THE KOCABAŞIS AS INTERMEDIARIES?: THE LOCAL AND CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION IN İMVROS/İMROZ AND LEMNOS IN THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY

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Studies concerning center-periphery relations and the Ottoman rule of the Mediterranean islands of Crete and Cyprus have been well debated. The particular experience of the smaller Aegean islands, like Chios, Samos, Patmos, Andros and Rhodes, under the Ottoman rule also began to be analyzed by scholars. Studies about these smaller Aegean islands demonstrated communication of the islanders with the central government through Muslim local authorities. Contributing to such discussions, this paper focuses on the relationship between local intermediaries/civil community leaders and islanders in İmvros² and Lemnos,³ two small northern Aegean islands. It hopes to give voice to the overlooked ordinary insular lives under the Ottoman rule in the middle of the 19th century.

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2 The name İmvros (İpşpoç) is a pro-Hellenic name. It is transcribed as “Imbros” or “İmvoz”. August Fick, Vorriësche Ortsnamen als Quelle für die Vorgeschichte Griechenlands, Vandenhoek und Ruprecht, Göttingen 1905, p. 65; Çiğdem Özbez, “Imbros Ada’sındaki Kaberioi Kutsal Alan ve Hermes Tapunu,” Anadolu/Anatolia Ek Dizî/Suppl. no. 1, Ed. Zeynep Çizmeli-Oğuz, Tüç Sıpahi, Levent Keskın, Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, Ankara 2004, pp. 167-182, 168, FN. 11; Eugen Oberhummer, “Imbros,” Festchrift für H. Kiepert, Berlin, 1898, p. 293. When the Ottomans took over the island, they continued to use the name İmroz, which had been written in the Ottoman-Turkish documents as Ἰμροζ from 16th to 20th century. Turkish government changed the name İmroz to Gökçeada by the government decree on 29 July 1970; Alexis Alexandris, “ Imbros and Tenedos: A Study of Turkish Attitudes Toward Two Ethnic Greek Islands Communities Since 1923,” Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora, 7 (1), 1980, p. 5. In this article, the author prefers to follow “İmvoz”, the transcribed form of the word from Greek to Latin letters.

Framing the Study Area: Imvros and Lemnos

Imvrians and Limnians, willingly or unwillingly, became Ottoman subjects shortly after the fall of Constantinople. Imvros and Lemnos islands were not conquered by force by Mehmed II, they were taken over by him between 1456 and 1479 through negotiation -istmalet- policy.4 Mihail Kritovoulos, a leading Imvrian, and subsequently chronicler to Mehmed II,5 organized peaceful surrender of Imvros and Lemnos to the Ottomans. The sultan agreed to leave the islands under the administration of a local person, in return for taxes and loyalty.6 However, the islands were attacked by the papal forces and exchanged among the Ottomans, the Papal forces and Venice between 1456 and 1479. They came under the definitive rule of the Ottomans in 1479.7 These geographically isolated, but strategically important islands on the Dardanelles were not of great economic interest for the Ottomans like Crete and Cyprus. Ottomans did show a specific interest to retain Lemnos during the Venetian-Ottoman war from 1463 to 1479 not only because of its strategic importance, but also its rare mineral source *terra sigillata* (Tyn-ı Mahtüm trans. the “sealed earth”) played a role for the Ottomans’ insistence to regain the island.8 Although, *terra sigillata* was important because of its therapeutic quality for plague, which was a devastating problem in the Ottoman capital in the 15th century,9 Lemnos, however was not a major economic gain for the Ottomans. The Ottomans attempted to provide integration of these two small Aegean islands with their overwhelmingly Greek population -Imvros composed of only Orthodox Christian Greeks- through issuing *kanuname* and installing Muslim local rulers.10 The issuing of

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4 This was an Ottoman policy of “accommodation”, that is, taking over the Balkans by persuasion and assurances of good treatment. Halil Inalcık, “The Status of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch under the Ottoman,” in Halil Inalcık, *Essays in Ottoman History*, Eren Press, Istanbul 1998, pp. 196-8. For the application of istmalet policy on the Aegean islands, see Lowry, *Fifteenth Century Ottoman Realities*, pp. 1, 3-4, 10, 42-5.


6 Ibid., p. 15.


10 The *kanuname* for Imvros and Lemnos islands are available in the tahrir-tax- registers for the years 875 (1470/1490) (TD n. 25, 925 (1519), TD n. 75, TD n. 434 (period of Kanuni Sultan Süleyman), TD n. 490, 977 (1569), TD n. 724, 1009 (1600). 75 Numarah Gelibolu Livasi Tahrir Deteri 925 (1519) Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, Ankara 2009, pp. 7-8.
kanunnames after a short while of their annexation into the Ottoman rule indicates the Ottomans’ attempt to form a general administrative pattern for these islands. For example, although Chios was taken over in 1566, the first kanunname was issued for the island in early 18th century. This can be seen as a belated Ottoman attempt to provide administrative integration of such small islands in the Aegean.

