero delle famiglie s'attrovano in cadauna delle infrascritte Ville e Boarie native e foresti». It states that a total of 1,500 families were involved, of which 1,334 were native,<sup>31</sup> and that the number of people labouring each month was 25.<sup>32</sup> These numbers are surprising because, according to the Grimani census of 1700, the families (*famiglie*) of the entire *territorio* of Vostitsa amounted to 879, including the 383 families of the town of Vostitsa which, of course, were exempt from the *angarie*. According to the same census, the number of persons aged 16–60 years old, who were eligible for the *angaria*, was about 664.<sup>33</sup>

As already mentioned, Grimani reduced the number of recruits to 200 per year from each province, which amounted to a total of 800. On 4 November 1699, he reported that:

Affinche pur maggiormente si consolino i Sudditi con la benediction della pace, s'è col riflesso prudentissimo di S.E. creduto bene ordinare, che le provincie concorrino al travaglio dei lavori nella Linea di Corinto con soli ducento huomini per cadauna, due terzi meno degl'anni decorsi, quando ogn'una d'esse era tenuta d'intervenire col número di seicento; lasciandoli tuttavia in libertà ò di far' il mensual'esborso nelle Camere, ò di contribuir l'impiego delle persone.<sup>34</sup>

In this way, by the end of Grimani's term of office and for the third year running, some 113,000 reals had found their way into the Venetian Treasury, not taking into account the benefits accrued from the personal labour of those who

29 ASV, GS, b. 31, fasc. 82, ff. 9r-v.

30 PANAGIOTOPOULOS, *Πληθυσμός και οικισμοί*, cit., pp. 268-271.

31 ASV, GS, b. 31, fasc. 82, f. 10r.

32 *Ibid.*, b. 31, fasc. 82, ff. 8r-v.

33 PANAGIOTOPOULOS, *Πληθυσμός και οικισμοί*, cit., p. 279.

34 ASV, PTM, b. 571, filza 849, n° 68.



did not wish or could not afford to pay.<sup>35</sup> Grimani used this money in order to hire masons from Roumeli who worked at low cost and with greater efficiency than not only the forced labourers, but even experienced craftsmen. By the end of his term of office, the Corinth fortifications were almost complete. Over and above this, however, the *Syndici Inquisitori* (whose term of office lasted until 1704), abolished the fiscal equivalent of the *angaria* once the final titles of land ownership were distributed to the inhabitants of the Peloponnese. Already, the performance of this measure had dropped to very low levels due to the financial difficulties faced by the peasants, who could not meet the payments. As such, a long list of debtors to the State had formed who owed sums from previous years.<sup>36</sup> In the autumn of 1701, Giacomo da Mosto noted that the revenues of the levies from 400 peasants across all the provinces of the Peloponnese totalled 18,200 reals,<sup>37</sup> while in his final report in 1708 Angelo Emo stated that even though the fortifications of Corinth may have strengthened the land borders of the Peloponnese, they had also weakened the hinterland by placing a heavy financial burden on the conscripted populations.<sup>38</sup>

The language and expressions used in administrative documents testify to the extent of the burden that this system had placed on the rural populations of the Peloponnese. The Venetian governors themselves, in their correspondence and final reports, whenever referring to the *corvée*, did not hesitate to demonstrate emphatically the intolerable conditions created by this financial system, which was so profitable for the Venetian State. *Angaria* and all types of associated obligations are described as: *angaria molto gravosa*,<sup>39</sup> *pesantissimo aggravio*,<sup>40</sup> *obligo insofferibile*,<sup>41</sup> *aggravio insensibile*,<sup>42</sup> *incredibile angaria et aggravio*,<sup>43</sup> to name but a few of the gravest expressions found in the primary historical sources.

Based on the evidence, it is fair to argue that the inhabitants of rural settle-

35 ΝΤΟΚΟΣ, «Οι αστικές κοινότητες», cit., pp. 252-253.

36 *Ibid.*

37 ASV, PTM, b. 572, filza 851, n° 19.

38 ΛΑΜΠΡΟΣ, «Εκθέσεις των Βενετών προνοητών», cit., p. 651 (Relatione Grimani).

39 ASV, PTM, b. 574, filza 854, n° 12.

40 *Ibid.*, b. 574, filza 854, n° 9.

41 *Ibid.*, b. 572, filza 850, n° 94.

42 *Ibid.*, b. 575, filza 855, n° 12.

