

THE *LIFE AND PASSIONS OF SINFUL SOPHRONIUS* (1804): FIRST COMPLETE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

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Introduction

Sophronius of Vratsa (1739–1813), born Stoyko Vladislavov, was a Bulgarian Orthodox priest and a leading figure in the early Bulgarian National Revival. He was anointed bishop of Vratsa in 1794 and released from this office several years later but was canonized as a saint in 1964. *The Life and Passions of Sinful Sophronius* is the first Bulgarian autobiography and one of the first texts written in Modern Bulgarian (V. Karateodorov, 1940:8; V. Dimitrova, 2006:12; P. Anchev, 2009:86). It provides a first-person perspective on the Ottoman occupation of Bulgaria and the first Russo-Turkish war, and reads like a Balkan version of Don Quixote.

Sophronius breaks with the traditional genre of Old Bulgarian texts, namely the *Vita* or *Zhitie*, a hagiographic account which describes the life and deeds of a saint as an inspirational story. “Times are changing and we change with them” was written inside the cover of Sophronius’ collected manuscripts (1805).¹ We may ask why he wrote his life-story. Dimitrova (2006:7) surmises that Sophronius may have wished to transmit a documentary of the times and his life, to rehabilitate himself in the eyes of subsequent generations, or even to present a fictional version of life in 19th-century Bulgaria. I agree with Dimitrova (2006: 7) and N. Randow (1979:72) that Sophronius’ account does not follow the stylized form of the *Vita*, as his narrative is comprised of personal and picaresque episodes that relate his hardships in an anecdotic and humorous manner. Rather than a saint, Sophronius considers himself an anti-hero and transient who moves from one social milieu to another. He recalls episodes of his life, from his birth, childhood, and youth with a wicked stepmother, to becoming a priest, caught in the wars “between the Turk and the Muscovite” (1804: 7), and his travels through occupied Bulgaria and beyond.

In Istanbul “[t]hey found that my papers were not in order and took me to a distant park where Turks were playing music, dancing and laughing. There they locked me up in a small room next to the road. I guessed why they had locked me up there. By chance the key was on the inside, and I locked myself in at once. So many sodomites came along and begged me to open the door! They offered me gold coins through the window. I realized what was happening and began to shout. Across the street there were Jewish houses and right away some Jews came over and asked me: “Why are you shouting?” I told them the whole story. So they went to my companion and gave some money to the tax collector and rescued me from those sodomites.” (1804:2).

¹ The manuscript was discovered in Russia in 1860 and first published by G. Rakovski in the literary journal “*Dunavski Lebed*” (1861).

Many anecdotes are about everyday life under Ottoman rule: “After an hour or so, they took us to the sultan's officer. He asked me first: ‘Who sold these sheep?’ And I replied: ‘Islyam Agha sold them and Hadji Vlasia bought them.’ ‘So, how many did they sell?’ [...] ‘700.’ ‘But didn’t they sell more than that?’ [...] Right away he ordered for me to be thrown down, my eyes facing the ground. Then three men sat on me and began beating me on my bare feet. May God protect us from the guards’ merciless beatings! [...] I couldn't bear it any longer, my heart was tearing painfully, and I said: ‘Let me go and I'll tell you. [...] [T]he chief meat supplier sold more sheep to two traders (*djelepi*), but I don't know how many sheep he sold, or for how much.’ Then he shouted: “Go now, and hang this bastard!” [...] Meanwhile, some lords intervened [...] and saved me from hanging. The guards put us in iron chains together with the other prisoners – about 25 Turks, Christians and Gypsies, but most were Albanians [...]. They also beat Hadji Vlasia, but not as much. And each day they impaled some of the Albanians before our eyes. Then [...] we wheedled the lords into appealing for our release. Five days later we were free, but we had to pay a fine of 1500 groshes.” (1804:10).

The Bulgarian bishop also describes how he was forced to hide in a Turkish harem in Plevan, when the town was sacked by various pashas and their mercenaries (1804:23), or how he barely escaped converting to Islam at gunpoint, after performing a wedding ceremony for a girl whom a sultan wanted as his second wife: “What was I to do? My mouth was dry from fear of death. I clammed up and merely said: “Ah, Effendi, should one change one's faith at gunpoint? But if you kill a priest, do you expect the world's praise?” He aimed his gun at me and thought for a long time. Then he asked me: “Will you divorce this bride from her husband?” I replied: “Certainly, when I get to Karnobat, I'll divorce them.” “Swear it!” - he said. What was I to do; from fear of death I swore and said: “Vallahi billahi, I'll divorce them!” (1804:13).

He recounts his travels throughout the occupied Balkans, his endless financial troubles, perilous encounters with Ottoman soldiers and the constant fear of being captured, which kept him on the run. “When I saw that [Pazvantoğlu's rebels] had begun to assemble in Plevan, I was afraid that they would do me some harm. In December 1799, I left Plevan and went to Nikopol, to cross the Danube and return to Walachia. But since the Danube was frozen on both sides, we couldn't get across and so we stayed in Nikopol for six days. Then we heard that Gyavur Imam was coming to Nikopol. I was frightened and for a large amount of money I was ferried across the Danube, but I was frantic. The ice broke and a horse went down and drowned. The other horses were tied together and dragged over the ice on a plank. We nearly died of cold by the time we reached Zimnicea.” (1804:26).

We learn of his slow rise in the ecclesiastic institution. “As I could read a little, the other priests hated me, for at that time all of them were peasants. And since they were so simple and illiterate, I did not want to defer to them, for I was young and unreasonable. And then they told lies about me to the bishop who hated me and often punished me by suspending me from my duties! The bishop had an assistant, an uneducated and illiterate Greek who really hated me, but that was only natural: for an educated man loves someone who is educated, a simple man – a fool, and a drunkard – a drunk.” (1804:4).

Sophronius uses a direct style with numerous conjunctions such as ‘and’ or ‘but,’ and loosely connected clauses that are reminiscent of spoken Bulgarian. He relates his life and sufferings in a first-person narrative in the historical present tense, with many exclamations resembling oral speech in the form of rhetorical questions, such as: ‘Now, what to say?’,

‘What to do?’, ‘Where was I to go?’, or ‘Where should I flee to?’. To use narratologist G. Genette’s (1999:35) phrase, Sophronius’ account is “literary by *diction* rather than by *fiction*,” and thus exemplifies autobiography, a genre “halfway between fiction and diction” (ibid).

His concern was to write in a language which would communicate knowledge and guidance to Bulgarians in a way they would understand, a living language rather than Old Bulgarian or Old Church Slavonic. (J. Feuillet, 1981:29). Sophronius concludes his autobiography thus: “That is why I now work day and night, to write some books in our Bulgarian language, so that my countrymen might receive some useful guidance from me, the sinful one, as I am unable to preach to them by word of mouth. May they read and heed my writings. May they pray to God for me, the unworthy one, to amend my ignorance and to grant me forgiveness, so that I, too, might receive a place at His right hand on Judgment Day. Amen!” (1804:30).

In these lines, we find a reply to the question of why he wrote his life-story: his motive was redemption and rehabilitation, by successfully transmitting his lessons to Bulgarians “in our Bulgarian language.” Effectiveness is a necessary condition for successful communication: to be effective, Sophronius’ plea must be taken up by the readers, through whom he can be rehabilitated. Since his works have reached us, Sophronius may have achieved his goal of restoring his social status, as well as his transition from ‘sinner’ to ‘blessed’ by the Church, when he was finally canonized.

Although Sophronius’ autobiography has been translated into French, German and Polish, it has not been translated into English, except for a short excerpt by H. Cooper (2007). Taking a leaf out of N. Randow’s German translation, I have rendered the Bulgarian text in contemporary English, which is closer to Sophronius’ direct style, rather than attempting to archaize it, like T. Dabek-Wirgowa’s (1983) Polish translation. My translation is based on *Slovo.bg*’s electronic edition of the manuscript; N. Oreshkov’s (1914) edition; N.M. Dilevsky & A.N. Robinson’s (1976) edition; V. Karateodorov’s (1940) adapted edition, and the contemporary adaptation published by D. Yakov (2006). I have checked it against Henry Cooper’s (2007) partial English translation; Norbert Randow’s (1979) outstanding German translation: *Leben und Leiden des sündigen Sofroni*; Jack Feuillet’s (1981) French translation: *Vie et tribulations du pêcheur Sofroni*; Teresa Dabek-Wirgowa’s (1983) Polish translation: *Zywot i meka grzesznego Sofroniusza*, and Wojciech Galazka’s (1982) partial Polish translation. My thanks go to Aneta Dimitrova for critical notes and corrections, Mira Kovacheva for critical comments, Ivan Mladenov for detailed discussions, and Malgorzata Skowronek for expert feedback.

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Life and Passions of Sinful Sophronius (1804)

I was born a sinful man, in the village of Kotel. My father was Vladislav and my mother was Maria, and they gave me my first name, which is Stoyko. When I was three years old, my mother passed away and my father took another wife, who was bad-tempered and envious, and she bore him a son. But she cared only for her own child and kept rejecting me.

When I was nine years old, I was sent to learn to read and write. Before that, I couldn't go to school, because I was often ill and feeble. I proved to be hardworking and smart in my studies, and soon learnt to read. Since there was no higher education in the Slav tongue in Bulgaria, I began to study in Greek, and learnt the [octoechos]² by heart.

As I started learning the Psalms, news came that my father had died of the plague in Tsarigrad in 1750.³ So, at eleven years old, I was left without a father and a mother. Then my uncle adopted me, for he was childless, and sent me to learn a trade. When I was seventeen, my uncle and aunt also passed away, one soon after the other.

My uncle died in Tsarigrad, as did my father; both had been cattle traders (*djelepi*). Because I was his heir, his debtors and partners made me come to Tsarigrad to collect the money he was owed from the butchers (*kasapi*), as was customary for a cattle trader.

Since the butchers were scattered across Tsarigrad and the Anatolian shore, one of my uncle's partners and I decided one day to cross over to the Anatolian side. So we went to the pier [*skelyata*]⁴ to cross [the Bosphorus] by boat. We saw boats near the Tsar's palaces.⁵ We were simple folk, and because these boats were moored straight across from Scutari, we wanted to use them to cross over to Scutari.⁶ On our way there, at one place we saw a large crowd of people gathered around two fighting wrestlers. Behind them were tall palaces and, for all I knew, the Tsar himself could have been there. When the wrestlers had stopped fighting, the whole crowd swept towards the Tsar's palaces. We went along with them and stopped between the Tsar's gate and Jali-Kiosk,⁷ where the Tsar's boats were tied down. While we were standing there, wondering where to go, one of the guards [*bostancii*] appeared and said:

² "Eight-voice" – Hymn book in eight parts used in Orthodox liturgy, named for the eight tones on which sacral music is based.

³ Tsarigrad = Constantinople = Istanbul.

⁴ *Скелята*. Karateodorov (1940, 12) and Yakov's edition (2006, 16) use *пристанище*, *пристана*, which denotes *harbor* or *pier*.

⁵ Sophronius refers to the Ottoman Sultan as 'Tsar'. The Ottoman Sultan at that time was Mustafa III (1717-1757), who attempted administrative and military reforms to halt the decline of the Ottoman Empire, and who declared war on Russia, which resulted in a defeat after his death. Sophronius refers to this war below. Mustafa III was succeeded by his son, Selim III (1761-1808), who undertook a series of westernizing reforms, which evoked mutinies from various conservative factions, such as the Janissaries and local notables in the Ottoman Empire.

⁶ *Scutari* (*Скутари*) is a large district of Istanbul now called *Üsküdar*, on the Anatolian shore of the Bosphorus.