Although they were not conquered by the Ottomans, it is difficult to answer to what degree the Greek islanders recognized the claim of to be ruled by the Ottomans. We may say that they lived a modest way life in their subsistence economies and stayed away from upheavals, like not supporting the Greek revolt of 1821. Although Greek bandits attacked to and landed in Imvros and Lemnos in order to take sustenance support, the islanders did not help them so that Ottoman troops drove back the rebellions. While the population of Imvros remained Orthodox Christian -except Muslim local rulers and soldiers- after the annexation to the Ottoman rule, in Lemnos there was a Muslim settlement since the middle of the 16th century. 40 years after the definite establishment of the Ottoman rule in the islands, the population of Imvros was around 2,100 in 1519-except 84 müselleman (cavalrymen); of Lemnos it was about 4,888 (1173 households). Towards the middle of the 19th century -the given period of this study-according to the population census of 1831, the male population of Imvros was 2505, of Lemnos it was about 5491, of which 511 were Turks. Both islands had been taken over by Greece in 1912, during the Balkan wars, and Imvros had been used by Britain, Lemnos by France as military bases during the First World War. As a result of the Lausanne Treaty in 1923, while Lemnos remained in the Kingdom of Greece, Imvros -and Tenedos- took part in the national borders of the nascent Turkish Republic. The Greek Orthodox population of Imvros was 9,207 in 1923, the population of Lemnos was around 25,000, when it was taken over by Greece in 1912.
Kocabasısı as Ayans: Reporting to the Center

Both islands were covered by churches and chapels, most of which were belonged to the Athonite foundations. This shows the crucial role of Christianity in the islanders' life. Priests of these Athonite monasteries were the main landlords of the islands.20 The members of the Orthodox Christian clergy -priests/ despots, and metropolitans- were the community leaders and elites of the islands, until the emergence of kocabasısı as influential civil leaders in the 18th century. Non-Muslim Kocabasısı were regarded as equal to ayans and as intermediaries between local people and central government and other Ottoman authorities in the present literature.21

The emergence of ayans -provincial elites and land notables- as politically and economically powerful authorities in the 18th century is a topic that attracted a scholarly debate. These studies commonly indicated that the struggle over resources led to a contest between those in the countryside and the central authority and as a result constant economic struggle occurred between the ayans and the central government.22

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Ottoman central government, attributing a political role to the *ayans*, expected them to collect taxes, provide public order and security. They were seen as local intermediaries not as official functionaries of the central government -like the kadi- but as the products of given society. Although *kocabaşis* were regarded as equals to *ayans* in the literature, regrettably though, their role and significance is not a well-studied subject. Studies in the Ottoman-Turkish historiography, following a monolithic approach, focused primarily on the Muslim *ayans*, ignored their non-Muslim counterparts (*kocabaşis*). Recently however some studies, albeit slightly, emphasized the interaction and cooperation of Muslim *ayans* and Orthodox Christian *kocabaşis*. What still remains to be comment on the relationship of the *kocabaşis* with their people.

*Kocabaşis* were locally rooted native people and elected by the islanders, not imposed by the central authority as a potential community leaders. The economic, political, and social conditions under which *kocabaşis* gained influence and the power of *kocabaşis* over local people in different regions of the Empire is not well explored yet. Comparing *kocabaşis* with *ayans* requires a further understanding of the political and economic conditions under which *kocabaşis* gained economic and political power as local leaders. Using primary sources would be helpful to clarify this matter. Ottoman archival documents used for Imvros and Lemnos islands for this study, for example, do not allow us to examine the social backgrounds and the base of the economic power of *kocabaşis* of these Aegean islands. Therefore, this paper diverts from this aim and instead examines the relationship between the *kocabaşis* and islanders, and the Muslim local and central administration. Understanding the relationship between local governors/elites -whether non-Muslim civil and religious leaders- and the Ottoman central authority would provide a better understanding of dynamics of power in the

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Greek Aegean islands under the Ottoman rule and help to answer the question how the Greek Orthodox islanders were treated by their coreligionist local leaders and as well as the local and central Muslim Ottoman authorities. Such an analysis would help us to shed light on the life of the ordinary people in the Empire.

