ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΜΕΙΖΟΝΟΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΜΟΥ

Authoring : *Touloumakos Pantelis*
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Summary :

Georgios Amiroutzes was one of the most important, complex and controversial figures of aristocracy and letters in Trebizond shortly before and immediately after the Ottomans conquered the Empire of Trebizond.

Other Names

Amouroutzis, Amouritzis, Amiroukis, Amiroutzis

Date and Place of Birth

early 15th c., Trebizond

Date and Place of Death

1470-1475, Constantinople

Main Role

scholar

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1. Birth – Education

Georgios Amiroutzis[1] was born in Trebizond in the early 15th century. According to Dorotheos of Monemvasia, he was “crafty, well-built, artful, tall and a marvellous archer”.[2] He studied physical sciences, medicine, philosophy and theology in Trebizond and later in Constantinople.[3]

2. Between Unionists and anti-Unionists

Amiroutzis was a particularly active diplomat working for the Empire of Trebizond. In 1437 he participated in the delegation accompanying Maria, the daughter of Alexios IV Komnenos, emperor of Trebizond, to Constantinople, where she got married to Emperor John VIII Palaiologos. Besides, in 1438-39, he participated in the Byzantine delegation that held the discussions with the Catholic Church during the Council of Ferrara-Florence.

During the council, Amiroutzis and Georgios Gemistos Plethon were the secular counsellors of the emperor, while Bessarion, the metropolitan of Nicaea, was his ecclesiastical counsellor. Chrysanthos of Trebizond makes an interesting comment underlining that Amiroutzis was not at the head of the Byzantine delegation because John was aware of his character. The emperor had appointed Makrodoukas instead. In any case, the presence and the personality of Amiroutzis must have been acknowledged by the Catholic side, as evidenced by the fact that Cardinal Cesarini invited Amiroutzis along with Bessarion and Gemistos “to dine and posed philosophical questions to those exceptional men, who were sufficiently working out the solutions”.[4]

Among some members of the Byzantine delegation there were conflicts and disputes, which gradually worsened. The dispute among Mark Eugenikos, metropolitan of Ephesus, and Grigory Pneumatikos (Grigory Melissenos or Mamas) broke out over the issue of the purgatory. By order of the emperor, the relevant memorandum would be prepared by Mark Eugenikos. However, Gregory urged Bessarion to write another memorandum on the same issue. Bessarion wrote it and then Gregory attempted to persuade the emperor that it had to be handed round to the Catholic delegation, since it was “more earnestly written and more literary” than that written by Mark Eugenikos. The emperor finally decided that a new memorandum should be written based on the best and most useful elements of the two previous memoranda. Apart from Mark Eugenikos, the relevant committee included Bessarion, George Gemistos and Amiroutzis.

The divergence of views as well as the deterioration in the relations between Mark Eugenikos and Bessarion became also obvious in Ferrara, on November 18, 1438, during the 11th Assembly of the Council. Syropoulos says: “[Gregory] Pneumatikos and

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Amiroutzis, who left along with someone else, sat to the east of the triclinium, behind everybody and very far from the metropolitan of Ephesus, and laughed at what he was saying".[5]

As regards the issue of the union of the Churches, Amiroutzis had initially adopted a unionist attitude, which provoked his dispute with Gemistos. According to Syropoulos, during a bitter argument before the emperor between the unionists, including Amiroutzis, and Mark Eugenikos Gemistos sided with Mark and Amiroutzis criticised him rudely. But the emperor did not respond to Amiroutzis' impudence. This excerpt may also be indicative of the influential position of Amiroutzis among the Byzantine delegates. In any case, as regards the disputes between unionists and anti-unionists, the sources should be evaluated very carefully, as their writers were biased towards one of the sides, as it must have happened with Syropoulos.

However, after he returned to Constantinople, Amiroutzis changed his mind and became an anti-unionist. This change was probably affected, apart from the strong anti-unionist reactions provoked, by the pressure of his friends. In any case, it is likely that he accused John VIII of being concerned with the issue of "filioque" instead of getting prepared for the forthcoming conflict with the Ottomans, called the Catholics "ventriloquists", due to the fact that they considered the Pope infallible, and denounced the addition "by the Son" (filioque) as well as the union of the Churches. As regards the reversal of the philosopher's opinion, a letter titled "from the philosopher Amiroutzis to the ruler of Nauplion, Demetrios, about the events of Florence" has been preserved.[6] However, Gill convincingly wonders whether Amiroutzis wrote this letter and implies that the real writer of the letter could have been Yorgos Koresios, who lived a century after Amiroutzis and was a tough opponent of the Roman-Catholic Church.[7]

Amiroutzis returned to Trebizond in 1440, while in 1449 he was sent to Genoa by John IV in order to negotiate again the commercial agreement between the city and Trebizond. Chrysanthos of Trebizond reports that, although he was offered money by the government of Genoa, he later claimed that he was not assigned with carrying out negotiations and refused to renew the agreement.[8] In any case, when he returned from Italy he was awarded the title of "protovestiarios" by David I.