⁷ Jali-Kiosk or Pearl Kiosk is an octagonal edifice at the foot of the seraglio, where the sultan held audiences. The kiosk was built by Sinan Pasha, a favorite of Sultan Selim III.

“What are you doing here? Get out of here fast, before I cut off your heads!”

We apologized, saying that we were foreigners and simple folk. But on our way back, the Janissaries, who were keeping watch there, caught us. They wanted to kill us, they said, because they hadn't seen us passing by with the crowd. After we got away from them, we went to the main harbor and crossed over to Scutari.

Then I was just a teen, young and handsome of face, and the local Turks were sodomites. When they saw me, they caught me and asked me about my tax papers [*harachijska hartija*].⁸ They found that my papers were not in order and took me to a distant park where Turks were playing music, dancing, and laughing. There they locked me up in a small room next to the road. I guessed why they had locked me up there. By chance the key was on the inside, and I locked myself in at once. So many sodomites came along and begged me to open the door! They offered me gold coins through the window. I realized what was happening and began to shout. Across the street there were Jewish houses and right away some Jews came over and asked me: “Why are you shouting?”

I told them the whole story. So they went to my companion and gave some money to the tax collector and rescued me from those sodomites.

We collected as much money as we could and returned to our village safe and sound. When it was counted, it turned out that my uncle still owed 400 groshes.⁹ And they charged me with that debt, so that I'd have to settle it. But while I was in Tsarigrad, my relatives had plundered the household and hidden most of the goods. And when my uncle's creditors came with the Turkish judge to record the household goods, they found only a little and thought I had hidden them. The judge ordered to have me beaten with a *falàga*,¹⁰ but the mayor¹¹ did not allow it; he knew I was innocent. But they still put me in iron chains and kept me in jail for three days, until my relatives forked out a small sum. Then they released me. But afterwards they issued a church order against me, because it occurred to them that I may have hidden something.¹² So I went to the bishop in Shumen to put things straight. On the way we were nearly killed by rebels [*haidouti*].¹³

Even before those creditors had convened to request their money, my relatives had forced me to marry, because there was no one to look after me. I was eighteen years old, young and stupid, and knew nothing about my uncle's debts, or that I would be saddled with

⁸ *Харачийска хартия*. Karateodorov (1940, 12) translates *пътен лист* which denotes *travel document*, whereas Yakov's edition (2006, 17) uses *книжата за данък*, which denotes *tax papers*.

⁹ In Bulgaria, the *grosh* was used as a currency before the *lev*.

¹⁰ A *falàga* is a wooden instrument for holding someone's legs up and beating their feet with a stick. It was used as punishment in 19th Century Bulgaria. <<http://rechnik.chitanka.info/w/фаллага>>

¹¹ *Selskiat knez* (*селският кнез*). Karateodorov (1940, 13) and Yakov's edition (2006, 18) use *кмет*, which denotes *mayor*.

¹² *Aforèsto* signifies removal or exclusion of someone by order of the church. (Български тълковен речник)

¹³ *Haidouk - ti* (*хайдутин - и*) is a Balkan term for outlaws, rebels, bandits, guerillas or freedom fighters in 17th-19th C. Southeastern Europe. *Haidouti* fought against the Ottoman rule, but also attacked merchants and travelers.

all of them. Having bought my uncle's house while he was still alive, I still had some money. I spent it when I got married, but I was counting on my trade. Then, when the court charged me with those debts, I did not have a penny left in cash.¹⁴ What misery I had to go through till I paid off that debt!¹⁵ My life was marked by poverty, worry, and sorrow! I endured much blame from my wife, who was a bit of a snob!

I thought about leaving my home and wife and going down to the villages to work and earn my living [*kevernizam*].¹⁶ Some of the top bosses [*chorbadjiy*]¹⁷ heard that I wanted to leave and they called me and said:

“Don't go anywhere, stay here! Soon our bishop will come [from Shumen] and we'll ask him to make you a priest.”

The bishop¹⁸ (*archi-iereos*) arrived three days later. They petitioned for me and he agreed at once to anoint me on Sunday. They then gave him seventy groshes. This payment was made on Wednesday and I prepared what was needed for Sunday. On Friday evening the churchwarden came, returned the money and said:

“You should know that the bishop won't make you a priest. Somebody else came and gave him a hundred and fifty groshes, so the bishop will anoint him.”

Grief and regret took hold of me then, for I had confessed to the priest, brought my diploma and had prepared what was necessary. But whom should I tell about my grief? I hurried to these people who had petitioned for me and given their money, so they went to the bishop and gave him another thirty groshes. And I was anointed on 1st September 1762.

As I could read a little, the other priests hated me, for at that time all of them were peasants [*orachi*].¹⁹ And since they were so simple and illiterate, I did not want to defer to them, for I was young and unreasonable.²⁰ And then they told lies about me to the bishop, who hated me and often punished me by suspending me from my duties! The bishop had an

¹⁴ The Old Bulgarian noun *сирмя* is rendered as *капитал* in contemporary Bulgarian, but I use *cash* because the expression is *готова сирмя* – *ready money*. In addition, *capital* has acquired different connotations since Sophronius' time.

¹⁵ *Сиромашия* – poverty, misery, penury. I use '*misery*', which covers both material poverty and sorrow. Also, I use '*poverty*' for rendering *нужда* – literally: '*need*'.

¹⁶ *Кевърнисам*. Karateodorov (1940, 14) uses *да се поменувам*, which denotes *to be mindful of myself* and Yakov's edition (2006, 19) uses *да се поотърся*, which denotes *to find myself*.

¹⁷ *Чорбаджиа* – *u* from the Turkish *çorbacı* denotes a military rank in the corps of the Janissaries, and in old Turkic it refers to the head of a military unit (*korbashi*). *Chorbadjia* literally means '*soup-cook*', from '*chorba*' – soup. In Christian regions in the Ottoman empire *chorbadjia* was used for the Christian head of a local elite, such as the head of a village, as well as for tax collectors and other administrative positions. In colloquial Bulgarian it means '*boss*'.

¹⁸ '*Prelate*', literally '*High-priest*' from the Greek *ἀρχι* – chief + *ιερεύς* – priest.

¹⁹ *Орач-и* means *ploughman*.

²⁰ "*Bezumnaya mladost toya*" (*безумная младост моя*) denotes "*my heedless youth*". Karateodorov (1940, 14) follows the original, while Yakov's edition (2006, 20) uses "*безразсъдната си младост*" which denotes "*my reckless youth*".

assistant [*protosinghel*],²¹ an uneducated and illiterate Greek who really hated me, but that was only natural: for an educated man loves someone who is educated, a simple man – a fool, and a drunkard – a drunk.

So I had an unquiet life for several years.

In 1768, war began between the Turk and the Muscovite.²² What to say? When those cruel and savage Muslims [*agaryani*]²³ attacked us, they did great harm to Christians. They did whatever crossed their minds, and massacred so many people! Our village was at the crossroads of four roads and my house was quite far from the church. But because of my ministry, I had to be at church every day for vespers and matins. I had many roads to wander on my long journeys to church and back home. They caught me and beat me many times! They punched me on the head and tried to kill me, but God protected me.

Then the pashas²⁴ started marching through and made me write registration permits [*teskera*]²⁵ for their quarters, because I could write fast. But then they did not like their quarters and came back again. They repeatedly pulled their guns on me, in order to kill me! Once one of them threw his spear at me, but did not hit me. Finally the famous Algerian [*Dzhezaerli*]²⁶ Hassan Pasha marched through on his way to Ruse [*Ruschuk*].²⁷ I was handing out registration permits as usual. Then one of his people took me by the beard, almost tearing it out.

When everyone was accommodated, the pasha called four village elders to him and I was one of them. Then came the Turkish sergeant [*chaoush*],²⁸ who lived in the village, for the vezir had sent him to protect the village from the army. We went with him to the pasha's front door [*porta*], and he said:

“You stay here, and I'll go up to see why the pasha called you.”

²¹ In orthodox Christianity, a protosinghel (протосингел, πρωτοσύγκελλος) is a bishop's principal assistant.

²² Sophronius refers to the first Russo-Turkish war (1768-74), which ended with the Treaty of Küçük-Kaynarca, following the defeat of the Ottomans at the battle of Kozludzha. Karateodorov (1940, 15) refers to it as the first war of Catherine the Great.

²³ *Агаряни* denotes *descendants of Agar and Ismael*, designating followers of Islam. <<http://bible.netbg.com/bible/dic/w.php?53>>

²⁴ *Pasha* (Turkish: *paşa*, derived from Persian: *pādšā*) was a higher rank in the Ottoman Empire's political and military system, usually granted to officers and dignitaries. Cf. Yakov's edition (2006, 21).

²⁵ *Teskera* (тескеpa) from the Turkish *teskere*, derived from the Arabic *taskira* (*reminder*), denotes a *written document, letter, or certificate*. Karateodorov (1940, 15, 46) and Yakov's edition (2006, 21, 58) use *permit* (позволително).

²⁶ *Dzhezaerli* (джезаерли) denotes *Algerian*. See Karateodorov (1940, 16).

²⁷ Ruschuk (Русчук, Rusçuk) is the Turkish name of Ruse (Рyce), an important river port and city in northeastern Bulgaria, situated on the right bank of the Danube, on the border with Romania. Prior to Ottoman Bulgaria, Ruse was called Rusi. Etymologically, the name denotes “red” (= “rous”). Ruse is an old city with a history dating back to the Romans, Thracians, and the Neolithic age.

²⁸ *Chaoush* (чaуш) is a Turkish word for an armed guard or a sergeant. See Karateodorov (1940, 16) and Yakov's edition (2006, 21).

After he'd gone upstairs, the pasha yelled at him and had him thrown in jail. So we took to our heels as best we could. I ran past the pasha's house, unaware that the pasha was sitting up there in the corner and could see me. When he saw me, he shouted:

"Hey! Why are you running away? Catch him and bring him here!"

Immediately four of his people caught me and brought me to the pasha. I was so afraid! Then he asked me:

"So, why are you running away? Who's chasing you?"

I replied:

"Effendi,²⁹ we are rayas;³⁰ we're always as scared as rabbits. When you arrested the sergeant, we were frightened and ran away."

But he replied:

"What does that have to do with you? I summoned you to ask you for directions."

He was a terrible pasha! He then went to Ruse and stayed there.

In summer, 1775, the Muscovite defeated the Turk and crossed the Danube to besiege Shumen, where vezir³¹ Muyusunoglu was standing with the Turkish army. The Muscovite then laid siege to Rouschouk, Silistra³² and Varna.³³ At that time an Albanian [*Arnaoudian*] pasha was stationed in our village to guard the ravine, so that the Turkish army wouldn't flee, as they usually did. The judge [*kadia*],³⁴ the sergeant, and the tax collector [*subashit*]³⁵ also happened to be there. When they heard that the Muscovite had besieged the vezir, they all fled to Sliven.³⁶ We were really afraid they would loot us before they fled! The Christians kept watch day and night. The siege lasted for 22 days. Then they signed a peace treaty and the Muscovites withdrew, leaving Turkey and Walachia.³⁷

Soon after that I went to Mount Athos (*Sveta Gora*)³⁸ and stayed there for six months. When I returned from there, I taught children to read and write, and had a good

²⁹ *Effendi* (ефенди, from the Greek, *authentēs* – lord, master) is a Turkish title of respect or courtesy.

³⁰ *Raya* (рая, from the Turkish, derived from the Arabic *ra'aya* – flock) denotes a non-Muslim or infidel in Ottoman society.

³¹ A *vezir* or *vizier* (derived from the Arabic *wazir* – viceroy) is a high-ranking counselor, official or minister in the Ottoman Empire.

³² Silistra (Силистра) is a port town in northeastern Bulgaria, on the southern bank of the Danube.