43 *Ibid.*, b. 572, filza 850, n° 95.

ments, with the exception of the priests and monks of the Orthodox and Latin Churches, the widows, and the destitute, were burdened in every possible way and to a degree that often exceeded their capabilities in order to serve the administrative and defensive needs of the state. As a result, they suffered losses over their already meagre income, property and valued livestock, and even jeopardised their safety and, on occasion, their very lives. The Venetian *proveditori* seem to have taken stock of the excessive strain such policies put on the local peasants, the so-called *poveri villici* of the documents.<sup>44</sup> Occasionally, they would express their thoughts on the types of *angaria* that were the most trying to the peasant populace at any given period.

Forced labour in construction works is undoubtedly among the harshest types of *angaria*. The corvée on the fortifications of Corinth was no exception, and its optional conversion to a fiscal levy, as mentioned above, was met with relief. Grimani's reports reveal the villagers' feelings of utter despair at the prospect of working in Corinth. In his final report, he referred to the intolerable and unsanitary conditions prevailing at the construction site, which had claimed many workers' lives.<sup>45</sup> Such references alongside mentions of the illnesses that plagued the labourers were quite frequent.<sup>46</sup> In his letter of 14 October 1700, Grimani stated: «Sino gl'utlimi decorsi giorni mi trattene à Corinto l'obbligo di supplir à quanto richiedevano le premure di quell'importantissimo luogo, non ostante alle risentite influenze dell'aria insalubre».<sup>47</sup> Although it would be reasonable to assume that the number of people who had lost their lives during forced labour on construction sites, galleys, salt works and shifts was considerable, reports of this kind are not typically found in the sources and, thus, any statement on mortality rates is mere conjecture.

As a result of the political and social conditions of the time, forced labour was often accompanied by a multitude of arbitrary acts of mistreatment against the peasants. The culprits were usually local officials or any other person with a connection or access to the Venetian administration. Peasants falling victim to the ruthless behaviour of third parties with any sort of authority over them was a common occurrence. Members of the urban communities, village prefects,

44 *Ibid.*, b. 573, filza 853, n° 19.

45 ΝΤΟΚΟΣ, «Οι αστυκές κοινότητες», cit., p. 263.

46 ASV, PTM, b. 571, filza 849, n° 30, 42.

47 *Ibid.*, b. 572, filza 850, n° 103.



5 Today's map of the Isthmus of Corinth showing the Hexamilion location. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

soldiers scattered throughout the territory, the *meidani* charged with maintaining order, but also random charlatans and thugs would deceive villagers with bogus promises of exemptions from the *corvée* and other unsubstantiated benefits, while extracting extortionate amounts of money in return. All of the above contributed to the growing hardships of peasant life in Venetian Peloponnese.

Even prior to the institution of the fiscal *corvée* option, individuals called upon to offer personal labour in the fortification works of Corinth sought ways to extricate themselves from the obligation. Since the fiscal levy was not yet institu-

tionalised, their attempts were obviously in contravention of the law, a fact which left them exposed to the greed and predatory tendencies of village chiefs and other people with access to power. In 1691, during preparations for the dispatch of people and animals to Corinth, the authorities observed the illegal exchange of large sums of money between officials and villagers, who hoped that in this way they might escape this onerous task. In response, the *proveditore general* Antonio Zeno, issued an edict regulating the election process and duties of the *demogeros*, and stipulated that «the cursed initiative of collecting exorbitant sums of money, which had become so widespread that the poor were oppressed and destroyed on every occasion of public service, should be stopped». Moreover, he ordered the village mayors immediately «to re-collect without delay the sums collected and return them in full to those from whom they had been unjustly and illegally extracted». Despite his efforts, however, a similar illegal collection took place the following year and, as he mentions, he had to act again in 1692 so that a significant amount of money collected through fraudulent means during preparations for the *corvée* would be returned to its rightful owners.<sup>48</sup>

The majority of appeals sent to the Venetian Senate by inhabitants of the Peloponnese concerned the issue of statute labour at the fortification works in Corinth prior to the introduction of its fiscal alternative. The content of the letters confirms – also from the point of view of the rural population – the issues that had been identified and frequently mentioned in the correspondence and reports of Venetian officials and governors of the Peloponnese. The main concerns raised in the appeals include:

- (a) The removal of peasants/farmers from their homes for a considerable amount of time, which often coincided with the sowing and harvesting seasons, forcing them to be away at a crucial, for their survival, time in the agricultural cycle.
- (b) The harsh living and working conditions on the construction site, especially during the winter when many of the men fell ill. Another clear reference is made to the death rate, which, in the circumstances, should not be considered a rare occurrence.<sup>49</sup>

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48 ΝΤΟΚΟΣ, «Οι αστικές κοινότητες», cit., pp. 263–264.