3. The Fall of Trebizond and the Role of Amiroutzis

In the early summer of 1461, Mehmed II started to secretly prepare his army in order to capture Trebizond. He was at the head of a huge army. At the same time, Mahmud Pasha, the Great Vezir and Kapudan Pasha, became the leader of the Ottoman fleet. After the surrender of Sinop, it was the turn of Uzun Hasan to surrender; he was a Türkmen leader of Akkoyunlu, an important ally of John IV. This fact was a serious blow for the Empire of Trebizond and contributed decisively to the ensuing developments. Although David I had at first decided to defend heavily, following the example of Constantine Palaiologos, he was finally persuaded to surrender Trebizond to the Ottomans. Amiroutzis must have played a key role in this decision, but was accused of treachery and "pro-Turkish" attitude. It should be noted that Mahmud Pasha – with whom Amiroutzis negotiated over the surrender of Trebizond – was a relative of his; they were cousins as their mothers were sisters.[9]

However, after the fall of Trebizond, Amiroutzis wrote the letter to Bessarion, in 1462, in which he mourned for the fall of the state of the Grand Komnenoi and requested money from Bessarion in order to pay the ransom for his captive son, Basileios. What is more, he informed Bessarion that he could accept letters or anything else either to Constantinople or Adrianople.[10]

Savvidis notes that the role of Amiroutzis has been discussed by various researchers, the first being Nicholas Tomadakis.[11] Tomadakis supports that the advice of Amiroutzis to David I to hand over Trebizond, instead of mounting resistance, was a matter of political caution rather than "treachery". At the same time, he attributes the presence of Mahmud Pasha to the political brilliance of the Conqueror. He also believes that Amiroutzis did not receive any particular attention by Mehmed II and, as a result, there was no treachery – as evidenced by the fact that the philosopher from Trebizond was taken to Adrianople, just like the rest of the captives, and by the way the Sultan treated Amiroutzis' sons,[12] who were both finally Islamised (although the Islamisation could make things easier for them in order to hold official posts). D. Nicol writes that "there has been a lot of talk of the alleged treachery of Amiroutzis. The subsequent developments showed that he [David I] acted rather well when he handed over Trebizond […]. Given the attitude of the Turks towards the resisting cities, it may as well be supposed that Amiroutzis gave sound advice to his emperor".[13]

Among those who reject Amiroutzis' alleged treachery is Spyridon Lambros, who believes that the letter to Bessarion proves his claims,[14] and Odysseas Lampsidis. The latter mentions the said letter but challenges the validity of the sources reporting Amiroutzis' treachery.[15]

Apart from the others, Chrysanthos of Trebizond and Babinger are diametrically opposite to the previous writers in this matter. The first refers to the content of Amiroutzis' letter to Bessarion – that he could move both to Constantinople and Adrianople – only to conclude that he was the only exiled person in Adrianople who "was allowed by the Sultan to move"[16] and, as a result, he had cooperated with the Ottomans; he underlines that in the above letter Amiroutzis made no mention of "his devious actions".

Babinger believes that Amiroutzis committed "treachery" by deeply influencing the emperor. He was also powerful enough to paralyse the preparations made in view of the forthcoming siege, create a discouraging atmosphere and prepare his compatriots for the surrender. Besides, he attaches particular importance to Amiroutzis' kindred with Mahmud Pasha as "thanks to this affinity he managed, almost without fight, to hand over the empire of the Komnenoi to the power of the Great Turk". Babinger also underlines that Amiroutzis' sons, who were Islamised, were the only officials of Trebizond to be awarded all distinctions by the Sublime Porte, while their father – as mentioned below – praised the Sultan with poems; Babinger believes that this is decisive evidence that Amiroutzis enjoyed certain rights thanks to the favour and gratitude of the Sultan.[17]

In the long discussion and dispute about the attitude of Amiroutzis during the surrender of Trebizond it should be noted that the arguments are often ideological rather than historical and tend to present descriptions and motives reminiscent of the 19th and the 20th rather than the 15th century.

It may be supposed that, after the city was captured by Mehmed II, the philosopher of Trebizond was gradually incorporated into the court of the Ottoman Sultan and became a close collaborator.