³³ Varna (Варна) is a city on Bulgaria's northern Black Sea coast.

³⁴ *Kadia* (кадия) is a Turkish word for judge (*сѣдия*). See Karateodorov (1940, 17) and Yakov's edition (2006, 22).

³⁵ *Subashit* (субашит) is a Turkish word for *tax collector*. Karateodorov (1940, 17) translates *селският главатар, турчин* which roughly denotes *Turkish village chief*. Yakov's edition (2006, 23) uses *бирникът*.

³⁶ Sliven (Сливен) is a city in southeastern Bulgaria, near Yambol and Nova Zagora.

³⁷ In Sophronius' day, Walachia (Vlashko, Влашко), now Romania, was under Ottoman suzerainty, with brief periods of Russian occupation between 1768 and 1854.

³⁸ Mount Athos (Sveta Gora, Света Гора), also known as the "Holy Mountain" (Άγιον Όρος), is a mountain and peninsula in northern Greece and an autonomous monastic state within

life. But the devil, who always envies the good, prompted the bishop to make me his churchwarden's treasurer.³⁹ That was the end of my pious life. In order to indulge the bishop, I began to impose fines on people, as was the Greek custom: I became a judge for intermarriage and other offenses; but rather for money, not even for myself, but to indulge the bishop. And the Holy God rewarded me justly for my deeds. I will recount this later.

It was not long before the lords (*aghi*) of Omurtag [*Osman pazar*]⁴⁰ quarreled about who should become regional governor [*ayanin*].⁴¹ The sultan⁴² of Verbisha⁴³ appointed a regional governor, but the district governor [*valia*]⁴⁴ didn't want him. So they sent Bekir, the pasha of Silistra, to deal with them. When he arrived, he killed the sultan's governor. Ten people from our village had to go to Omurtag. They negotiated the tax for our village, which was fixed at 10 kesia (500 *groshes*). The pasha locked up three of us, including me. He sent the others to our village to collect the tax money and gave them three days to bring it to him.

Meanwhile we sat there, in jail. Three or four days passed, but no one came. We heard that they had gone to Varbitsa (*Verbisha*), to complain about the pasha to the sultan. My companions in jail began to weep bitterly:

"Ah, we poor devils [*siromakhi*],⁴⁵ the pasha will have us beheaded!"

In less than an hour an envoy came from the pasha and said:

"Come, priest [*papaz*],⁴⁶ the pasha has summoned you!"

With a heavy heart I went to the pasha! Secretly I prayed to God to forgive me my sins, because I had lost hope. When I came to the pasha, he said:

"Where are your people who should bring the money, eh?"

And I replied:

"Effendi, they only left three days ago. When should they have collected so much money and brought it here?"

And he answered:

"Infidel [*gyavur*],⁴⁷ go now and write to them that they shouldn't collect the money from infidels [*raya*],⁴⁸ but rather take it from some trader; because if they don't return within three days, I shall behead you all, and will take the double amount from them!"

the Hellenic Republic. Its orthodox monastic traditions date back to the Byzantine period, and its 20 monasteries are subordinated to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

³⁹ *Epitrop* (*енумпон*) denotes a person who manages the church's finances.

⁴⁰ *Osman pazar* (*Осман пазар*), now Omurtag (*Омуртаг*) is a town in Targovishte Province in northeastern Bulgaria, located north of the Stara Planina mountain.

⁴¹ An *ayanin* was a regional governor and local notable in the Ottoman Empire.

⁴² According to Karateodorov (1940, 18) and Yakov's edition (2006, 23) '*sultan*' here denotes the title of a Tatar landowner.

⁴³ Verbisha (Върбиша), now Varbitsa (Върбица), is a town in eastern Bulgaria, in the Shumen province. *Varbitsa* denotes *willow*.

⁴⁴ *Valia* (*валия*) denotes an Ottoman district governor. See Karateodorov (1940, 18) and Yakov's edition (2006, 24).

⁴⁵ *Siromakh* (*сиромак*) denotes a beggar, poor man, or poor devil (idiom).

⁴⁶ *Papaz* (папаз, поп, from the Greek *pappos*) denotes priest, or grandfather.

⁴⁷ *Gyavur*, *giaor*, or *gavur* in Turkish, denotes a non-Muslim or infidel.

⁴⁸ *Raya* denotes the non-Muslim population of the regions under Ottoman rule.

I wrote that down and we sent a messenger. Three days passed but they didn't come, and we looked like sheep waiting for slaughter. On the third day, the pasha summoned me again. When I went to him, I was really desperate, and because I was afraid, I was unable to reply to what the pasha was saying. As I was standing before him and he saw that I couldn't answer, he asked me gently:

“Didn't your people come?”

I replied:

“Effendi, you are merciful. Be a little more patient; whatever happens, they'll be here tonight!”

But he didn't want to wait and immediately sent an envoy to request another 1000 groshes. I had to endure a lot in jail! Since then I've been suffering from an intestinal disease called haemorrhoids⁴⁹ which I caught back then from the disgusting food. When I wanted to go outside, they wouldn't let me and insulted me. Also, due to fear and illness, all my hair had fallen out.

After that I didn't stay idle. I bought two small houses near the church and renovated them completely, spending what money I had. After some time, I fell ill. It was not an illness to confine me to bed, but a tension in my chest. I couldn't stay in one place till someone counted to ten. I walked like a madman near the water and wept. I felt as though my heart would jump out of my mouth. God had sent me this punishment for my foolish madness because I had become self-important as treasurer and had fined innocent people. We had no doctors, only some old women who cast spells and treated me, but to no avail! I went to look for doctors in Sliven and Yambol,⁵⁰ and finally I went to Tsarigrad. I spent so much money that I accumulated quite a few debts.

Then the Turk started war with the Muscovite and the German.⁵¹ At that time the vezir pasha Yusuf spent the winter in Ruschuk. My son went to Walachia to buy some pigs but, for some reason, he lost 1400 groshes. When he saw that we were debt-ridden, he went to the army camp and became scribe to the chief meat supplier.

Some days later my wife also fell ill. She was bedridden for 6 months, and then she died. We had other expenses, as well. On one side, armed forces were marching through and we had to accommodate them, and on the other side, the creditors did not leave us in peace. They wanted their money and they wanted to put me in jail. When my health had improved a little, my superior forbade me to celebrate mass for three years, because of the spells I had asked the old women to cast on my illness. When these three years had passed, my superior gave me permission to celebrate mass, but the bishop forbade it because my son still owed him interest on his money – but no capital – in an amount of 84 groshes.

⁴⁹ Haemorrhoids seems a mischaracterization of his condition, yet Sophronius renders the notion both in old Bulgarian and Turkish: “Имам недуг почечуйний, сиреч маясил. Тогива от противное ястие беше мя хватил”. “Недуг почечуйний” denotes “a problem with the rectum” and “mayasil” is a Turkish word for haemorrhoids. Karateodorov (1940: 25) and Yakov (2006: 25) use „чревна болест, сиреч маясил“; the German, Polish and French translators use “haemorrhoids”.

⁵⁰ Yambol is a city in southeastern Bulgaria, on both banks of the Tundzha river.

⁵¹ Sophronius refers to the Austro-Turkish war of 1787-1791 and the Russo-Turkish war of 1787-1792.

“Give me,” he told me, “this money, and I will give you permission to celebrate mass.”

In this way he kept me from celebrating mass for another three years. I really endured a lot from the priests! They insulted me and sneered at me, and they did not pay me my due. Even when they did give me something, they would tell me:

“Look, we’re feeding you as if you were some blind man.”

And those were my students! For six years I suffered such shame and abuse.

When the vezir’s army⁵² was in Machin,⁵³ the chief meat supplier sent my son and one of his men to collect sheep from the Plovdiv [*Philipine*] area. They collected them and that lord [*agha*] sent my son with 20,000 sheep to the army in Adrianopolis [*Odrin*].⁵⁴ However, my son left 700 choice muttons for our village, so that he could sell them when his lord marched through here. When he came, my son sold the muttons to Haji⁵⁵ Vlasia and Matei. And they handed them over to a man who was supposed to go to Adrianopolis to sell them at the Turkish Feast of the Sacrifice [*Kurban Bayram*].⁵⁶ When the shepherds came to Fandaklii,⁵⁷ they got into a fight with each other and one of them was killed. The local sultan caught them and put them in jail, and confiscated the sheep.

In these days one of the sultan’s officers [*bostancibaşı*]⁵⁸ had come from Adrianopolis to guard the ravines, to stop the Turks from deserting the army, and the local sultan delivered the prisoners to that officer. We, however, did not know anything about this. One day 20 guards arrived at our village and asked who had sold those sheep. Our elders replied:

“These sheep were sold at the priest’s house, you should ask him. We don’t know who sold them and who bought them, but he knows.”

They summoned me and turned me over to the henchmen. They took the three of us to the sultan’s officer at Sliven. But he was about to leave for Kazanlak⁵⁹ and therefore turned us over to the master sergeant [*ortachaoush*]. Then we cut across the field to

⁵² Karateodorov (1940, 21) notes that the vezir had an army of 20,000 at Machin and was preparing to attack the Russians.

⁵³ Machin (*Мачин*) is a town in northern Dobrudja (*Добруджа*). The Dobrudja region is situated between the lower Danube River and the Black Sea, between southeastern Romania and northeastern Bulgaria. Varna, Silistra, Dobrich are Bulgarian cities in the Dobrudja region. The Bulgarian city of Plovdiv (*Пловдив*) was then known as Philippopolis.

⁵⁴ *Adrianopolis* is today’s *Edirne* (*Odrin* in Bulgarian).

⁵⁵ Haji (*hajj*, *hagi*, *хаджу*) is a honorific title given to a Muslim who has successfully completed the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca. NB: it is also given to Christians who have successfully completed the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and is added as a prefix to their family name.

⁵⁶ *Kurban-Bayram* is a Muslim religious holiday honoring the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son Ismail.

⁵⁷ Fandaklii is now the village of Tenevo in the Yambol region in Southern Bulgaria.

⁵⁸ An officer from the Sultan’s guard (*bostancibaşı*). Guards are *bostancii*.

⁵⁹ Kazanlak (*Казанлък*) is a town in the Stara Zagora province in central Bulgaria, , near the Balkan mountain range and the Rose Valley.

Koriten.⁶⁰ It was the 23rd of July and the weather was blazing hot, burning like fire. They had tied our hands behind our backs and made us go on foot.

We walked for two hours and then we couldn't go on because of the heat. We couldn't keep up with them, since they were on horseback and we were on foot. Haji Vlasia, who was older, fell unconscious to the ground. The guard sent someone to the officer, who was close behind us, to ask if he should let us mount our horses, but he said:

"Don't you have a club (*topuz*)⁶¹ to beat them, so that they'll walk? If they can't walk, cut off their heads and leave them."

Our hearts sank when we heard that, and we were wondering what to do. We conferred and promised the guard 30 groshes, because Turks are easily persuaded by money. By then we had fallen behind and they put us on our horses. So we rode to the village of Koriten and stopped there. After an hour or so, they took us to the sultan's officer. He asked me first:

"Who sold these sheep?"

And I replied:

"Islyam Agha sold them and Haji Vlasia bought them."

"So, how many did they sell?"

And I said:

"700."

"But didn't they sell more than that?"

I replied:

"I don't know. That's all I know"

"Don't you know, you bastard [*pezvenk*]?"⁶²

Right away he ordered for me to be thrown down, my eyes facing the ground. Then three men sat on me and began beating me on my bare feet. May God protect us from the guards' merciless beatings! They beat me and asked me:

"Say, how many sheep did he sell?"

