ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΜΕΙΖΟΝΟΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΜΟΥ

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Summary :

A leading ecclesiastical figure in the second half of the 17th century, when he served as Patriarch of Constantinople five times. His patriarchal career was described by antagonism and controversies with the Phanariote houses of Constantinople.

Other Names

Dionysios o mouselimis (the müsellim) or seroglanis (the seroğlan)

Date and Place of Birth

first half of the 17th c., İstanbul (Constantinople)

Date and Place of Death

1696, Tîrgovişte, Wallachia

Main Role

Ecumenical Patriarch

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1. Life and career

Dionysios Komnenos came from an old aristocratic family of Byzantium. He was born before the mid-17th century in Constantinople and was introduced to the limelight in the second half of the same century as an administrative official of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (hence his epithets ‘müsellim’ and ’seroğlan’, which both refer to Ottoman administrative posts). After he had received an excellent education, which included his studies at the Patriarchal Academy, he was directly elected metropolitan of Larissa on 9 August 1662, although until then he was a layman.

He first ascended the patriarchal throne in October 1671, the first of his five terms of office. Dionysios was overthrown following actions of the wife of the Great Dragoman, Panagiotis Nikousios, on 25-7-1673, and was offered the diocese of Philippopolis (in Turkish: Filibe, now Plovdiv, Bulgaria) eis zoarkeian, which was also repeated after his second patriarchal term (24-10-1676 to 2-8-1679). After he was removed from the patriarchal throne for the second time, he settled in Walllachia. When he completed his third patriarchal term (31-8-1683 to 10-3-1684) he retired to Chalki and possibly to Adrianople (Edirne) for some time, while from 1685 onwards he was offered the diocese of Chalcedon. It was then that he was involved in a strong controversy with Patriarch Iakovos, which was to become extremely fierce in the following years. Dionysios secured the support of the prelates and overthrew Iakovos before he ascended the patriarchal throne for the fourth time on 7-4-1686. However, Iakovos retaliated by offering a largew sum to the Grand Vezir and overthrew Dionysios again on 17-10-1687. Dionysios was then persecuted, arrested in Adrianople, where he had retired, and was made to pay ransom for his freedom. He then left for Wallachia, where he enjoyed the hospitality of the prince Constantin Brâncoveanu. The latter supported Dionysios, who became patriarch in 1693 for the fifth time, since Iakovos was no longer on the patriarchal throne. Dionysios replaced Kallinikos II of Akarnania. This last term of office met with general reaction and, following several denunciations of maladministration, he was permanently removed from the patriarchal throne seven moths later and retired to Wallachia, where he remained until his death.

He died in Tîrgovişte of Wallachia on 23 September 1696 and was buried in the yard of the Radulvoda Monastery.

2. Work and evaluation

He was an active and literary hierarch. His capabilities are proven by the long contention for the patriarchal throne and the successful attitude he had towards subversive activities against him, before he recovered the throne four times. A characteristic example of his theological background is his ‘answer’ to the Calvinists about the doctrines of the Orthodox Church in January 1672. His relationship

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with Asia Minor was poor and was restricted only to his presence in Chalki after his third patriarchal term, as the offer "eis zoarkeian" of the metropolitan throne of Chalcedon was a mere formality. One of his actions concerning Asia Minor was his ratification of the donation to the brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre of the Church of St. George in Attaleia (Antalya).

Bitter enmities occurred against him, most typical being that of the new-sprung Phanariote families, which is reflected in the generally negative attitude of Komnenos Ypsilantis towards him, although more than a century had passed. Due to this enmity, he was first overthrown in 1673, following actions of the wife of the Great dragoman, Panagiotis Nikousios. His relations with the body of hierarchs were unstable: although he secured their support to overthrow Iakovos in 1686, there was general outcry against him during his last term of office. Besides, this success to secure a last time of office was due to the fact that towards the end of his career he secured the solid support and protection of the prince of Wallachia, which counterbalanced the negative attitude of the Greek-Orthodox elite. Traces of this attitude have also survived in the work of Manuil Gedeon, who portrays Patriarch Dionysios IV as a tough and stern man.

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Glossary :

eis zoarkeian

The offer of the metropolitan throne of a province was at times a form of retirement for prelates who had previously been patriarchs. The person awarded the title ‘eis zoarkeian’ (as a life support) was not a titular prelate, but actually the metropolitan of an active province and received the salary defined by the ecclesiastical law, without being obliged to be present there and perform his metropolitan duties.