4. Amiroutzis in the Circle of Mehmed II

In the early 1463, Theodora Grand Komnene, the niece of David I and wife of Uzun Hasan, wrote a letter to her uncle, captured in Adrianople at the time, asking him to send her to Amid (Diyarbakır), her husband's base, either his little son, Georgios, or his little nephew, Alexios. Amiroutzis revealed the existence of this letter to Mehmed II and, as a result, David I and his familiars were imprisoned at first in a castle of Adrianople and then at the Eptapyrgio (Yedi Kule) of Constantinople. Finally, David I along with his three sons and his nephew were executed on November 1, 1463.[18]

This action of Amiroutzis was rather indicative of his affiliation to the wider circle of Mehmed II. It could be suggested that the philosopher in this way provided good services and dedication to the Sultan. This is also indicated by the moment this incident occurred: only two years after the fall of Trebizond, Amiroutzis became a figure trusted by the Ottoman authorities.[19]

In Constantinople, Amiroutzis established spiritual relations with Mehmed II. Kritoboulos reports that Amiroutzis often held theological and philosophical discussions with the Sultan,[20] who must have been introduced by Amiroutzis into the philosophical thought of the Peripatetic School and possibly Neoplatonism.[21]

Apart from their philosophical discussions, the Ottoman Sultan assigned Amiroutzis with the task of publishing Ptolemy's works as well as with preparing a single chart that would include all the Ptolemaic charts. In order to carry out this task, Amiroutzis worked during the summer of 1465. Then, his youngest son, who spoke Arabic fluently, wrote the names of the countries and the toponyms in Arabic. Mehmed II must have been enthusiastic over the publication of this work. According to Kritoboulos, the reward and the gifts must have been generous. At the same time, they were asked to prepare an Arabic translation of the manuscript.[22] Besides, the theological discussions of the two men led Amiroutzis to writing the work "Dialogue about the Christian faith with the King of the Turks".[23]

In his reference to the spiritual relationship between Amiroutzis and Mehmed II, Balivet remarks that the philosopher intended to become "Aristotle of the new Alexander", thus comparing the Ottoman Sultan with the Macedonian king. In addition, İskender – Nâme (Alexander's Book) by Ahmadi was very popular among the educated Ottomans in Conqueror's years.[24] It is likely that Balivet holds this opinion based on one of the five poems attributed to Amiroutzis – three hymnodies to Mehmed II and two love poems –, where he writes to the Ottoman Sultan: "πως αλλότρια τα σου / πως ουν ξένα τα σαυτού ; / εις δουλείας τον ζυγόν ούτω πέρας αγαγών / έκρινεν ως παις εμός / ο Αλέξανδρος ουμός εποιείτο ίδια / και τας των Περσών καλά".[25]

An interesting aspect – both for Amiroutzis and the prevailing conditions of the time – is the fact that the philosopher from Trebizond resumed his spiritual relations with clergymen and scholars of the former Byzantine state. Letters of Amiroutzis sent to Theophanes of Media, Kritoboulos – possibly the known historian – and Leonardo Aretino have been preserved.[26]

5. The Alleged Islamisation of Amiroutzis

Given the close relationship and cooperation between Amiroutzis and Mehmed II, the question whether the philosopher from Trebizond had become a Muslim remains unanswered. As mentioned above, his two sons, Basileios and Alexander, finally went over to Islam under the names Mehmet and İskender respectively. Tomadakis supports that Amiroutzis remained Christian until the end of his life. Although his arguments are interesting, at some points he adopts an almost excusatory attitude about Amiroutzis' actions in order to justify his opinion.[27] Frangedaki in turn challenges his Islamisation and, among others, argues that the Ottoman sources always report the Christian name of Amiroutzis.[28]

6. The Last Period of His Life

After the Ottomans captured Athens and Franko Atzagioli, the Duke of Athens, was murdered, his widow and daughter of Dimitrios Asen, the so-called "Mouchliotissa", known for her beauty, was included in the hurrem of Mehmed II in Constantinople, while her sons were Islamised. Even though he was married, Amiroutzis fell in love with Mouchliotissa and wanted to marry her while his wife was still alive. But the Ecumenical Patriarch Joasaph Kokkas (1465 – 1466) refused it. In order to avenge him, Amiroutzis, helped by his cousin, Mahmud Pasha, dethroned the patriarch and compelled him to shave his beard as punishment, while Manuel, the Great Ecclesiarches and subsequent Patriarch Maximus III, was compelled to cut his nose apart from his beard. Manuel was punished because he refused to persuade the patriarch into accepting Amiroutzis' request. Finally, Amiroutzis obtained the permission by the Pasha and, after turning his wife out, he got married to Mouchliotissa.[29]

Amiroutzis must have died between 1470 and 1475 while throwing dice.[30]

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1. He is also found as *Amouroutzis*, *Amouritzis*, *Amiroukis* and sometimes *Amiroutzis; Εγκυκλοπαιδικό Προσωπογραφικό Λεξικό Βυζαντινής Ιστορίας και Πολιτισμού* (Athens 1997) vol. II, entry "Αμιρούτζης", p. 88, with the relevant reference to this matter.