A kocabaşı could be from various ethnic and religious backgrounds, Greek, Armenian, Bulgarian, and Serbian, Latin Catholic or Protestant.27 Leaders of Christian communities were known as primates or primkur, knez, voyvoda, and protogeros as called in different languages. These terms transformed into çorbacı -head of the town- and kocabaşı -head of the village- as the Turkish became widespread spoken language in the Balkans. The term kocabaşı, which means “big head”, derived from the term ocakbaşı means the head of a hearth or simply a community.28 In Kemal Karpat’s explanation çorbacı was a superior figure to kocabaşı as a community leader of larger town. As for the term itself, various other names were used in Greek for kocabaşı, like proesti, prouchontes, archontes.29 Halil İnalcık defined the term kocabaşı as a Christian ayan who were responsible of collecting taxes.30 Referring to S. S. Bobcev’s differentiation between the terms of kocabaşı and çorbaci in terms of their duties, İnalcık also mentioned that while the kocabaşis were only responsible for collecting taxes, the çorbacıs on the other hand, were representative of local people, and the kocabaşis were elected among the çorbacıs of the region once in a year.31 Kocabaşıs, whose influence increased as the ayan gained more political, economic and social power in the 18th century, were named as çorbacıs in the Balkans, Anatolia and Aegean islands.32 For example, while the naib of Thasos Island informed the central government about doings of two çorbacıs used this term, however, in the seal of the same document the term kocabaşı was used.33 We learn about existence of başkocabaşı -the head kocabaşı who was elected by regular kocabaşıs, on Paros Island.34 As for Imvros and Lemnos

30 Halil İnalcık, “Tanzimat’ın Uygunlanması ve Sosyal Tepkileri” [The Application of Tanzimat and Social Responses], Belleten XXVIII, no. 112 (1964): 642, FN. 51.
31 Halil İnalcık, Tanzimat ve Bulgar Meselesi [Tanzimat and Bulgarian Issue], Ankara 1943, p. 78.
34 Ibid., 405. FN., 28, 29, Evamir Mecmuas, no. 38 A, 38 B.
islands the terms kocabaşı and çorbacı had been used interchangeably in the Ottoman-Turkish documents.

The term kocabaşı was seen first time in an Ottoman-Turkish document dated to 1691, however the Greek equivalent of the term kocabaşı, protokir35 was seen in an earlier date in 1651 in the court register of Crete.36 The oldest known document about the election of kocabaşis is dated 17 October 1726, from which we learn about their duties: Kocabaşis should be eloquent, comprehensive, reputable, loyal to the state, able to deal with the problems of people, protect the honor of people and maintain their welfare; they should not collect extra taxes.37 Local people elected the kocabaşis and informed the central government about the elected kocabaşı and asked for its approval. If he was approved by the central government, a decree (buyruldu) was sent to the kocabaşı, then, he could hold his post officially.38 It was seen that kocabaşis could be elected from a variety of professions, like priests, monks, makers or sellers of saddle makers (semercī), and dyers.39 Various examples indicated that kocabaşis treated their people unjust and misused their authority by taking illegal taxes, therefore they were discharged of their position upon the complaint of people.40 The kocabaşı of Morea, Panayote Benakis, is a telling example for the strong authority and influence of kocabaşis among local people, which played significant role in the Morean revolt in 1770.41

Kocabaşis as Local Elites? Defining the Term in Depth

Ottoman rule recognized the existence of provincial elites. Furthermore, the use of the terms ayan, derebeyler, vücu, iş erleri, söz sahipleri, muteberan, kocabaşlar, çorbacılar to describe a certain group of people representing local population are enough to prove

35 Protokir (πρωτοκύριος) means in Greek proto (πρῶτο) -first- kyrios (κύριος)-gentleman, governor- which refers to the leading community member.
37 Mert, “18. ve 19. Yüzyıllarda Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda Kocabaş Deyimi,” 403, FN. 14, BOA, Cevdet Adliye (C.ADL.), no. 1060; Cevdet Maliye (C. MAL.), no. 30980; HH, No. 38896-C; (irade Hariciye, (I. HR.), n. 7529; lef: 26; İrade Meclisi Vala (LMV.), n. 1550, 6392.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., FN., 24, BOA., C.ZAP., n. 2685, 4535.
this. For example, in the kanunname of Imvros in 1519, soldier (leşker) Sivastopoulo, Mihal Ralo and Papas Kostendin Konomo were defined as the ajans of the island. When we think of that ajans gained their economic and political power by depending on the land, it makes sense to call them as “land notables”. However, how about the usage of the term “elite”, who were the elites of the Ottoman society, more specifically of the Aegean Islands? The elite formally represented the local population before the Ottoman authorities and providing taxation and security, they were expected to deal with local affairs efficiently. Defining elites as people with economic power, who had the right to usufruct the land in perpetuity, excludes influential leading people in a society without economic wealth, like intellectuals and clergymen. Therefore, accepting those with economic and political power as elites of a society would be misleading. Accepting wealth, which brings about political power, as the basic determinant of being elite is an insufficient assumption in its own right. Although power and wealth usually interlinked, political authority/power and influence should be counted as other crucial characteristics of elite. It is commonly accepted that being political interlocutors, provincial elites were the intermediaries between central government and its agents, and local people. The central authority in due time delegated them with official duties. However, this state centered approach curtails other influential agents in social life. Abandonment of official state documents in the Ottoman archives brought about the development of a state centered approach, instead of a society oriented one. An alternative approach could be a society orienting one, which defines elites as people with social power and influence, irrespective of economic wealth and having been involved in legal procedures. Hence, it was quite possible for Muslim and non-Muslim clergy, who formed part of the Ottoman elite in administrative and social terms, could be among the elites.