49 Georgios V. ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΥ, «Εκκλήσεις προς το γενικό προβλεπτή της Πελοποννήσου Francesco Grimani για την απαλλαγή από αγγαρείες (1698/99)», *Proceedings of the 5th In-*

Local officials and governors sought to improve the living conditions of the locals. It should be noted that Venice's priority was the economic exploitation of the Peloponnese and, consequently, the increase of its agricultural production, which was directly and exclusively dependent on the peasantry. Its subjection to statute labour, either in person or fiscally, prevented its human capital from performing at its best, even if it wanted to. Moreover, the Venetian rulers were essentially relying on the local population to meet vital defence needs through the system of *angarie*, at a time when the State's finances were in poor shape and the Ottoman threat was ever-present. Consequently, the commanders of the Peloponnese were aware that it was in their best interests to heed the complaints of the locals, at least to some extent, in order to be able to rely on the land's manpower. Moreover, they sought to set limits on arbitrary practices, as they had an effect not only on the local population, but above all on the Venetian State itself. Undesirable consequences of the oppression of the peasantry through fraud and abusive practices included the loss of agricultural labour, a decline in participation in the system of statute labour, as well as the loss of much-needed revenue for the Public Treasury.

In the case of the Peloponnese, as was earlier in Cyprus, Crete and the rest of the Venetian possessions in the Greek-speaking East, the constant demands of the State from the native populations forced the latter to abandon their homes and flee either outside the Peloponnese (to hostile areas under Ottoman rule)<sup>50</sup> or to mountainous and inaccessible places where it would be difficult, if not impossible, for them to be located by the authorities.<sup>51</sup>

This practice of fleeing the homeland was clearly harmful for the Venetian State, which faced frequent delays in the completion of its projects, while its defensive needs were hardly met in the most effective way. These repercussions were not lost on the inhabitants of the territory of Arcadia<sup>52</sup> or the territory of Fanari, who used them as leverage to achieve their own goals by convincing the Venetian State to transform statute labour from personal to fiscal. They stressed

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*ternational Conference on Peloponnesian Studies, Argos–Nafplio, 6–10 September 1995, Vol. 4, Athens, Society for Peloponnesian Studies, 1998, p. 268.*

50 ASV, PTM, b. 571, filza 849, n° 16.

51 *Ibid.*, b. 571, filza 849, n° 5.

52 ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΥ, «Εκκλήσεις προς το γενικό προβλεπτή», *cit.*, pp. 280-281.

that, in this way, it would be possible to raise the necessary funds to hire more qualified labourers.

As revealed by the sources, the fleeing of the peasants was a serious matter that the Venetian governors sought to limit. The measures that were adopted from time to time were arguably not directed at relieving the villagers from their excessive burdens or at combating the arbitrary acts committed against them. In fact, there is evidence that the Venetian State, at times, took measures against the peasants themselves. It was, therefore, decreed that the latter had no right to leave their place of residence without first obtaining special permission to do so, «per frenar in avvenire il disordine, e pregiuditii, che rillevantissimi risultano al Publico interesse». <sup>53</sup>

The progress of the fortification works in Corinth was not without complications. These grandiose and ambitious plans for the defensive protection of the region were draining the finances of the State. On top of that, the system of *angaria personale* proved to be quite ineffective. A large number of recruits absconded, and the cost of the subsistence and per diem of those who did eventually turn up, made the Government a loss. The option of exchanging the personal labour of the corvée with a monetary equivalent was initially piloted for a year. The *vecchiardi* accepted the proposal and the State hoped that all 600 of those called to work in Corinth (of whom, as Francesco Grimani observed, less than half presented themselves for manual labour) would meet their financial obligations to the State as they were now presented with a choice. <sup>54</sup> The *angarici* could provide statute labour or buy it out by paying six reals a month. The *vecchiardi* of each village were entrusted with monitoring the process, so that villagers who were not entitled to an exemption could not in any way be granted one. Only those employed in salt works, in cutting and transporting timber, and those who were members of community bodies were exempt from the measure. According to Francesco Grimani's calculations, the levy would yield 3,600 reals per month and 28,800 reals in total per year to the Venetian Treasury, which was a respectable sum of money to be used for the promotion of Venetian objectives in the Peloponnese. As regards the fortification works in Corinth, the hire of skilled masons from Roumeli proved more efficient in terms of output and expertise than the reluctant

<sup>53</sup> ASV, PTM, b. 571, filza 849, n° 5.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, b. 571, filza 849, n° 7.