I couldn't bear it any longer, my heart was tearing painfully, and I said:

"Let me go and I'll tell you."

They let me go.

"Tell us!"

"I know," I said, "that the chief meat supplier sold more sheep to two traders (*djelepi*), but I don't know how many sheep he sold, or for how much."

Then he shouted:

"Go now, and hang this bastard!"

The guards dragged me off to hang me. I pulled back towards their boss but they pulled me outside and tore my clothes. I forgot both beatings and pain! Meanwhile, some lords [*aghi*] intervened, who happened to be with him, and saved me from hanging. The guards put us in iron chains together with the other prisoners – about 25 Turks, Christians,

⁶⁰ *Koriten* or *Korten* is a village in the Stara Zagora region in southern Bulgaria.

⁶¹ A *topuz* is a club with a metal ball at the top, used by the Ottomans for law enforcement.

⁶² *Pezvenk* (*пезвенк*). Karateodorov (1940, 22) uses *сводник* (*pimpr*), while I follow Yakov's edition (2006, 29), who uses *мръстник* (*bastard*).

and Gypsies, but most were Albanians [*arnaouti*] who had deserted the army after the Muscovite defeated it at Machin.

They also beat Haji Vlasia, but not as much. And each day they impaled some of the Albanians before our eyes. Then the guards came and threatened to impale us, too. So we wheedled the lords [*aghi*] into appealing for our release. Five days later we were free, but we had to pay a fine of 1500 groshes. The officer let us go, but he did not release the shepherds. He said:

“I’ll release them when I’ll go to Edirne [*Adrianopolis*].”

Before he left for Edirne, however, they fired him, and so the shepherds, who were our countrymen, stayed in jail.

We had to endure a lot from their women! Once, when a pasha passed through our village, these women set out to file a complaint about us. What could I do? This was yet another misfortune. So, when I heard about it, I fled to the forest and stayed there for two days until the pasha had left. The shepherds stayed in jail for three months. Then the meat supplier obtained a decree [*ferman*]⁶³ from the vezir to release them and he also got back the sheep from the sultan. And the dismissed officer had to return half the fine, namely 750 groshes. This officer was from Karnobat⁶⁴ and his name was Mehmet Serbezoğlu.⁶⁵

Once all this was over, I passed the winter at home. However, the bishop did not allow me to celebrate mass and the priests insulted me every day. The elders had turned me over to the sultan’s officer, even though I was innocent and had helped a lot with village affairs: I had often gone to the vezir’s council in order to help the village. For twenty years I had taught their children to read and write, and I’d held mass on every Sunday and on every holiday.⁶⁶ And now, after all my efforts and work, after all the good I had done them in body and soul, in the end they turned me over to the sultan’s officer to be killed! This was just too much!

On top of this sorrow, there were the priests’ insults – that they had to keep me, as though I were a blind man. In my distress I went to the Anchialic bishopric [*episcopacy*].⁶⁷ The bishop welcomed me gladly and gave me a parish with 20 villages, including Karnobat.

I knew that Serbezoğlu was there, the one who had fined us and from whom they then reclaimed the money by means of a decree [*ferman*]. But I also knew I’d done nothing wrong because I had neither sold nor bought these sheep, even though they were bought and sold in my hut.

⁶³ A *ferman* or *firman* (*ферман*) is a sultan’s decree or royal mandate. The Turkish word comes from the Persian *farmân*, denoting *decree* or *order*.

⁶⁴ Karnobat is a town in the Burgas province in Southeastern Bulgaria.

⁶⁵ *Serbezoğlu* (*Сербезоглу*) is a Turkish surname denoting “*son of a courageous man*”. J. Feuillet (1981) provides detailed notes on Turkish names and Turkish words in the French translation of Sophronius’ autobiography.

⁶⁶ “*книжное учение*”

⁶⁷ *Anchialo* (*Αγχιάλος*) is today’s *Pomorie*, a seaside town in southeastern Bulgaria.

The Christians were very happy when I arrived there to serve as priest. From March to Whitsunday [*Sveta Troitsa*],⁶⁸ my life was peaceful. On that day, a decree arrived, reinstating Serbezoglu. Right away he sent servants, who seized me and threw me into a dreadful jail. He kept me there for four days. He didn't mistreat me; there was a trade fair in Karnobat on these days. Also, a sultan was staying at his house as a guest, so it was impossible for him to harm me. Four of us were tied together on a short chain, and there was no way we could lie down at the same time. When two of us were lying down, the other two were standing. Guards came to me, swore at me and said:

"As soon as the sultan leaves, we'll impale you and beat you up, so you'll understand what it means to reclaim a fine from an officer of the sultan's guard."

They did not let any Christians approach us. I looked like a sheep about to be led to slaughter. On the fifth day the sultan left, and as soon as he had stepped out the doorway, the guard arrived and asked me:

"What's your name? Tell me the truth!"

I told him my name. The officer wanted to get a court order to kill me. When the Christians heard this, they got ready to appeal for me in town and in the villages – they had all come to the trade fair. The men appealed to one of the officer's friends, and the women appealed to his mother. And his mother begged him to give me to her, so as not to offend the Christians by killing me. Due to so many pleas, I was released from that terrible death. But since he had sworn to kill me, instead of me, he impaled one of the shepherds that day, who was a killer. And then he once again imposed that fine on me which had been reclaimed from him.

Soon after that, another misfortune befell me, which was even more awful and terrible. In my parish there was a village called Shikhlari.⁶⁹ And there lived a sultan called Akhmet Geryay, whose wife was the daughter of a khan.⁷⁰ This sultan fell in love with a Christian girl, the daughter of some big shot [*chorbadji*] Ivan, surnamed Kovandjioğlu.⁷¹ The sultan wanted to take her as his second wife. But the khan's daughter did not allow him to take a second wife. So he kept that poor girl 4 or 5 years – neither marrying her, nor allowing her to marry.

One day they summoned me to Karnobat to perform a wedding ceremony and I asked where the girl was from, and they told me:

"This is the girl whom the sultan wanted to take as a second wife, and now he has given her permission to marry, so we brought her here."

I believed them and married them. Three days later I learned that the sultan was going after her father in order to kill him, but the father had escaped. So then the sultan had

⁶⁸ The Christian *Sveta Troitsa* holiday (*Света Троица*), also known as *Whitsunday* or *Pentecost* (Greek: Πεντηκοστή, Bulgarian: *Петдесетница*), is celebrated on the 50th day after Easter (Christ's ascension).

⁶⁹ Shikhlari (*Шихлари*), now called Raklitsa, is a village near Karnobat, in the Burgas region, in southeastern Bulgaria.

⁷⁰ *Khan, han (хан)* is a Mongolian, Turkish (*kağan*) and Ottoman (*han*) title for a sovereign or military ruler.

⁷¹ *Kovandjioğlu* (Turkish) denotes *Beekeeper's son*.

caught her brother and given him a heavy beating and fined him. I was horrified and scared to death.

I then went to a village called Kosten⁷² – the only place with a church in the entire Karnobat district [*kadiluk*]⁷³ – to celebrate mass on the day of the holy apostles Peter and Paul. Some guy called Milosh came to call on me about an urgent matter. In the afternoon I was ready, and Milosh and I set off. At a place not far from the road, we saw men and women harvesting the fields, and nearby, there were a couple of Turks on horseback. They summoned us, as we passed them. When we came closer, Milosh said:

“That’s the sultan.”

I ran up to kiss the hem of his coat and he asked me:

“Are you the priest of these villages?”

I replied:

“Yes, I am your servant.”

Then he asked me:

“Did you perform the wedding ceremony for Kovandjioğlu’s daughter in Karnobat?”

I replied:

“I’m a foreigner; I’ve only recently come here and I don’t know who Kovandjioğlu’s daughter is.

Right away he lifted his gun and twice clubbed me on the shoulders with the stock. Then he pulled his gun on me. Since I was close to him, I grabbed the gun, and he called to his attendant:

“Quick, give me a rope to hang this bastard [*pezvenk*]!”

The man went to my horse, took its double reins and threw them around my neck. Nearby there was a willow tree, which he climbed right away and pulled me up by the rope. As my hands weren’t bound, I held onto the reins and pulled them down. I begged the sultan to have mercy on me. But he was sitting on his horse and furiously called out to Milosh:

“Hey! Come and hang this bastard!”

Then Milosh began to appeal to him for my sake, but the sultan hit him in the face with the shotgun’s club and smashed his jawbone. The sultan then turned to face the willow-tree and pointed his gun at his attendant, and yelled:

“Why don’t you pull on the rope, eh? Now I’ll haul you down from the willow.”

The man pulled the rope up while I was pulling it down, since my hands weren’t tied. And while the sultan was watching us, Milosh, my companion, ran away and there was no one left to pull me up. Then the sultan told his attendant:

“Come down and we’ll go to the village to hang him there, so that everyone will see him!”

They gave me my horse’s reins so that I could lead him, and the attendant dragged me along by the rope around my neck, while the sultan was walking behind me. Swearing at me, he told me:

⁷² Kosten (Костен) is a village in the Burgas province, in southeastern Bulgaria.

⁷³ Sophronius uses the Turkish word *kadiluk* (кадилук), which denotes an administrative subdivision of the Ottoman Empire.

“If I don’t kill you, who else shall I kill? You wed my wife to an infidel [*gyaur*]....”⁷⁴

I was silent, because I had despaired of life. But when he led me through the fields, the grass and weeds came up to my knees and I could hardly walk. I fell down many times, but the servant pulled on the rope and nearly choked me. The sultan, who was following behind me and cursing me, clicked his gun but didn’t fire. Then he clicked it again and fired, but he either didn’t aim it at me, or he didn’t hit me because he was drunk. When we were back on the road he told his attendant:

“Stop!”

We stopped. Then he aimed his gun at me close up and told me:

“Infidel [*gyaur*], be quick about joining our faith, for you are leaving this world right now!”

What was I to do? My mouth was dry from fear of death. I clammed up and merely said:

“Ah, Effendi, should one change one’s faith at gunpoint? But if you kill a priest, do you expect the world’s praise?”

He aimed his gun at me and thought for a long time. Then he asked me:

“Will you divorce this bride from her husband?”

I replied:

“Certainly, when I get to Karnobat, I’ll divorce them.”

“Swear it!” – he said.

What was I to do; from fear of death I swore and said:

“Vallahi billahi,⁷⁵ I’ll divorce them!”

His attendant then came to my aid and said:

“Effendi, why does he have to divorce them? If he simply curses them, she will run away from him by herself.”

He then told his attendant:

“If that’s how it is, let him go on his way!”

I got on my horse, and in a quarter of an hour I reached the village of Sigmen, which is two hours away from there.⁷⁶ At Sigmen I quickly drank three or four glasses of strong grape brandy. As I was sitting there, I was overcome by fear and started to tremble, almost as from fever. Milosh arrived about an hour later and, when he saw me, he was shocked and amazed. He gripped his injured face and said:

“Oh, father, are you alive? As I fled,” he said, “I kept looking back at the willow from afar, to see whether they had hanged you, but you weren’t there. Yet when the shot rang out I said: “There, poor priest Stoyko is gone from this world.”

Well, such woes and deathly fears passed over my head. And I suffered all that for other people’s sake.

⁷⁴ *Гяур* (*гяур*) or *гявур* (*гявур*) is a Muslim denomination for infidels (“not of islamic faith”).

⁷⁵ Sophronius uses the Turkish expression: “*vallahi billahi*” (*upon my oath I swear it*). It seems that his swearing on Allah renders his oath invalid for Christians. See Yakov’s edition’s note (2006, 37).

⁷⁶ Sigmen (Сигмен) is a village in South-Eastern Bulgaria, in the Karnobat municipality, situated in the Burgas province.