46 Ibid., p. xix.
47 Ibid., p. xii.
48 Ibid., p. xvi.
49 Ibid., p. xviii.
50 Ibid., p. xviii.
51 For the example for the influence of Orthodox Christian bishops see Pinelophi Stathi, “Provincial Bishops of the Orthodox Church As Members of the Ottoman Elite (Eighteenth-Nineteenth Centuries),” in Provincial Elites in the Ottoman Empire, ed. Antonis Anastasopoulos, Crete University Press, Rethymno, pp. 77-83.
It is possible to define kocabays and bishops -despots, as written in the Ottoman documents- of the Aegean islands as elites of the island society. As for Imvros and Lemnos islands, until the emergence of kocabays as influential civil leaders in the 18th century, elites of the islands were their religious -metropolitan and despot- leaders, who were chosen by the Patriarchate. Therefore, exploring the relationship of islanders with their metropolitan and despot -especially before the 19th century- will uncover the most important social aspect of island society. This could be possible not only with the analysis of state documents, but also with the examination of correspondences between islanders and the Patriarchate in Istanbul.

When we consider Imvros and Lemnos examples in terms of defining the elites of the islands, we also should take into consideration the rural life in these islands. This alerts us to think the concept of elite is not only an urban phenomenon, but also had some rural connotation with different characters and qualities. In geographically isolated islands, like Imvros and Lemnos, where islanders had parochial perspective, being a native of island should be necessary to have status and power, and influence over the islanders. In a relatively closed economic structure of these islands, it could be almost impossible for someone out of this locality to flourish economically and to have status and ability to control local population. One must add that in the island societies, both kocabays and Orthodox Christian metropolitans and despots were among the elites of island societies.

As this paper indicates, in the Tanzimat years, islanders found new interlocutors to make their complaints other than their community leaders -civil and religious. In the given period of this study -the middle of the 19th century- state documents revealed, on the one hand, the relationship between kocabays and islanders, on the other hand, between islanders and central/local administration. As will be discussed in the below, the archival documents used for this paper showed the central government acted as a mediator/broker between kocabays and islanders in favor of islanders in the Tanzimat years.52

The Ottomans incorporated leaders of diverse groups into administrative roles and extended protections and claims over non-Muslim subjects. Petitions submitted to the Porte indicated, Ottoman central authority was invited by local parties to interfere in conflicts. During the times of local conflicts, as happened in the Karaferye town in the Balkans in the middle of the 18th century the central government played an active role to solve the problem when a conflict occurred between the elites of the island.53

Likewise, in Imvros and Lemnos, a century later, central government interfered in conflict between the islanders and their kocabaşı, and between a kocabaşı and a despot. The archival records showed that religious and lay leaders of the islands - despot and kocabaşı - who constituted a power group outside the Ottoman mechanism for maintaining coherent relationships between islanders and the central government, misused their power. Benefiting from the Tanzimat regulations, the islanders applied to the central government to complaint about them.

In Imvros and Lemnos, at times, there was a conflict between the despots and the kocabaşis. As the examples will indicate in the following section, the kocabaşis abused their power, the central government served as interlocutors between islanders and their kocabaşı.