2. Χρύσανθος Φιλιππίδης, μητροπολίτης, "Η Εκκλησία Τραπεζούντος", *Αρχείον Πόντου* 4-5 (1933) p. 314.

3. *Εγκυκλοπαιδικό Προσωπογραφικό Λεξικό Βυζαντινής Ιστορίας και Πολιτισμού* (Athens 1997) vol. II, entry "Αμιρούτζης", pp. 88 – 89.

4. Χρύσανθος Φιλιππίδης, μητροπολίτης, "Η Εκκλησία Τραπεζούντος", *Αρχείον Πόντου* 4-5 (1933) pp. 314 – 315.

5. Βαρναλίδη, Σ., *Γρηγόριος ο Γ΄, ο τελευταίος Πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως πριν από την Άλωση (1453) και η φιλενωτική πολιτική του*, (Thessaloniki 2001) pp. 28 – 31, with the relevant source. The relevant excerpt by Syropoulos is cited by Chrysanthos of Trebizond as well see Χρύσανθος Φιλιππίδης, μητροπολίτης, "Η Εκκλησία Τραπεζούντος", *Αρχείον Πόντου* 4-5 (1933) p. 315.

6. Jugie, M., “La lettre de Georges Amiroutzès au Duc de Nauplie Demetrius sur le Concile de Florence”, *Βυζάντιον* XIV (1939) pp. 77–93.

7. Gill, J., “A tractate about the Council of Florence attributed to George Amiroutzes”, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 9 (1958) pp. 30–37.

8. Χρύσανθος Φιλιππίδης, μητροπολίτης, “Η Εκκλησία Τραπεζούντος”, *Αρχείον Πόντου* 4-5 (1933) pp. 315-318.

9. Χρύσανθος Φιλιππίδης, μητροπολίτης, “Η Εκκλησία Τραπεζούντος”, *Αρχείον Πόντου* 4-5 (1933) p. 320.

10. Χρύσανθος Φιλιππίδης, μητροπολίτης, “Η Εκκλησία Τραπεζούντος”, *Αρχείον Πόντου* 4-5 (1933) p. 321; Σαββίδης, Α., *Οι Μεγάλοι Κομνηνοί της Τραπεζούντας και του Πόντου*, (Athens 2005) pp. 130–132.

11. Σαββίδης, Α., *Οι Μεγάλοι Κομνηνοί της Τραπεζούντας και του Πόντου*, (Athens 2005) p. 132.

12. Τωμαδάκης, Ν., “Ετούρκευσεν ο Γεώργιος Αμιρούτζης;” *Επετηρίς Εταιρείας Βυζαντινών Σπουδών* (1948) pp. 114–115.

13. Σαββίδης, Α., *Οι Μεγάλοι Κομνηνοί της Τραπεζούντας και του Πόντου*, (Athens 2005) p. 132.

14. Λάμπρος, Σ., “Ο τελευταίος Έλλην Αυτοκράτωρ”, *Νέος Ελληνομνήμων* 14 (Athens 1917) p. 289. However, in an earlier article, Lambros (Λάμπρου) had supported that Amiroutzes “probably deceived everybody taking advantage of the circumstances and pretending to be mourning when he wrote to Bessarion and asked money in order to pay the ransom for his son and allow for himself, without suffering for the fall of Trebizond”, Λάμπρος, Σ., “Ποιήματα Γεωργίου του Αμιρούτζη”, *Δελτίον της Ιστορικής και Εθνολογικής Εταιρείας της Ελλάδος* Β΄ (1885) p. 276.

15. Λαμψίδης, Ο., “Πώς ηλώθη η Τραπεζούς”, *Αρχείον Πόντου* 17 (1952) pp. 15–54.

16. Χρύσανθος Φιλιππίδης, μητροπολίτης, “Η Εκκλησία Τραπεζούντος”, *Αρχείον Πόντου* 4-5 (1933) pp. 321–322.

17. Babinger, F., *Mahomet II le Conquérant et son temps 1432 – 1481* (Paris 1954) p. 237.

18. Σαββίδης, Α., *Οι Μεγάλοι Κομνηνοί της Τραπεζούντας και του Πόντου*, (Athens 2005) pp. 139–140.