When I had completed my year there, I went to Karabunar.⁷⁷ I spent a year there, too, but it was peaceful. When I left, the Christians wept at our parting. They wanted me to remain for another year, but I couldn't stay, because my children had left Kotel and had moved to Arbanasi.⁷⁸ I had to go to them.

I set off and went to Arbanasi on March 13th. I had no work until July and stayed at a monastery for nearly two months.⁷⁹ Kyrios Seraphim, the bishop of Vratsa,⁸⁰ arrived at the time. He was ill, and after a few days he went to meet his Maker. A few days later, I went to see Kyrios Grigorios, the bishop's assistant [*protosinghel*] in Tarnovo,⁸¹ to ask his advice on a matter concerning the monastery. And he told me:

"You should leave the monastery, because we want to make you bishop of Vratsa."

I refused, saying that I was not worthy of such a title: first, I was too old, 54 years old, and second, I had heard that this bishopric extended over many small villages, so there would be a lot of masses to celebrate. But he said:

"But we absolutely want to make you bishop."

These talks went on for about 15 days. On the day of the Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross,⁸² the first deacon, Kyrios Theodosius, came to my home and told me:

"Look, father, many days have passed since we invited you to be our bishop, but you don't want to. And now the lord Archbishop [*mitropolit*]⁸³ (his name was Matei), has sent me. There are also four other bishops who advise him and I can tell you that all of them consider you worthy to become bishop of Vratsa. See, you should give me an answer: do you want to be bishop or not? That's why I have come here. Listen, father!" he continued:

"We have served for twenty years, yet we are not considered worthy of the bishopric, and others pay money or send petitioners, while you have been offered this gift without having served for a long time, without a pay-off and without petitioners."

While I was thinking about which answer to give, my children started to persuade me:

⁷⁷ Karabunar (Карабунар) is a town now called Sredets (Средец), in the Burgas province.

⁷⁸ Arbanasi (Арбанаси) is a village in central northern Bulgaria, in the Veliko Tarnovo municipality.

⁷⁹ Yakov's edition (2006, 39) notes that priest Stoyko Vladislavov took his vows under the name of Seraphim when he joined the Kapinovo Monastery.

⁸⁰ Vratsa (Враца) is a city in northwestern Bulgaria, situated at the foothills of the Balkan mountains, also called the Vrachanski Balkan. Sophronius became bishop of Vratsa on 17 September 1794.

⁸¹ Veliko Tarnovo (Велико Търново) is an historical capital of Bulgaria, located in north central Bulgaria.

⁸² The feast of the "Elevation of the Honored and Life-Giving Cross" (*Ἐψωσις τοῦ Τιμίου καὶ Ζωοποιῦ Σταυροῦ*, in Latin *Exaltatio Sanctae Crucis*) takes place on September 14th, commemorating the finding of the True Cross in 326 and its recovery from the Persians in 628, and is one of the great feasts of the church year.

⁸³ *Metropolitan bishop* or *Mitropolit* (*Μητροπολίτης*), Greek: *μητροπολίτης*, or *archbishop*, is the oldest and highest episcopal rank in Orthodox Christianity. A metropolitan bishop presides over synods (councils) of bishops.

“Father, don’t you want to consent, since they are pleading with you? We’d like our father to be bishop!”

I gave in to their wheedling and accepted. The first deacon kissed my hand and left.

Then they summoned me to the archbishopric, where I met the other bishops and kissed their hands. That was on Thursday. The archbishop told me:

“On Sunday you should be ready to be ordained as bishop.”

As it happened, they had ordained me as priest on Sunday, September 1st, 1762, and then they ordained me as bishop in 1794, again in September, on the 13th, which was also a Sunday. And when they ordained me as bishop, they dressed me in the vestment worn by the former bishop, Kyrios Gedeon, in Kotel, when they had ordained me as priest.

On the day I became bishop, there was great joy in the archbishopric, and there was a lavish banquet at our house. I stayed on in Arbanasi for three more months, until I was ready, and until the decree and summons arrived from Tsarigrad.

On December 13th I set out for my bishopric. It was bitterly cold, and snow had fallen. I intended to arrive at my bishopric for Christmas. When I arrived in Pleven,⁸⁴ the Christians there were amazed that I had dared to travel to Vratsa in such weather.

Then the first disturbing news arrived. I asked: “What is this unrest near Vratsa?” The people of Pleven told me that Pazvantoğlu⁸⁵ had quarreled with Lord Gench and Hamamcioğlu, whom he had banished from Vidin; and they had gathered an army of Turks and Albanians to combat against Pazvantoğlu. But since they couldn’t reach the Vidin district [*kadiluk*] because of Pazvantoğlu’s army, they were camped in the villages around Vratsa.

How should we then get to Vratsa? I stayed three days in Pleven, but on the fourth day I left for Vratsa. I sent villagers ahead to scout out if the army was in the villages and to return to warn me, so that we could go back to Pleven.

And that’s how we reached the village Koynlare,⁸⁶ which is halfway between Pleven and Vratsa. The villagers came in the middle of the night and told us that 400 of

⁸⁴ Pleven (Плевен) is a city in northern Bulgaria, situated in the Danubian plain.

⁸⁵ Osman Pazvantoğlu (1758 – 1807) was governor of the Vidin district after 1794 and a rebel against Ottoman Sultan Selim III, resisting the latter’s westernizing reforms. He managed to gather a large army and fought the Ottomans for several years, extending his rule to the Black Sea. In the end he was made pasha of Vidin, a port town on the southern bank of the Danube in northwestern Bulgaria, strategically close to Serbian and Romanian borders, as well as at the opening of the road to Nis, Sofia, and Edirne /Adrianopolis / (Одрин), the administrative center of the Eyalet of Edirne. According to the *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire* (G. Agoston & B. Masters, 2009: 448), Pazvantoğlu had a special policy regarding Christians, particularly merchants and high clergy, who participated in his administration and whom he used as spies, advisors, and agents in his diplomatic relations.

⁸⁶ Today Koynlare is a town called Koynare. It lies in northern Bulgaria, on the bank of the river Iskar, and is part of the Pleven province. Koynare was part of the Ottoman Empire since 1516, and part of the Nikopol (*Niğbolu*) district. In 1878 it became part of the modern Bulgarian state.

Pazvantoğlu's *pandours*⁸⁷ had arrived at the village Branitsa, which is an hour away from Koynlare. As we didn't know what the word "*pandours*" meant, we were filled with fear and didn't know where to go. I sent people to find escorts for me, but nobody wanted to go because it was so cold, and because they were afraid. It was noon. The people had not returned and I was afraid the *pandours* would come and ransack us. At last we managed to find a Turk and then we left the village. As we approached Vratsa, we saw many troops coming out of the town toward us. But we didn't know whose troops they were. So we were really frightened, until we realized that they were citizens of Vratsa who were pursuing the troops that had destroyed and plundered the surrounding villages.

At last I arrived at my bishopric, which was no better than jail. It didn't matter!⁸⁸ The Christians welcomed me joyfully. On Sundays and on holidays I went to the churches and delivered sermons in our Bulgarian tongue. These Christians, who until then had not heard any other bishop deliver such sermons in our language, thought I was a philosopher. I went to the villages to collect the church tax⁸⁹ as was the custom, but the alms I received were very little, because there was a great famine that year, throughout Bulgaria. One *oka* of flour cost twenty coins.⁹⁰ They promised me more in the future, if God gave plenty.

After I finished traveling around the Vratsa district,⁹¹ I wanted to go to Pleven in June, to also collect the church tax there. As we approached Pleven, I sent people ahead to announce our arrival. Several priests came to meet us and said:

"Bishop, now it is not possible for you to come to Pleven, because Topuzoğlu and Nalbantoğlu are fighting in town, over who should become regional governor [*ayanin*]. No Christian leaves his home, and we have come out secretly at night."

As we passed by Pleven, we heard gunshots. We were terrified until we had left the town behind. We then went to Arbanasi.

After I left the bishopric, it was God's will that a plague suddenly struck that summer, afflicting the whole bishopric, in towns and villages. Not a single village was spared, for the sake of our sins. On account of this deadly terror I stayed four months in Arbanasi and spent all the money I had collected from the Vratsa district.

Pleven citizens came to fetch me in October. They said:

⁸⁷ *Pandours* (*пандури*) is an 18th C. term for military frontier guards, more specifically denoting a Croatian frontier soldiers in the Habsburg army, who had a reputation for cruelty and plundering (cf. Merriam-Webster's dictionary). According to J. Feuillet (1981, 182, note 120), the French translator of Sophronius' *Vita*, the first Bulgarian usage of the word *pandour* is attested by this text.

⁸⁸ "*Нека бъде*" (*нека бъде*) literally denotes: "*let it be*", with a spiritual connotation of "*let God's will be done*." Yakov's edition (2006, 42) renders this expression as "*както и да е*" – "*be that as it may*" or "*whatever*."

⁸⁹ Ecclesiastical or church tax = *мирия* in the text. Karateodorov (1940) uses *мирия*, with a note referring to the tax as *владичнина*. The 2006 adaptation into contemporary Bulgarian uses *владичнина*.

⁹⁰ *Oka* (*ока*, *-и*) is an old Turkish weighing unit, used in Bulgaria until the 1920s. One *oka* is about 1220 grams.

⁹¹ *Kadilik* (*кадилик*); see notes 30 and 38.

“The plague is still there, but it is worse for the Turks than for the Christians, where it has abated somewhat.”

I went with them to Pleven. A priest came to kiss my hand. I looked at him and saw that his face was burning with fever. As he was leaving, I heard another priest say to him:

“Why did you kiss the priest’s hand? Don’t you see that you have caught the plague?”

It was true, because he died that night. In the morning they asked me for priests, to bury him.

“If you don’t send us priests,” they said “we’ll go to the chief [*ağa*]⁹² and we’ll take them by force, so that they’ll bury him. So far, priests have buried all those stricken by the plague. Why shouldn’t they also bury this priest?”

What was I to do? I sent them priests and they buried him. In the morning they all came to me and I realized that I was amidst them. I decided to celebrate mass and to receive the holy sacrament. Then may God’s will be done. After that we went through Pleven and the villages and blessed the water everywhere, and God kept me safe.

Thus these two years passed. The money I collected just about covered my taxes and their interest. Although I funded my living expenses, I was unable to reduce my debt.

In the summer of 1796, Pazvantoğlu’s rebels [*haidouci*] attacked and occupied all towns and villages. Since I could no longer go anywhere, I sent the priests to collect the church tax, but they had trouble even taking half of what was needed. This year the Rumelian governor [*Urumeli vasili*]⁹³ Mustafa pasha deployed an army of 40,000 and besieged Vidin for a long time, but they couldn’t do anything against Pazvantoğlu. When Mustafa pasha left, Pazvantoğlu’s rebels once more occupied my entire bishopric.

In 1797, brigands [*Kardzhalis*]⁹⁴ joined Pazvantoğlu’s people and arrived at Vratsa. They laid siege [*maysere*]⁹⁵ to the town for 8 days, and although they fought, they couldn’t enter. I had fled at night two days earlier, to go to Rakhovo,⁹⁶ and from there to cross to

⁹² *Ağa* (ara) is a honorific title of a civilian or military functionary in the Ottoman Empire and denotes *chief* or *lord*.

⁹³ The governor (*vasili, vali, валия*) of Rumelia Eyalet, a major province of the Ottoman Empire. Rumelia (= *land of the Romans*) originally referred to Anatolia, but after 1453 denoted the Balkan regions of the Ottoman Empire populated by Orthodox Christians. Haji Mustafa pasha was appointed “commander of commanders” (*Beglerbeg[i]*) of Rumelia Eyalet in 1797, by Sultan Selim III.