**Intricate Relations: Kocabaşı, Despot, Kaymakam, Central Government and Islanders**

Kocabaşı and sandık emini (treasurer) of Imvros - son of Kosta, Dimitri (Logofet) - was in duty in the island in 1840s and 1850s. The discontent of the islanders about the kocabaşı Dimitri was reported in detail first time by the kaymakam of Tenedos in July 1850. He reported his observations to the Porte as a result of the trips he made to Samothraki (Semadirek) and Imvros islands in order to examine the public order and security: When he arrived on Imvros, islanders gave him a petition (anafora) in which they expressed their complaints from the kocabaşı Dimitri: The
kocabaşı was conducting trade with his friend Laskari with the help of his supporters and did not deal with the islanders. The kocabaşı, who was angry with the despot of the island, collected stamps\(^58\) of the leading islanders in the villages and used them for his self-interest, he did not pay his annual tax and even made the islanders pay for it. Since Dimitri had too many followers, the islanders could not dare to complain about him. He and his friend bought the products of the islanders with low price and sold them with high profit. They established monopoly over trade in the island with the help of çorbacı of Agia Theodori village, who was his son in low, and acted unfair to the islanders. To get rid of from this situation they elected another çorbacı, but Dimitri and his followers refused to accept the new çorbacı. The ill-natured (fesād) kocabaşı acted against the benefits of the poor (fukara) islanders.\(^59\) İsmail Kamil noted that although he warned Dimitri various times, the kocabaşı did not care about his advises and continued his unruly actions. Islanders had prepared an anafora with the help of their despot and sent it to the Patriarchate. As a result, İsmail Kamil stressed that the dismissal of the kocabaşı was necessary for the well being of the islanders and public order of the island. He also noted a circulating rumor that kocabaşı Dimitri secretly served as a deputy to the Greek consulate.\(^60\) This indicated the kaymakam’s concern for the Ottoman benefits on the face of the independent Greek kingdom-twenty years after its foundation.

The kaymakam requested help from the central government in favor of the Imvrians.\(^81\) A month later after the report of İsmail Kamil, Meclisi Vala\(^62\) wrote the inappropriate actions of the kocabaşı and explained all these complaints of the islanders by depending on the report of İsmail Kamil,\(^63\) and asked from the new kaymakam of Tenedos to investigate the issue in order to understand if they are actual complaints or

\(^58\) Mühür/mühür (seal): Everyone in government circles or among the public in the Ottoman empire had a personal mühür. It was used in petitions or letters after the author’s name. Mubahat Kütküoğlu, “Mühür”, Türkiye Dışari Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi, vol. 31, pp. 530-1. Seals were used by local notables in their communications with the central government, and can be seen as an indication of civic life. Nora Lafi, Esprit civique et organisation citadine: caractères de l’ancien régime urbain dans l’Empire ottoman et signification des réformes modernisatrices, Thèse pour l’habilitation à diriger des recherches, Berlin 2011, pp. 27-30. In the complaint petitions or letters consulted for this study, the theft of other people’s seals was viewed as unethical or corrupt behaviour. This response indicates the importance of mühürs in official correspondences in rural regions as well, including the small Aegean islands.

\(^59\) The term fukara is used for the islanders in the Ottoman documents. BOA, AMKT, UM, n. 23/22, 9 Ramazan 1266 (19 July 1850).

\(^60\) BOA, AMKT, UM, n. 23/22, 9 Ramazan 1266 (19 July 1850).

\(^61\) BOA, AMKT, n. 23/22, 9 Ramazan 1266 (19 July 1850).

\(^62\) The Meclisi Vala-yi Atkam-ı Adliye, in short the Meclisi Vala “Supreme Council of Judicial Ordinances” was established in the Tanzimat era. It was responsible for preparing the Tanzimat laws and regulations, and was also a special administrative court for trying administrative staff acting contrary to Tanzimat regulations.

\(^63\) BOA, AMKT, n. 27/ 69, 17 Şevval 1266 (26 July 1850).
not.⁶⁴ Imvrıans asked the exile of the kocabaşı Dimitri in 1852.⁶⁵ This shows that although the former kaymakam İsmail Kamil informed the central government about the problem in 1850, for two years there had been no any progress. However, we learn that the kocabaşı was exiled in 1852.⁶⁶ But, it was not the central government who exiled Dimitri, it was the despot, who first imprisoned him in the metropolitan house and then sent him to exile in Ahi Çelebi town in Edirne.⁶⁷ However, the kaymakam Fazlı Ağa, who was in charge after İsmail Kamil, investigated the issue and argued against the islanders wrote to the central government that in fact the Imvrıans were happy with the kocabaşı Dimitri, but since the despot had hostility towards the kocabaşı he had been imprisoned and exiled him illegally.⁶⁸ Meclisi Vala was not convinced with the report of the kaymakam Fazlı Ağa, since the despot was known in the island with his good manners for 16 years, while the kocabaşı oppressed the islanders for 30-40 years and acted contrary to the Orthodox rituals.⁶⁹ He refused the claims of the islanders; since his imprisonment and exile by the despot was contrary to the Tanzimat principles, the kocabaşı applied to the Patriarchate and the central government for his release.⁷⁰ According to the Tanzimat regulations no one could be imprisoned without a trial. However, the islanders also complained about Fazlı Ağa to the central government, since he made the islanders to prepare the petition by force for the good behaviors of the kocabaşı. The islanders sent a complaint petition about Fazlı Ağa to the Patriarchate as well.⁷¹ The availability of the petition of the islanders’ -both in Ottoman Turkish and in Greek-contentment about the kocabaşı with their stamps indicates accuracy of the event.⁷² The islanders put their stamps in Greek to the fake Ottoman Turkish petition, which Fazlı Ağa wrote on behalf of them.