19. Tomadakis challenges the reliability of the relevant excerpt concerning the role of Amiroutzes in the execution of David I, his sons and his nephew because, although little reference is made by Laonikos Chalkokondyles, it is withheld by Kritoboulos. However, he underlines that, even if the information is true, the attitude of Amiroutzes is justified, as his political experience dictated that the movement of Uzun Hasan would not have succeeded and the Pontus would not have been liberated. Because he considered the forthcoming sacrifices of the Asia Minor Christians vain, he notified the Conqueror of Komnene’s letter. In order to make sure that the Komnenoi would never claim Trebizond, Mehmed II ordered that they be massacred; Τωμαδάκης, Ν., «Ετούρκευσεν ο Γεώργιος Αμιρούτζης;», *Επετηρίς Εταιρείας Βυζαντινών Σπουδών* (1948) pp. 115–117.

20. Χρύσανθος Φιλιππίδης, μητροπολίτης, “Η Εκκλησία Τραπεζούντος”, *Αρχείον Πόντου* 4-5 (1933) p. 322.

21. Babinger, F., *Mahomet II le Conquérant et son temps 1432-1481* (Paris 1954) p. 297.

22. Babinger, F., *Mahomet II le Conquérant et son temps 1432-1481* (Paris 1954) p. 301; Χρύσανθος Φιλιππίδης, μητροπολίτης, “Η Εκκλησία Τραπεζούντος”, *Αρχείον Πόντου* 4-5 (1933) pp. 322–323; Hunger, H., *Βυζαντινή Λογοτεχνία* 2: Η λόγια κοσμική γραμματεία των Βυζαντινών, Μορφωτικό Ίδρυμα Εθνικής Τραπέζης (Athens 1992) p. 360.

23. Χρύσανθος Φιλιππίδης, μητροπολίτης, “Η Εκκλησία Τραπεζούντος”, *Αρχείον Πόντου* 4-5 (1933) p. 323.

24. Balivet, M., “Aristote au service du Sultan! Ouverture aux Turcs et Aristotélisme chez quelques penseurs Byzantins du quinzième siècle”, in *Byzantins et Ottomans: Relations, interaction, succession* (Istanbul 1999) p. 149.

25. About this and the rest of the poems, see Λάμπρος, Σ., «Ποιήματα Γεωργίου του Αμιρούτζη», *Δελτίον της Ιστορικής και Εθνολογικής Εταιρείας της Ελλάδος* Β΄ (1885) pp. 275–282.

26. Χρύσανθος Φιλιππίδης, μητροπολίτης Τραπεζούντος, «Η Εκκλησία Τραπεζούντος», *Αρχείον Πόντου* 4-5 (1933) p. 323.

27. Τωμαδάκης, Ν., «Ετούρκευσεν ο Γεώργιος Αμιρούτζης;», *Επετηρίς Εταιρείας Βυζαντινών Σπουδών* (1948).

28. Frangedaki goes further considering that the sons of Amiroutzes might have been cryprochristians; Frangedaki, A., "On fifteenth – century Cryptochristianity: A letter to George Amiroutzes from Michael Apostolis", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 9 (1984/1985) pp. 221–224.

29. Γεωργίου Κωνσταντινίδη, *Ιστορία των Αθηνών*, (Athens 1894) pp. 419–420; Στασινόπουλος, Επ., *Ιστορία των Αθηνών* Ιστορία των Αθηνών, *από την αρχαιότητα ως την εποχή μας*, (Athens 1973); likewise, Χρύσανθος Φιλιππίδης, μητροπολίτης Τραπεζούντος, «Η Εκκλησία Τραπεζούντος», *Αρχείον Πόντου* 4-5 (1933) pp. 324–325.

30. Χρύσανθος Φιλιππίδης, μητροπολίτης Τραπεζούντος, «Η Εκκλησία Τραπεζούντος», *Αρχείον Πόντου* 4-5 (1933) p. 325. The text falsely reports 1870–1875 instead of the correct 1470–1475.

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Glossary :

filioque

Filioque means "and [from] the son" in Latin, and it refers to the procession of the Holy Spirit. It was the diversive difference between the Roman and the Eastern Church and triggered, among other things, the Great Schism (1054): the Roman Church had added it to the Nicene Creed, but the Eastern Church never accepted the addition.

protovestiarios

(and protovestiarites) Honorific title given to high-ranking officials and future emperors during this period. The protovestiarios was originally responsible for the imperial wardrobe, but in the 9th-11th centuries the holders of the title could command an army or conduct negotiations with foreign states.

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