⁹⁴ The name *Kardzhali* (*Кърджали*) appears to be derived from the legendary 18th C. Turkish brigand Kırca Ali. Perhaps for this reason *Kardzhali*[-s] denotes *brigands*, namely military gangs that ravaged parts of Bulgaria at the turn of the 18th century. See on this J. Feuillet (1981: 188, note 131), who also notes the Turkish origin of the word *kardzhali* as *inhabitants of lowlands*. In addition, *Kardzhali* is a town in the Eastern Rhodopes in Southern Bulgaria which, in Sophronius’ day, was used as a base by Pazvantoğlu Osman Pasha, who ruled the area till 1807. Pazvantoğlu is a dominant figure in Sophronius’ *Vita*.

⁹⁵ *Majsere* (*майсеpe*). Karateodorov (1940, 35) and Yakov’s edition (2006, 45) use *обсада*, which denotes *siege*.

⁹⁶ Rakhovo (*Рахово*) is a town today called Oryakhovo (*Оряхово*) in northwestern Bulgaria, in the Vratsa province. It is a port town at the river Danube and located at the border between Bulgaria and Romania, the former Walachia (*Влашко*).

Walachia. That night, our horse broke loose with our baggage and made off with my belongings, worth 200 groshes. God alone knows how much fear we endured until we had crossed the Danube! Then I went to Arbanasi, where I stayed for a while, until the brigands [*Kardzhalis*] had left my bishopric. In autumn I again returned to Vratsa.

In 1798 another great army of the Tsar marched against Pazvantoglu, because he had occupied the area from Ruschuk⁹⁷ to Varna. The captain-pasha⁹⁸ of Tsarigrad arrived with many troops and cannons, and also the famous Karaosmanoğlu of Anatolia, along with twenty-four other pashas and all regional governors (*ayani*) of Rumelia. It was said that an army of 300,000 had been deployed against Vidin. Vidin was besieged and fought over for six months, but they couldn't win against Pazvantoglu.⁹⁹

As for me, I fled to wherever I could. During January I lived in a sheep pen for twenty days until the first troops had moved on. One night, when the road was a bit safer, I left for Teteven.¹⁰⁰ The branches nearly knocked my eyes out. I stayed in Teteven for two months. When the first troops had nearly reached Vidin, I left Teteven to get to Vratsa for Easter. On the way some Turks nearly killed me on account of someone else's fault.

Around that time silikhtar¹⁰¹ Husein pasha burned Gabrovo¹⁰² on his return from Vidin, and the brigands [*Kardzhalis*] who accompanied him plundered Arbanasi. Our house was looted completely; not a spoon or bowl remained for us. They took my clothes and books and everything I had, and the entire house was ransacked.¹⁰³ My children fled to Kotel¹⁰⁴ and from there they went to Svishtov.¹⁰⁵

As for me, since I was unable to leave my bishopric because of the troops, I accompanied the Tarnovian bishop's assistant [*protosinghel*] to collect the church tax in the Tarnovo bishopric. Then I went to Svishtov and found my children naked and destitute. They were sitting on a straw mat and I had no money to buy them clothes. My grief was great!

In August I returned to my bishopric. The entire army was fighting at Vidin, to conquer the town. I was terrified as I went around the villages to collect the church tax! Retreating mercenaries – deserters from the Turkish army – plundered the villages. They

⁹⁷ Ruschuk (Русчук, Rusçuk) is the Turkish name of Rousse (see note 26).

⁹⁸ Captain-pasha (капитан-паша) may be Sophronius' transliteration of *Kapudan-pasha* or *Kaptan-ı derya* ("admiral-pasha"), the title of the commander of the navy in the Ottoman Empire.

⁹⁹ Karateodorov (1940, 36) notes that the number 300,000 was an exaggeration, and that Vidin was armed with 220 cannons.

¹⁰⁰ Teteven (Тетевен, Тетювен) is a town in central northern Bulgaria, at the foot of Stara Planina mountain, in the Lovech province.

¹⁰¹ Silikhtar (Силихтар) is the title of a dignitary in the Ottoman Empire.

¹⁰² Gabrovo (Габрово) is a city in central northern Bulgaria, at the foot of the central Balkan mountain.

¹⁰³ Karateodorov (1940, 36) notes that they probably tore down Sophronius' house to search for buried money.

¹⁰⁴ Kotel (Котел) is a town in central Bulgaria, part of the Sliven province. "Kotel" means *cauldron*.

¹⁰⁵ Svishtov (Свищов) is a town in northern Bulgaria, in the Veliko Tarnovo province, on the right bank of the Danube.

even fleeced the Turkish tax collectors [*soubashi*].¹⁰⁶ But I continued going around the villages.

When Pazvantoğlu had at last defeated and dispersed the Tsar's army on St. Demetrius' Day,¹⁰⁷ I was still out and about my bishopric. Turks came pouring in from Vidin and fled to the villages. I suffered much misery and fear until I at last returned to Vratsa! I had made my way through countless woods and hills and valleys. And I had been in Vratsa for a few days when news arrived that Ali Pasha was coming from Vidin with an army of fifteen thousand strong. His seneschals arrived at night, and when I heard this, I prepared to flee from Vratsa on that night, around eight o'clock.¹⁰⁸ The night was dark, the weather was rainy, and the mountain was high and steep. On the way I slipped and fell many times, until I reached the Cherepish monastery!¹⁰⁹

When we arrived at the monastery, we did not find anybody – the monks had fled. The monastery was closed and we did not know where they were. At long last a village priest came along. He knew that they had fled to a cave and he took us there. I stayed in that cave with them for 24 days. I had caught a bad cold and fell ill, and kept my bed there four days. Then I felt warmer and slowly recovered.

I then set out for another monastery which was in the Sofia bishopric.¹¹⁰ But the mountains there were so high that one could not ride, yet my feet were hurting so badly that I couldn't walk. The way over the mountains usually takes two hours, but by the time I had climbed up and back down, I was truly in tears about my life. I stayed at that monastery for 14 days.

There I received a letter from Vratsa, saying that the captain-pasha had killed Ali pasha in Rakhovo and that the latter's army had dispersed. Another one had arrived in Vratsa, to stay there over the winter – Yusuf pasha¹¹¹. They wrote that: "the bishopric is empty and Yusuf pasha is a good person. Come back soon to the bishopric." But the snow was deep and the winter was severe. Although Vratsa is ten hours away, it took us three days to get there.

¹⁰⁶ The name *soubashis* (субашите) denotes police officers and tax collectors in smaller towns and villages in the Ottoman Empire. Karateodorov (1940, 37) uses *delii* (делии), explaining that these were brave Turkish soldiers who were returning after being dismissed from the army and acting like brigands.

¹⁰⁷ St. Demetrius' Day (Димитровден) is a popular and Christian Orthodox Christian holiday celebrated on October 26th in commemoration of the Christian martyr St. Demetrius of Thessaloniki (Άγιος Δημήτριος τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης).

¹⁰⁸ Karateodorov (1940, 37) explains in a note that 8 p.m. Turkish time corresponds to 2 a.m. Bulgarian time.

¹⁰⁹ The Cherepish monastery (Черепишкият манастир) is one of the biggest Orthodox monasteries in Bulgaria. It is located in the Balkan mountains in northern Bulgaria, and belongs to the Vratsa diocese.

¹¹⁰ Yakov's edition (2006, 48) notes that Sophronius refers to the Seven Altars Monastery (манастирът "Седемте престола"), situated in Sofia province, in the Western Balkan mountains, on the border between Sofia province and Vratsa province.

¹¹¹ Koca Yusuf Pasha (1730-1800), who was grand vizier under Sultan Selim III.

I had about 10 peaceful days in Vratsa. Then ten Albanian ensigns (*bayratsi arnauti*)¹¹² arrived and, as there were no empty houses available to accommodate the troops, around 15 people came to the bishopric. They settled in there and I was supposed to feed them. But there was only one room, for the Turks had destroyed the other room. It was winter time and very cold, because initially the house had not been a bishopric but a monastic dependency [*metochion*] where only monks had stayed. I had to tell a lot of lies until I had an opportunity to flee from them.

But to which house could I go, when they were all full of Turks? I fled to the chief of couriers [tatar-ağasi].¹¹³ Since I was wearing a green fur cap [*kalpak*],¹¹⁴ they asked me:

“Who are you?”

I didn't dare tell them that I was a bishop and so I replied:

“I am a doctor.”

They asked me about remedies and I answered as well as I could. Then, at nightfall, I went to a Christian who took me into his home. There were no empty houses anywhere. My servants were outside – I saw that they nearly died from the cold.

I wanted to leave Vratsa, but the pasha's Albanians were guarding the gates and controlled who was going out and who was coming in. Well, what was I to do? I sent ahead a draught horse with two local Turks, wrapped a scarf around my head, took a whip in my hand and spurred on a stable-groom.¹¹⁵ Disguised as chief of couriers [tatar-ağasi], I quickly passed through the gates, and they didn't recognize me for who I was.

I returned to the Cherepish monastery. Meanwhile the Albanians in the bishopric were using all the bed linen and the crockery. They consumed and wasted the corn, the barley, and the wine. However, we couldn't stay in this monastery. So I set out for another one, which was farther away from Vratsa. Late one evening we arrived at a village from which everyone had fled – no one had remained and we found neither bread nor wood. It was bitterly cold, and the December night was long. We nearly died of the cold. In the morning we got up early. The snow was so deep that the road was gone. The four-hour journey to the Karloukovski monastery¹¹⁶ took us nearly two days. I stayed there for five or six days, and we celebrated Christmas. But Turkish troops soon began to arrive, because the army had withdrawn from Vidin. Pashas settled in all the neighboring towns. These pashas' men marched through the villages, mostly to look for food and to loot them. So it was not possible for me to remain at that monastery any longer, and I went back to Teteven. I stayed there for 40 days.

¹¹² *Bayrak* (байрак, from Old-Turkic *batrak*, *badruk*) denotes “flag” or “banner”. Karateodorov (1940, 38) and Yakov's edition (2006, 48) note that in this context the term refers to armed forces assembled under one banner (*bayrak*).

¹¹³ Master of Tatar-Ağasi (Татар-агаси) denotes the master of the couriers (Karateodorov 1940, 38).

¹¹⁴ A *kalpak* (калпак) is a high-crowned cap made of felt or sheepskin, worn by men in Turkey, the Balkans and the Caucasus.

¹¹⁵ “*Seysin*” (сеюзин) denotes *groom*. Karateodorov (1940, 39) and Yakov's edition (2006, 49) use *коняр* (коняр).

¹¹⁶ The Karloukovski monastery (Карлуковски манастир) is situated near the Iskar river and the town Lukovit in the Lovech province in northern Bulgaria.

In February, some people came and said that the captain-pasha's mercenaries – around 2000 men – had withdrawn from Pleven, where they had been spending the winter. I was delighted and went to Pleven. But it did not occur to me that Yusuf pasha was in Vratsa, and Gyurdzhi pasha was in Lom, and across from Lom, there was silikhtar Husein pasha, in Walachia. These three were the worst thugs.¹¹⁷ What if they were to pass through Pleven, where should I flee to? It was not that I had to flee because I had done something wrong, but because my position was dangerous: I was a *bishop*. If the marauding pashas had caught me, ten purses [*kesia*] would not have sufficed to set me free. And I did not even have a hundred groshes on me!