In the petition, it wrote:

"Respected Mr. Logothetis is dealing with trade in our homeland from the very old times on. Contrary to the sayings of the bishop Neofitos and his followers, he was never unfair to the islanders and he dealt with useful works. He has been a good and harmless tradesman regarding the issues related to the Kingdom. Therefore, all due respect, we request his situation to be reexamined."

⁶⁴ Ibid. The kaymakam to whom the Meclisi Vala asked to investigate the issue was not İsmail Kamil; it was kaymakam Fazlı Ağa, who replaced İsmail Kamil. Fazlı Ağa was the former muhassıl of Chios Island and he was appointed as kaymakam of Bozcaada in 27 Zilhicce 1260 (3 Kasım 1850), Sadaret Mektubi Kalemı Meclis-i Vala, (A.MKT.MVL.), n. 33/132, 27 Zilhicce 1266 (3 November 1850).
⁶⁵ BOA, Hariciye Nezareti Mektubi Kalemı (HR.MKT), n. 47/70, 2 Zilkade 1268 (18 August 1852).
⁶⁶ BOA, HR.MKT 49/60 9 Zilhicce 1268 (24 September 1852).
⁶⁷ Ibid.
⁶⁸ BOA, Sadaret Mektubi Umum Vilayet, (A.MKTUM), n. 188/43, 9 Rebiülevvel. 1269 (18 August 1852).
⁶⁹ BOA, A.MKTUM, n. 188/43, 9 Rebiülevvel 1269 (18 August 1852).
⁷⁰ Ibid.
⁷¹ BOA, A.MKTUM, n. 131/46, 2 Receb 1269 (11 April 1853).
⁷² Meclisi Vala, (MVL), n. 253/80, 1269 Ra 9 (20 Ocak 1853), BOA, MVL, no. 253/80, 9 Rebiulahir 1269 (20 January 1853), BOA; HR.MKT, n. 49/60, 9 Zilhicce 1268 (24 September 1852), BOA.
⁷³ HR.MKT, n. 49/60, 1268 Zilhicce 1852 (28 September 1852).
In this petition, 82 names were written in August 1852 from Sihunidi, 196 names from Panayia, 13 names from Gliki, 2 from Kastro, 47 from Agridia and 89 names from Agia Theodori villages. 74

Dimitri, finally, was regretful for his wrong doings in Imvros. Since he was in exile for 7-8 months, the Meclisi Vala suggested the Patriarchate to decide for his release.75

In order to get rid of the maltreatment of the kocabaşıs, Imvrians applied to the central government either through their muslim müdürs or kaymakams and the Patriarchate. During the incident of the kocabaşı Dimitri from 1850 to 1853, the müdür of the island had changed four times. The first two müdürs, Cemal Efendi and Necip Efendi were dismissed by the central government, since they acted improper and unlawful to the islanders.76 Afterwards, Abdullah Efendi was in charge after the demise of Ahmet Efendi in 1851.77 The islanders heard that the kaymakam of Tenedos, Ali Bey, was going to be appointed as their müdürs. They petitioned to the central government their refusal of Ali Bey as their müdürs because of his bad reputation.78 Another instance for islanders' communication with the central government was their complaint petition -to the Meclisi Vala- to report on the müdür Necip Efendi's wrongdoings, unfair behaviours and his disobedience to the Tanzimat principles.79

During the Tanzimat years, the islanders not only sent complaint petitions about their kocabaşı to the central government, and also about their Muslim local administrators. Their applying to the central government to benefit from the Tanzimat regulations indicates their awareness of the political developments and expectations from the Ottoman government.

