ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΜΕΙΖΟΝΟΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΜΟΥ

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## Summary :

Settlement of Cappadocia, economic and administrative centre. Its residents were Muslims (mainly), Orthodox Christians and Armenians; the main occupation of the Greek-Orthodox was small industry and commerce.

## Other Names

Garsaura, Archelais

## Geographical Location

Central Asia Minor

## Historical Region

Cappadocia

## Administrative Dependence

Until 1917: kaymakamlık of Aksaray, mutasarrıflık of Niğde, vilayet of Konya; 1917-1922: mutasarrıflık of Aksaray, vilayet of Konya

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### 1. Anthropogeography

Aksaray lies on a plateau to the southwest of Niğde, at an altitude of 980 m, near the River Beyaz-Su. The River Kara-Su crosses the city and the surroundings are quite marshy with sparse porous stones. There was limited arable land at the time and plots of this land were used as fields, vineyards and orchards, while there were several fruit trees, mainly apricot trees. Finally, there was a lot of pasture around – there is evidence of well-developed stock farming in some large villages –, while a part of this land was covered with woods.

No other name is attributed to the settlement and the authors that have delved into its history agree that ancient Garsaura, and later Archelais, used to be in the same position. Aksaray was built in the 12$^{th}$ century, in the site where a Roman, and later a Byzantine, settlement used to be.[1] As the administrative and commercial centre of the surrounding area in the Ottoman period, Aksaray had several public buildings: Administration Building, Court of Law and a branch of the Ottoman Bank, as well as the Zinçirli medrese (first half of 15$^{th}$ c.) and two mosques, Ulu Cami (early 15$^{th}$ c.) and Kızıl Cami.[2]

It is not likely that there was any resident Greek Orthodox population in Aksaray until the end of the 19$^{th}$ century. However, various local traditions talk about the existence of Greek Orthodox population in former times. The fact is that neither European nor Greek sources available mention anything about resident population before 1875, when the first Greek Orthodox community was formed. As the administrative and commercial centre, the settlement attracted merchants from several parts of Cappadocia, such as Kaisareia, Ürgüp, Nevşehir, Niğde, Bor, Gelveri, Aravisos and Tirhin. The first settlers stayed there for only a few months a year, depending on their professional needs, while only a few of them became permanent residents. Around 1875 they started to bring their families to their new land, thus gradually creating the Greek Orthodox community. The newcomers inhabited a separate quarter at the centre of the settlement.[3]

Apart from Muslims, who represented the largest religious group, and Christian Orthodox, Aksaray was inhabited by lots of Armenians as well. At this point it is worth mentioning that the Greek Orthodox shared their cemetery with the Armenians.[4]

The Greek Orthodox community, all of them Turkish-speaking, amounted to about 500 people in 1905, the year when the overall population of the settlement reached a total of 6,650 people.[5] Of course, there are different population estimates as well. Farasopoulos and Sarantidis cite a population of approximately 400 people towards the end of the 19$^{th}$ century, Christopoulos

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mentions 90-100 people out of a total of 3,300 inhabitants and Andreadis mentions 35 families (without any information about the number of people). On the other hand, Leontopoulos says that 45 Greek Orthodox families inhabited Aksaray when the overall population of the settlement reached 8,000 and Kontogiannis claims that the inhabitants amounted to 2,500, without mentioning the number of the Greek Orthodox. According to the refugees, at the time of the population exchange between Greece and Turkey, there were 48 Greek Orthodox families in Aksaray, with a total of 203 inhabitants.[6]

**2. History**

Aksaray used to be the seat of several sovereigns, the Seljuks at first and the Karamanids later. Its important geographical position helped it become a traffic hub during the Ottoman period, as well as a centre for military movements and a supply centre during the wars of the Ottoman Empire against the Persians, various local powerful families and disordered troops, which often caused trouble in the area. Throughout the period from the 16th to the early 19th century Aksaray faced problems with the uncontrollable activities of deli ordelibaşı. There were also problems with powerful local families, who in the case of Aksaray seemed to be subordinates to the family of Çapanoğlu.[7]

After 1875 the relations between the Muslim inhabitants and the recently arrived Christian Orthodox were rather good in periods of peace, while they deteriorated in periods of crisis. For example, in 1916 the Muslims imposed a two-month boycott on Christian stores. They repeated the boycott in 1922, although this time it lasted for only one week. In 1921, Aksaray and its surrounding areas accepted Greek Orthodox populations expelled from İsparta of Pisidia, Aydın, Bodrum and Denizli.[8]