We arrived at Pleven on Saturday, All Souls Day, and there I remained undisturbed till the first Friday of Lent.¹¹⁸ On that day, late at night, Gyurdzhi pasha's mercenaries arrived. They broke down the gates and twelve riders also came with their horses to our house. We had neither bread nor barley, chaff or hay, and thus we resorted to pleading. We gave them money, and after that they went to another house. They also told us that Gyurdzhi pasha would arrive on the next day, with an army of 4000 men. So where was I to flee to? Out there was nowhere to go, and it was impossible to remain in a Christian house. So I fled and hid in a Turkish harem. I thought Gyurdzhi pasha would stay for a day or two and leave. But that's not what happened, since he stayed for ten days. On the day he left, Husein pasha arrived with an army of 6000 men, and they spared neither Christian nor Turkish houses. Turkish wives [*kadinskij*]¹¹⁹ raised hue and cry, but no one listened to them. They also came to our house, but they didn't like it because there was no place for the horses. While they were rummaging the house, I fled in terror to the Turkish woman. As is their custom, she turned her face away from me, so that I could not look at her.

This pasha stayed for 15 days, so that I remained 26 days in the Turkish harem. This was the Great Fast,¹²⁰ and the Turks had no food in the house. The market¹²¹ was closed, and all Christians had Turks in their homes. Who would have thought about bringing me some dinner? The local people were not used to honoring their bishop. Never mind dinner. For many days I even remained without bread, because this Turk was very poor. At his place they mainly ate corn bread, a little cabbage soup and nothing else. I was afraid that someone would come and betray me because then I would surely have been killed, for they would have asked me for a lot of money but I had none.

When the troops had departed, I left the harem and went to the house of my churchwarden. Less than three days had passed when a great tumult broke out in town. When we asked what was happening, we were told:

¹¹⁷ “*Zulumdzhi*” (зълумджии, золумджии) denote *evil-doers* or *tormentors* (злосторници), as Karateodorov (1940, 40) notes. Yakov's edition (2006, 50) uses *violators* (насилници).

¹¹⁸ Сирни Заговезни – the holiday of forgiveness, 7 weeks before Easter.

¹¹⁹ *Kadın* (кадин) is a Turkish word for *woman*. In Bulgarian *kadina* (кадѝна) denotes *Muslim woman* and *Turkish woman*.

¹²⁰ The Great Fast or Great Lent (Велики пости) is a 40 days' fasting season in the Orthodox Christianity, preceding Easter.

¹²¹ *Charshiya* (чаршия) is derived from the Turkish *Çarşı*, denoting *market*, or a central commercial street

“Brigands [*Kardzhalis*] have come to the outskirts of the town and want to enter the town by any means.”

We saw how Turkish and Christian women seized their valuable belongings and fled crying towards the fortified Turkish quarter. Right away the churchwarden and his wife set out as well. They took a few things with them and abandoned their home. But where was I to flee to? Some people advised me to go to an inn that had solid stonewalls. Since many Turks were also staying there, the brigands [*Kardzhalis*] would be unable to loot it. So I went to that inn and stayed there for 15 days until the brigands [*Kardzhalis*] had left for Tarnovo.

Then came Saint Lazarus' Day.¹²² On this day I left the inn and went to the cloister [*metochion*] of the Holy Tomb.¹²³ There we quietly spent the Holy Week.¹²⁴ I celebrated mass at Easter, and we were happy. We went to vespers at the ninth hour.¹²⁵ When we began to say: “Christ is risen!”¹²⁶ and were about to kiss each other, as was the custom, we heard how the town was shaking. A general uproar arose and loud cries. All the people in the church rushed outside. I alone stayed in the church, wearing my bishop's vestment. I heard shouts and cries from outside, but I didn't know what the great tumult was about and I didn't dare to go out or even take a look. For the church's walls were very low, so I would have been visible from all sides. At that moment, hail pellets as large as walnuts began to fall, but the hail did not go on for long and soon passed. Then a priest came to the church and told me that Pazvantoğlu's bandits [*haidouti*] had come, about 2000 men. They had smashed the gates and doors and had settled down in our convent, and they had stolen all my things.

So, where should I go to? My head was swimming. The tax collector¹²⁷ Kyrios Konstantin was in town at that time, together with his servants, guards, and about 60 tradesmen and shepherds. They had come to take sheep as tax, which was the custom. I sent this priest to him. His people then came and took me from the church and escorted me to his place. There I stayed for 19 days. Pazvantoğlu's people were also billeted there and they were drunk and committed atrocities. For that reason, [Kyrios Konstantin]¹²⁸ took two people from their master [*agha*],¹²⁹ whose name was Goshanitsali Khalil,¹³⁰ to stay with us, and we shared our bread with them. Brigands [*Kardzhalis*] also came in from outside, and I

¹²² In Orthodox Christianity, Lazarus Saturday (Свети Лазар, Лазаровден) is the day before Palm Sunday.

¹²³ Божигробският метох.

¹²⁴ Страстната седмица.

¹²⁵ Karateodorov (1940, 41) notes that Sophronius refers to 9 p.m. Turkish time, which corresponds to 3 o'clock. Probably he means midnight, the traditional hour of vespers at Easter. Yakov's edition (2006, 53) translates “midnight.”

¹²⁶ The paschal greeting in Orthodox Christianity is “*Christ is (a-)risen!*” (*Христос воскрес*), and the response is “*Truly, he is risen!*” (*Воистину воскрес*).

¹²⁷ *Бегликчия*. *Beglik* (беглик) was a tax on sheep and goats in Bulgaria under Ottoman rule and after its liberation.

¹²⁸ I follow Karateodorov (1940, 42) and Yakov's edition (2006, 54) in adding “*Kyrios Konstantin*” in order to form a complete sentence.

¹²⁹ *Agha* (*ага*) denotes *chief, lord or master*.

¹³⁰ Karateodorov (1940, 42) notes that Gushanitsali Khalil (Гушаницали Халил) was one of Pazvantoğlu's important officers.

was sitting among them with a Walachian fur cap on my head. They called me scribe¹³¹ Stoyan but I could neither read something, nor say a prayer.

One day, the boss [*chorbadji*] Konstantin told me:

“We,” he said, “are going through Walachia to Tarnovo. We can’t risk going there directly, because of the brigands [*Kardzhalis*].”

I was beginning to wonder what to do. I couldn’t stay alone with the brigands [*Kardzhalis*] in Pleven, and I shouldn’t risk going to Vratsa; but if I went with them to Walachia, what was I going to do there? I really wanted to return to Vratsa, but I didn’t dare take a Turk as bodyguard, for he might tell someone. So I took a Christian, one of boss Konstantin’s men. We left at night, but nights are short in May. There were four of us; we went through woods and flat land, cutting across country and avoiding the road. We came to the river Iskar,¹³² but it was not possible to cross that river without a boat.

On the other side of the river was the village of Koynlare.¹³³ We shouted, but no one heard us because of the noise from the river. No one showed up. Night fell and it began to rain. We did not dare fire a gun, in case some of Pazvantoğlu’s bandits [*haidouti*] were there. What to do? We were clueless. At last we saw a cowherd. He recognized us and went to the village to let them know. Before long, people arrived with a boat, but the boat was a deadly barrel. It held three or four people and the horses had to swim across on their own. When we pushed the horses into the river so that they would swim across, one of them bolted back into the woods. My God, what were we going to do? It was getting dark. All the horses had swum over to other side, and only one of them had run into the woods. Should we take care of the other horses or catch this one? And how should we cross the deadly river at night? We would all drown! But by God’s grace¹³⁴ the horse had not gone far; it came back and followed the other horses. Once we had crossed the river I felt a bit better, because on the way to Vratsa there was less danger from the brigands [*Kardzhalis*].

That was how we got to Vratsa. I remained there over the summer until St. Demetrius’ Day. I did not dare to leave the town. On St. Demetrius’ Day I set out for Pleven. Pazvantoğlu’s rebels [*haidouti*] were there, too. I stayed there until St. Nicholas’ Day,¹³⁵ while the priests collected the church tax.

When I saw that [Pazvantoğlu’s rebels] had begun to assemble in Pleven, I was afraid that they would do me some harm. In December, 1799, I left Pleven and went to Nikopol,¹³⁶ to cross the Danube and return to Walachia. But since the Danube was frozen on both sides, we couldn’t get across, and so we stayed in Nikopol for six days. Then we heard that Gyavur

¹³¹ Both Karateodorov (1940, 42) and Yakov’s edition (2006, 54) render *yazadzhi* (язаджу) as *pisar* (писар), which literally denotes *scribe*.

¹³² The river Iskar (Искър) is a tributary of the Danube and the longest river in Bulgaria, which runs through the provinces of Sofia, Pernik, Vratsa, Pleven, and Lovech.

¹³³ See note 41 on Koynlare / Koynare.

¹³⁴ “Ала (по-)даде Бог”

¹³⁵ St. Nicholas Day (Свети Никола, Никулден) is a popular and Christian Orthodox holiday celebrated on 6th December in commemoration of St. Nicholas of Myra, also called St. Nicholas the miracle-worker (Νικόλαος ὁ Θαυματουργός).

¹³⁶ Nikopol (Никопол, Turkish: *Niğbolu*, Greek: Νικόπολις,) is a town in northern Bulgaria, part of the Pleven province, on the right bank of the Danube.

Imam¹³⁷ was coming to Nikopol. I was frightened, and for a large amount of money I was ferried across the Danube, but I was frantic. The ice broke and a horse went down and drowned. The other horses were tied together and dragged over the ice on a plank. We nearly died of cold by the time we reached Zimnicea.¹³⁸ The Walachian land was bare. The way and the location were beyond recognition. [Zimnicea] is six hours away, but it took us nearly three days to get there.

In summer 1800, the Tsar's army once again marched against Pazvantoğlu. The Bucarestian Mourouz-bey¹³⁹ advanced from Walachia and the pashas came from the Turkish side. Let me tell you the reason: in the village of Varbitsa¹⁴⁰ there was a sultan who was famous for having defeated the Austrians¹⁴¹ at Giurgu [*Giurgevo*].¹⁴² He had therefore become arrogant and did not want to submit to the vezir when the latter was in Shumen with the Turkish army. So the vezir ordered to have his palaces destroyed. The sultan fled to Muscovia¹⁴³ and stayed there for six years. Then he came to Tsarigrad with Muscovite support and the tsar let him set up his palaces again. But when he came to Varbitsa, he gathered an army of Turks and Christians and came to Vidin. I don't know what he'd discussed with Pazvantoğlu, but rumor had it that they had agreed that the sultan would become tsar and that Pazvantoğlu would become vezir. Anyhow, for whatever reason an army was again mobilized against Vidin.¹⁴⁴

What was I to do? I had no money [*harashlik*]¹⁴⁵ left for my own expenses, but I was requested to pay the church tax: the two alternatives were equally unpleasant. First, I had to get a written permission [*byuruntia*]¹⁴⁶ from the Vidin pasha in order to collect the church

¹³⁷ Dyavur-Imam or Gyavur Imam (Диавур-Имам, Гявур-Имам), is described by Karateodorov (1940, 44) as one of Pazvantoğlu's chief officers, whereas Yakov's edition (2006, 56) describes him as a Muslim clergyman. Maybe he was both.

¹³⁸ Zimnicea, in Bulgarian: Zimnich, Zimnica, of old Demnicikos (Зимнич, Зимница, Демницикос). Zimnicea is a town in Walachia (today Romania), on the left bank of the Danube, across from the Bulgarian town Svishtov (Свищов).

¹³⁹ Karateodorov (1940, 44) notes that *Mourouz-bey* denotes Prince Morozi. Alexandros Mourousis (1750-1816), a Greek ruler of Walachia (1798-1801), appointed by the Ottomans. He had to deal with Pazvantoğlu's rebellious troops in Oltenia and, in the end he asked to be dismissed from his office. "Bey" denotes a Turkish and Altaic title for tribal leaders, as well as rulers of provinces.