We also learn the central government monitored the revenues of the natural salt pit resource (memlaha) in Imvros. Its revenues belonged to the Foça salt pit and both salt pits were administered by the company called the Anadolu Kumpanyası (Anatolian Company). There was a problem about the collection and delivery of the salt pit in Imvros.80 In 1840s, there was 30 thousand bushel (keyl) salt came out in the year 1847 and it should be collected by tuz emini (Bekir Ağa). Kocabaşı Dimitri received an imperial

74 Ibid.
75 BOA, HR.MKT, n. 65/85, 28 Muḥarram 1270 (31 October 1853).
76 BOA, Sadarat Amedi Kalemi, (A.AMD), n. 27/29, 12 Safer 1267 (17 Aralık 1850), BOA; AMKT. UM., n. 82/45, 10 Muḥarram 1268 (5 November 1851).
77 Ibid.; BOA, AMKT.UM, n. 72/17, 28 Şevval 1267 (26 August 1851), BOA.
78 BOA, MVL 121/109 19 Zilhice 1268 (4 September 1852).
79 BOA, MVL, n. 105/107, Petition of the islanders, 7 Zilhice 1267 (3 October 1851).
80 BOA, AMKT 109/90, 3 Šebiüllahir 1264 (8 February 1848). The letter of mutasarrıf of Biga; AMKT 109/60 29 Safer 1264 (5 February 1848).
order from the Porte about this. The memlaka was not an old one, every 5-6 years no salt came out from the salt pit. Voyvoda and múltezims took three types of tax in Imvros: salt, wood (resm-i ağaq) and pork taxes (resm-i hinzir). The total amount of the tax the islanders paid was 17,000 gurûş when the Tanzimat regulations began. It was an old custom in the island that the islanders used to benefit from the salt for their own usage. Although the Anadolu Kumpanyası sent an officer from Foça to take the salt in Imvros, the islanders were already shared out the salt. Hence, certain amount of salt was lost. Therefore, according to the kaymakam of Tenedos, it was not Dimitri who snatched the salt; it was the islanders who kept some salt for their own use as the custom in the island. Reading this in the letter of the kaymakam, who explained all these in his letter to the central government, requested that the kocabaşı, some other şorbacıs and leading islanders would like to go to the Porte to present and clarify the issue. However, the mutasarrıf of Biga, who was superior to the kaymakam of Tenedos, wrote in his note it was the kocabaşı, who did not submit the salt to the Anadolu Kumpanyası and tried to cover up his fault, and the kaymakam of Tenedos was put in charge to investigate the issue by the mutasarrıf of Biga. He ordered the kaymakam to take the remaining amount from the kocabaşı. Since kocabaşı was responsible of distribution of products and collection of taxes, the mutasarrıf held the kocabaşı responsible for the lost amount of salt and wanted the kocabaşı of Imvros pay for the value of the lost amount of salt.

Similar kocabaşı corruptions happened in the neighboring Lemnos Island as well. In a long document in July 1839 -before the announcement of the Tanzimat in November 1839- we read about the corruptions of kocabaşıs and voyvoda of the island: In earlier times there was imbalanced situation regarding the collection of taxes on the Lemnos Island. Kocabaşıs used to take an extra tax which was named aralık aşeri. In order to rectify this unfair situation, kocabaşıs were told by the center not to collect this tax, but continued to do so. Moreover, they began to collect zecniye tax, a tax for alcoholic drinks taken from the reaya and collected taxes for navy and capital from both Muslims and Christians according to the economic condition of the people. The islanders had consented to this kind of application for the taxation. Later on, in order to solve out this unbalanced taxation of kocabaşı, an imperial decree ordered formation of a sandık ortası, a common treasury, whose kocabaşı and kabzmal (fruit and vegetable seller) would be elected by Muslims and non-the Muslims of the island. This method was applied for some time. However, the earlier kocabaşı and kabzmal, using

81 BOA, A.MKT 109/60, 29 Safer 1264 (5 February 1848).
82 Ibid.
83 BOA, A.MKT, n. 109/90 3 Rebiülahir 1264 (8 February 1848).
84 BOA, C.MAL, n. 302/12281 29 Zilkade 1254 (13 February 1839).
85 Ibid.
the old voyvoda's -Tahir Ömer Bey- leave from his duty as an excuse began to execute their former inappropriate doings: deceiving the new voyvoda, Salih Ağâ, they collected illegal cizye taxes and abused islanders.86 Limnians sent a petition to the central government and explained their sympathy for the new voyvoda, his humble and fair attitudes, and requested new voyvoda remain in the duty. A similar petition for the same event was also sent to the central government by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate.87 In order to prevent the unfair treatment of the islanders, Muslim and non Muslims local rulers and leading islanders in Lemnos -Naib Hüseyin Efendi, Defter nazım Ali Efendi, Ambar Emini Mustafa, leading islanders Ali Mirzan, Halîl bin Haci Ali oğlu, Molla Hüseyn, new kocabaşı Yorgaki and new kabzimal Yannaki, earlier kocabaşı Hacı Pandeli and old kabzimal Anagnosti, tailor Yorgi and Atanaş- were referred to Istanbul so that the issue was transferred to the Meclisi Vala.88

In another document, we see an interference of the central government to the unfair treatment of the Limnians on the eve of the Tanzimat, in July 1839. The clerk of the island collected extra cizye tax from the islanders. Collecting from each islander two, one and half gûruş extra, the amount he collected reached to 3,000 gûruş.89 The voyvoda of the island explained this inappropriate situation to the central government and guaranteed the islanders that the extra amount would be paid back to them with the help of Islamic law. It was decided that the money of those, who were absent during the repayment, will be entrusted to their kocabaşis.90 Since the central government considered kocabaşı as reliable community leader, it entrusted the islander's money to him.