peasants.<sup>55</sup>

Despite any good intentions from the part of the Venetian overlords, the transformation of the system of *angarie* from personal to fiscal did not put an end to the injustices inflicted on the peasants. It has become evident that the local peasant population was unduly burdened by the imposition of this *corvée* levy, as a result of the following factors:

- (a) Accumulating financial demands: as types of statute labour, one after the other, were gradually transformed from *personale* to *reale*, those liable for the payments, and by extent economic activity in the Peloponnese at large, were adversely impacted. It is indicative of the situation that *proveditor* Emo had openly expressed his staunch opposition, clearly stating that the «damnable management» of the Venetian administration was one of the main reasons the land of the Peloponnese had fallen into economic disarray during his administration.<sup>56</sup>
- (b) Arbitrariness: one of the gravest injustices with regard to the system of *angaria* in its fiscal form was the fact that it was arbitrarily imposed exclusively on the rural populations. That is to say, despite the fact that monetary levies theoretically applied to the so-called “urban” populations as well, i.e. both to members of rural communities as well as to the inhabitants of towns, in practice, this significant part of the population was arbitrarily and unfairly excluded. This was perhaps the most extensive and systematic injustice inflicted upon the socially and economically weaker members of local communities. *Proveditor generale* Sagredo, in a decree designed to improve the living conditions of the peasants, referred to «collusion» and «fraudulent tricks», which he identified as being perpetrated by magistrates in the process of allocating the *angarie* at the expense of those liable for performing them.<sup>57</sup>
- (c) Unequal distribution of responsibilities: the problem was extremely widespread in the Peloponnese, especially given that the populations of urban communities, which were already considerable in number, were ever-increasing.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> ΝΤΟΚΟΣ, «Οι αστικές κοινότητες», cit., p. 265.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278; Alexis M. MALLIARIS, *Η Πάτρα κατά τη βενετική περίοδο, 1687–1715: γη, πληθυσμοί, κοινωνία στη Β.Α. Πελοπόννησο*, Venice, Hellenic Institute for Byzantine and

Emo stated that «ogni castello, quasi ogni terra trovò mezzi per erriggersi in Republica tutto consacrando alla propria ambitione i pochi e rozzi suoi habitatori». He highlighted that this phenomenon had reached extreme proportions in his time. The result was that the bulk of economic responsibilities to the *Serenissima* was disproportionately borne by the poorest classes living in the countryside.<sup>59</sup>

- (d) Social inequalities: a further thorn in this process was the additional exclusion from economic servitude of a significant part of the rural population, i.e. peasants who were attached to the estates of the *syndici* and others under their protection. This had created a particularly discriminatory situation in which people of the same social status and origin had different obligations towards the State. For Grimani, this partiality was the cause behind the significant erosion of population numbers in certain settlements and the parallel en masse emigration of peasants to other communities, where they would be afforded the protection of certain influential individuals, thus freeing themselves from their corvée obligations. The damages to the Venetian State were significant: (1) peasants remaining on public estates were excessively weighed down financially, which made it difficult for them to meet their debts to the State; (2) vital needs of the State in revenues and manual labour were not fully met through the system of *angarie*; (3) the public estates remained uncultivated and, consequently, largely under-exploited; (4) the unequal treatment of people of the same social class contributed to the creation of social inequalities within the body of the rural population.<sup>60</sup>

At the same time, however, the Venetian governors of the Peloponnese knew full well that it was not in their interests to disrupt their relations with the “bourgeois”, who lived either in cities or in estates in the countryside. This was an aristocracy that the Venetians themselves had installed in the Peloponnese as a network of collaborators, in order to extend the reach of their power in the hinterland, and govern this vast new possession more effectively. As such, the members of this class were absolutely indispensable to the Venetians. Fear of displeasing them meant that, ultimately, the system of *angarie reale* in the Peloponnese

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Post-Byzantine Studies in Venice, 2008, pp. 265-266.

59 ΝΤΟΚΟΣ, «Οι αστικές κοινότητες», cit., p. 278; ΜΑΛΛΙΑΡΙΣ, *Η Πάτρα*, cit., pp. 265-266.

60 ΝΤΟΚΟΣ, «Οι αστικές κοινότητες», cit., pp. 276-277; ΜΑΛΛΙΑΡΙΣ, *Η Πάτρα*, cit., p. 266.

would never be implemented fairly for all.