**3. Economy**

The sandy soils of the valley around Aksaray were suitable to farm cereals, mainly wheat, but barley and rye as well. The area was considered one of the breadbaskets of Turkey. Legumes and some vegetables were also grown in small orchards usually near the houses. Viniculture was limited and the wine produced was a medium quality, intended for home consumption. The same was true in the cultivation of fruit trees, usually grown in vineyards and orchards. Linseed was an important product that gave linseed oil, while the residues of this process were used as fodder. There was a lot of stock farming, mainly domesticated, which covered the food needs of each family, although there were some large herds. Moreover, the people were engaged in apiculture, although without remarkable results, and poultry-farming at home, aiming at selling their products, mainly eggs. Finally, a part of their income came from arboriculture, mainly wood production from poplar trees, used as raw material in carpentry developed in the areas of Aksaray and Halvadere.

Agriculture and stock farming were not the main occupations of the Christian inhabitants of Aksaray, who were initially engaged mainly in handicraft and commerce. Shoemakers, bakers, potters and millers are also mentioned. The domesticated production of woolen flannels and socks made by women is also mentioned.

Merchants were divided into two categories, depending on the range of their activities. The first category included those who covered the local needs, either as storeowners or as peddlers in local markets (the weekly market and the great market lasting from 15 May to 15 July). The second category included those who promoted local products to Mersin, Constantinople and Smyrna. They were wheat merchants, who collected the tithe from the entire district of Aksaray, leather merchants, as well as wool and rug merchants.

Finally, in Aksaray there was a community of Christians from Floita, Axo, Bor and Trochos, seasonal immigrants there, engaged in agriculture, linseed oil presses, furnaces and mills in summer.[9]

**4. Administration**

Until 1917 Aksaray was the seat of a kaymakamlık, which came under the administration of the mutasarrıflık (sancak) of Niğde and the vilayet of Konya. In 1917 Aksaray was promoted to the seat of a mutasarrıflık of the vilayet of Konya and maintained this status

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until 1922, when it was promoted to a prefecture seat.[10]

In comparison with other contemporary communities of the area, communal administration was poorly organised because of two main factors. Firstly, because the Christian population did not settle there until 1875, which means that by the time of population exchange the community of Aksaray had been in existence for only 49 years; second, because the community's population was small. Whichever demographical calculations we may accept, the Greek Orthodox community represented a small percentage of Aksaray's overall population, whose majority remained Muslim. As a result, the Greek Orthodox community could never acquire the control of the area, as it was not the predominant population group.

The Greek Orthodox community had its ecclesiastical fund, controlled by a three-member administrative board, and a supervisory committee, responsible for the supervision and approval of expenses. The community provided for the priest and the teacher, making use of its resources coming from community stores by the church.

**5. Religion**

The church of Aksaray was under the ecclesiastical administration of the diocese of Caesarea (Kaisareia), seated in Niğde. The few Christian Orthodox did not originally have an organized church of their own. According to information, they performed their religious duties in a house. It was not until 1908 that they formed a charitable committee, aiming to raise money to build the church. The church, dedicated to Saints Constantine and Helen, was completed in 1913.

**6. Education**

Education was organised late due to the factors that determined the development of the community. In 1905 Aksaray had a school with 2 classes for boys, one teacher and 30 pupils.[11] According to other sources, the school of Aksaray was both for boys and girls, with four classes and about 40 pupils,[12] while another version claims there were seven classes.[13] However, there was no school building until 1915. It was then that the community inherited a house with 5 rooms for a school. Two of the rooms were used as classrooms and the rest as the teacher's house.

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## Glossary :

**deli (delibaşi)**
Irregular troops who functioned as the Great Vezir's bodyguard and later as the Janissaries' light cavalry.

**kaymakamlık**
Ottoman administrative unit that replaced the kaza during the late Ottoman Period, after the administrative reforms of 1864.

**mutasarrıflık**
A medium-sized Ottoman administrative unit that replaced the sancak during the Late Ottoman Period, after the administrative reforms of 1864.

**vilayet (valilik)**
The larger administrative unit in the Ottoman provincial administration system. The large provinces of the Ottoman Empire were previously called eyalet. The new regulation of 1864 introduced the vilayet as an equivalent of the French département - albeit of smaller size. The governor of the

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vilayet was called vali and had extensive authority.

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