¹⁴⁰ Varbitsa (Върбица, Вербица) is a town in northeastern Bulgaria, in the Shumen province. In addition, the noun denotes *little willow* (from върба – willow).

¹⁴¹ Sophronius writes "*the Germans*" (*nemcite, немците*). Karateodorov (1940, 45) follows the original, but Yakov's edition (2006, 56) adapts the text to "*the Austrians*".

¹⁴² Giurgu, Bulgarian: *Giurgevo* (Гюржево), Turkish: *Yerköy, Yergöğü* is situated in Romania, on the left bank of the Danube, across from Rouse.

¹⁴³ Russia

¹⁴⁴ Karateodorov (1940, 45) notes that Pazvantoğlu intended to take the sultan's throne.

¹⁴⁵ *Harashlik, harchlik* (харашлик, харчлък) denotes *a little money for spending, or pocket money*.

¹⁴⁶ *Byuruntia, byuruntia* denotes *permission*. Karateodorov (1940, 45) uses *permission* (позволение), whereas Yakov's edition (2006, 57) uses *order* (заповед).

tax. But I had neither an archdiocese nor a bishopric, so I could not get this permission. In Walachia there once was a monk called Kalinik, who had been the abbot of the Markoutsa monastery.¹⁴⁷ He was a tenacious man who did not bow his head to anyone, least of all to the Hungarian-Walachian bishop, who then had him thrown in jail on some lawsuit. Out of spite, Kalinik sent a messenger to Vidin and promised Pazvantoğlu forty purses of money if he would make him bishop of Vidin. For some reason, Pazvantoğlu hated the bishop of Vidin and was furious with him. That monk Kalinik knew this, which is why he went to Vidin with a ploy. Pazvantoğlu kicked out the old bishop and took all his belongings and sent Kalinik to the bishopric to serve there in the bishop's stead, until he'd obtained the patriarch's permission to make him bishop of Vidin.

Since I had known this Kalinik for a long time, I sent him a letter, imploring him that if he had access to Pazvantoğlu, to procure a permit [*teskera*]¹⁴⁸ from the pasha or the overseer (*kekha*),¹⁴⁹ so that I could go and collect the church tax. He wrote to me:

“You should go to Vratsa and send a messenger to get you the permit.”

Unaware of his ploy, I set out for Vratsa. A few days passed. Before I had sent my messenger to Vidin, he sent me Pazvantoğlu's permit with an envoy [*mubashir*]¹⁵⁰ who was supposed to take me to Vidin.

So I went to Vidin. For two or three months I officiated in the churches. That's what it said in the pasha's permit, namely that I should stay with the Christians for a little while, to celebrate mass for them and then return to my bishopric. When I began to ask for permission to return, one of the pasha's men came to me and told me:

“You cannot go anywhere until Kalinik has become bishop!”

So what was I to do? I was a wretch [*siromakh*] who had unluckily let himself be tied down. I stayed in Vidin for three years. I had to put up with a lot from that monk Kalinik! For him I was like a common servant. He did not acknowledge me as a person, let alone as bishop. He was in league with the Turks, with Pazvantoğlu's bandits [*hajdouti*], and I did not dare to breathe a word about anything. He did not let me go anywhere except to church, and only if I was accompanied by a priest. And even if he had let me go, my legs were hurting, so I couldn't walk and always used a cart to get to church.

This siege [*maysere*]¹⁵¹ went on for two and a half years. I was terrified and endured much grief and sorrow. Then the third siege of Vidin began. But the besiegers were encamped far away. Plyasa pasha encamped in Pleven with 15 thousand Albanians [*arnaouti*], Gyurdzhi pasha encamped in Berkovica with an army just as strong, and Mourouz-bey came from Walachia with Ibrail Nazari and Aydin pasha, with an equally large number of troops.

¹⁴⁷ Karateodorov (1940, 45) notes that Sophronius refers to St. Marko's monastery but does not specify its location, which Sophronius places in Walachia (Romania).

¹⁴⁸ *Teskera* (мескера) see note 24.

¹⁴⁹ *Kekhaya* (кехая) is a Turkish name for overseer or supervisor (Yakov's edition, 2006, 58). According to Karateodorov (1940, 46) *kekha* denotes a municipal officer elected by the people.

¹⁵⁰ *Mubashir* (мубашир) is an Islamic word denoting *bringer of glad tidings*. Karateodorov (1940, 46) and Yakov's edition (2006, 58) use *messenger* or *envoy* (пратеник).

¹⁵¹ *Maysepe*. Karateodorov (1940, 47) and Yakov's edition (2006, 59) both use *obsada*, which denotes *siege*. See note 91.

Pazvantoğlu had the brigands [*Kardzhalis*] with him, in three companies.¹⁵² With 2 thousand brigands [*Kardzhalis*], Manaf Ibrahim defeated Plyasa pasha and took all his arms and brought them to Vidin. Plyasa pasha took to his heels. A thousand men from his army were taken to Vidin as prisoners. Pazvantoğlu gave each of them a loaf of bread and let them go. Another Kardzhali citizen, Kara Mustafa from Plovdiv [*Philippopolis*], attacked Gyurdzhi pasha during the night, took all his arms, and brought them to Vidin. The commander¹⁵³ of the third company of brigands was Guşaniç Ali Khalil.

Even more of Pazvantoğlu's rebels [*hajdouti*] fought tenaciously against the tsar's army and did not let them approach Vidin. At last, with Pazvantoğlu's permission, the brigands [*Kardzhalis*] crossed over into Walachia and burned Craiova¹⁵⁴ and the surrounding villages, killing many people. Then the local bey, Michael Voda,¹⁵⁵ along with the Hungarian-Walachian bishops, as well as all Walachian lords (*boyars*)¹⁵⁶ and bishops, fled to Braşov¹⁵⁷ for fear of the brigands [*Kardzhalis*]. That is how they made peace with Pazvantoğlu.

Then Pazvantoğlu sent Kalinik with fifty Turks to Ypsilanti-bey¹⁵⁸ in Bucharest, and with the bey's permission they ordained him as bishop of Vidin. A month after he had returned to Vidin, I also asked for permission to finally return to my bishopric, after three years. But since brigands [*Kardzhali*] were still prowling about my bishopric, it was not possible for me to go there. I thought of going to Craiova and stay there, because I was sick and tired of Vidin. I thought about getting away¹⁵⁹ from there as soon as possible.

I stayed in Craiova for 20 days and Kostaki Karadzha, the district governor [*kaymakaminu*],¹⁶⁰ held me in great esteem. While I was in Craiova, one day we heard that the brigands [*Kardzhalis*] were approaching the town. That night the district governor fled Craiova, as did lords, tradesmen, monks and priests. I alone remained in the bishopric. I wanted to flee, too, but I couldn't find a car. And once again I was terrified. But they didn't come and everyone returned to their homes.

¹⁵² *Вулока (бюлока)* (Turkish). Karateodorov (1940, 47) uses *отделение*, which denotes *detachment* (army). Yakov's edition (2006, 59) uses *рота*, which denotes *company*.

¹⁵³ *Вулок-башия* (бюлок-башия) denotes the commander of a company.

¹⁵⁴ Craiova (Крайова) is a city in the county of Oltenia (formerly Lesser Walachia), in Western Romania.

¹⁵⁵ *Voda* (Вода) is a Slavic title, probably a derivative of *voivoda*, denoting commander, ruler or governor. Karateodorov (1940, 47) uses *voivoda* or *voivode* (войвода), which literally denotes *warlord* in Old Bulgarian. In the Ottoman Empire, *voivoda* denoted the ruler of a Vlach community. Yakov's edition (2006, 60) uses *Voda*.

¹⁵⁶ *Boyar* (бояр) denotes the highest feudal rank in medieval Bulgaria, Russia, Walachia and Moldavia.

¹⁵⁷ Braşov (Брашов) is a city in central Romania, in the Transylvania region.

¹⁵⁸ Sophronius refers to Constantine Ypsilantis (1760–1816), a Greek ruler of Walachia (1802–1806), appointed by the Ottomans.

¹⁵⁹ "*Kourtulislam se*" (куртулисам са). Karateodorov (1940, 48) uses "се измъкна", and Yakov's edition (2006, 60) uses "се махна".

¹⁶⁰ *Каймаканът* is a Turkish word for *district governor*, which is how Karateodorov (1940, 48) and Yakov's edition (2006, 60) translate the term.

When I saw that the brigands [*Kardzhalis*] didn't leaving my bishopric, I left Craiova and went to Bucharest to my children, who were studying¹⁶¹ at the bey's academy.¹⁶² I went and paid my respects to the holy Hungarian-Walachian bishop. He was called Dositheos, an old man and a scholar blessed with wisdom. He received me kindly and took me to the bey, the Lord Constantine Ypsilantis,¹⁶³ and also to some lords. He told them how I had stayed in Vidin for three years and that I had endured a lot of sorrow and misery.

Dositheos summoned me to the bishopric and gave me a cell to stay there with him, and each day I was a guest at his table. I told him all my miseries: how they had lied to me from the beginning and had charged my bishopric with an expensive tax¹⁶⁴ of fifty-five purses; and that I had not been to my bishopric for four years. I told him that I had not taken any money and had not paid any taxes or interest,¹⁶⁵ so that the accumulated debt now exceeded 80 purses. And that the bishopric was laid waste, that there were no villages left, since the brigands [*Kardzhalis*] and Pazvantoğlu's bandits [*hajdouti*] had burned them down and people had fled to Walachia and other countries. I told him that the Holy Synod did not believe any of it, and demanded the entire amount, for it was impossible for me to deal with this bishopric and with that debt.

[Dositheos]¹⁶⁶ took pity on me and asked the bey to obtain my notice of dismissal [*paretis*] from the Synod, so that I would be released from this bishopric. The bey, may God grant him a long life, listened to him, wrote to the Synod and obtained my notice of dismissal. So I was released from those fears and those daily miseries. Yet I have a grievance, and I fear God and His judgment for taking that flock on my shoulders and then abandoning it. Still, I hope for God's everlasting mercy, because I did not abandon them to take a rest, but due to great misery and to the large debt they had imposed on me; and because they did not believe me¹⁶⁷ that the world was in ruins, especially around Vidin, which had become an abode of barbarians and bandits.¹⁶⁸

That is why I now work day and night, to write some books in our Bulgarian language, so that my countrymen might receive some useful guidance from me, the sinful one, as I am unable to preach to them by word of mouth. May they read and heed my writings. May they pray to God for me, the unworthy one, to amend my ignorance and to grant me forgiveness, so that I, too, might receive a place at His right hand on Judgment Day. Amen!

¹⁶¹ *Epistimia* (епистимия).

¹⁶² Yakov's edition (2006, 61) notes that the Bey's Academy refers to the oldest university institution in Bucharest, called the Royal Academy of Saint Sava, founded in 1694.

¹⁶³ See note 116, above.

¹⁶⁴ I follow Yakov's edition (2006, 61) who adds [tax (данък)] before "55 purses".

¹⁶⁵ *Fayda* (файда).

¹⁶⁶ I follow Karateodorov (1940, 49), who replaces the pronoun, unlike Yakov's edition (2006, 62), who uses "he" (той).

¹⁶⁷ "deto ne vярvat" ("дето не вярват"). I follow Yakov's edition (2006, 62), which translates "без да ми вярват" ("without believing me").

¹⁶⁸ *Hajdouts кое* (хайдутское), adj. of *hajdouti*, primarily denotes rebels, but in this phrase the connotation *bandit* (*razbojnik*, *разбойник*) is a more appropriate translation. Hence Yakov's edition (2006, 62) uses *razbojnicheskо* (*разбойническо*) – "bandit-like."

I wish you the same from my heart! May you be indulgent towards the long-suffering one! I greet you!

Bucharest, 1804.