All of the above suggests that the *angarie* amounted to social discrimination in the minds of all subjects. The people who owed service were disadvantaged both socially and financially vis-a-vis the Venetian lords and their exempted peers. What is most striking is that this disparity was maintained even in the case of monetary levies, despite the fact that these applied mainly to members of society who were in a better financial position and could afford to pay the required sums. In the case of the Peloponnese, however, the bourgeoisie had made their position clear. They were willing to pay money for purposes reminiscent of *leitourgies* (honourary functions, such as paying for doctors and teachers in their communities), but under no circumstances would they agree to be subjected to the fiscal process of *angarie*.

The mass exodus of rural populations from their hearths was a highly undesirable outcome for the Venetian administration, which had sought to encourage the creation of new settlements and the growth of existing populations in the Peloponnese. Instead, the new territories were slowly becoming deserted. The few that remained, in their majority peasants, were not enough to cultivate the public lands. What is more, in the face of the Ottoman threat, even fewer had any incentive to fight for the *Serenissima*<sup>61</sup>.

The fact that the institution of the *angarie* was applied so extensively in the Peloponnese is a testament to how acute and immediate the needs of the new conqueror were. At the same time, the inability of the Venetian administration to streamline its plans for the economic exploitation of the hinterland and win the favour of its inhabitants in the process, corroborates its weakened position in the Eastern Mediterranean at large.

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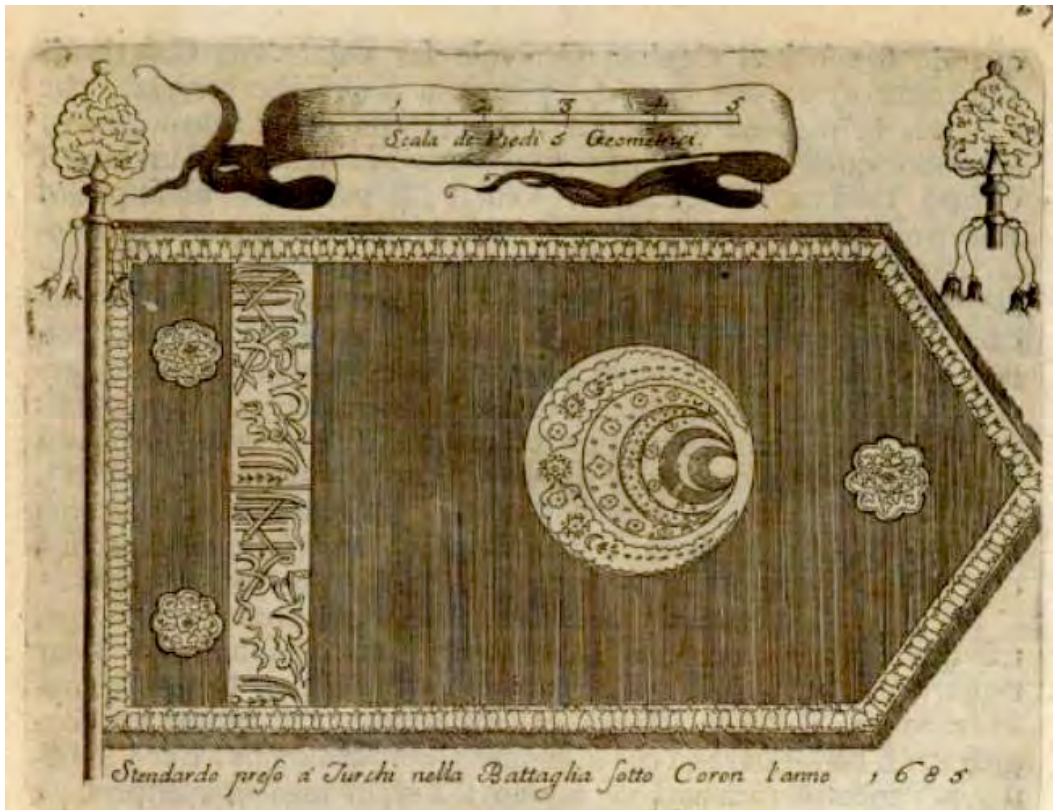
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Ottoman insignia taken as a trophy after the fall of Koroni to the Venetians in 1685. Vincenzo CORONELLI, *Repubblica di Venezia p. IV. Citta, Fortezze, ed altri Luoghi principali dell'Albania, Epiro e Livadia, e particolarmente i posseduti da Veneti descritti e delineati dal p. Coronelli*, Venice, 1688. Source: [travellouges.com](http://travellouges.com).





Icon of the naval Battle of Curzolari (Echinades in Greek) islands, by the Cretan painter Georgios Klontzas, last decades of the 16th century; one of the most famous depictions of the naval Battle of Lepanto in post-Byzantine art. Courtesy of the National Historical Museum, Athens (cat. n. 3578).

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