**Conclusion**

As these archival examples indicated, kocabaşis, as influential local leaders in the Imvros and Lemnos, in other words being the elites of the Orthodox Christian island community, misused their power and abused the islanders. Mentioning the Tanzimat regulations, Imvirans' appeal to the central government to search for their rights, shows their awareness of the Tanzimat in the isolated insular space in the northern Aegean. This signs although these islands geographically isolated units and had subsistence economies, they had a good communication with the capital and were aware of the administrative matters. Although the Ottoman government recognized the kocabaşi as entrusted interlocutors of the Orthodox Christian islanders, it took into consideration

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86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 BOA, C.ML, n. 86/3948 19 Rabī‘ulahir 1255 (2 July 1839).
islanders’ complaints for their coreligionist local leaders and attempted to prevent abuses of kocabaşıs in the islands. Moreover, as the archival records showed, in the case of Imvros, the central government dismissed various times Muslim local rulers -kaymakam and müdür- upon the complaints of the islanders. The responsive attitude of the Ottoman government towards fakara islanders had to do with the governmental policy of serving the needs of the Christian subjects, to gain their loyalty and to provide and maintain political legitimacy of the Ottoman political power, which was at stake apparently since the beginning of the 19th century. Tanzimat regulations, as everywhere else in the Empire, in Imvros, impaired privileges and benefits of the community leaders that not only this affected their relations with the islanders, but also led to the transformation or re-formation of the islanders’ relationship with their community leaders and Muslim local/central administration. As for Lemnos, the documents dating back to early 1839 -before the announcement of the Tanzimat regulations- hinted at continuity in the Tanzimat years regarding the Porte’s treatment of the Greek islanders. Another example regarding the kocabaşı corruptions in the collection of cizye and the intervention of the central government at the beginning of the 18th century in favor of the islanders was Chios. As a result of the abuses of the kocabaşıs in Chios, the sultan of the period, Ahmed III, sent two officials in order to inspect all cizye registers from the beginning of the century until 1719. The kocabaşıs of Chios were sent to İstanbul and imprisoned for a considerable period of time. The Ottoman government interfered in kocabaşı and voyvoda abuses of the islanders regarding their illegal tax collection methods in favor of the people. That is to say, it was not, all of a sudden, the Tanzimat applications provided fair treatment of the Greek islanders’ unjust treatment by their co-religionist local leaders.

Although the Greek islanders’ appeal to the Muslim local administrators and central government, and their interference in favor of the islanders tell us their acceptance of the Ottoman rule as legitimate and adoption to it in the middle of the 19th century, it does not tell much about the perception of their identities whether they were insular Ottomans, Orthodox Christian Ottomans or Ottoman Greek islanders.


93 Ibid., FN. 20.
Religion, language, ethnicity and culture, which are the main determinants of identity, should be considered while commenting on insular lives. Ethnicity and religion, Greek Orthodox Christianity, were not distinctive features of islanders, since many Greek Orthodox Christians lived in overall Empire in ad hoc systems. What might distinguish Greek Orthodox Imvrians and Limnians from rest of the Orthodox Greeks in other provinces in the Empire is their lack of knowledge of Ottoman Turkish and their Greek and island cultures. They communicated with the local and central administration through their clerk and Patriarchate. Language, insular way of life, and customs must be the basic determinants of identities of these islanders. It must be illogical to think that these Greek speaking people defined themselves as Ottomans or felt as Ottomans in relatively isolated island society. This might not be the case for Greek Orthodox Christians who co-existed and interacted with other non-Muslims and Muslims in the larger cities of the Empire, like İstanbul, İzmir, Bursa, Nevşehir, and Trabzon. In Lemnos, there was an interaction to some extent between non-Muslims and Muslims, but in Imvros there were no Muslims, hence interaction with ordinary Muslims was not possible. Greek islanders used to live according to their customs and terms for centuries. The lack of interaction with ordinary Muslims and not sharing common language and religion of the ruling dynasty might prevent Imvrians, and also Limnians, from identify themselves as Ottomans. However, this did not preclude them to be loyal Greek Orthodox subjects of the Empire and to perceive the Ottoman rule as a legitimate rule, as the archival documents indicated in this paper.
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