

THE SULIOTES.*

PREFACE BY THE TRANSLATOR.

THE following Translation is from a brief but simple and interesting Narrative of the sufferings and heroic actions of the Suliote People,¹ the original of which was presented by their Chiefs to the Ionian Government, as a testimony of the virtuous conduct and constancy displayed by their nation, under the most trying circumstances.

The Narrator, Captain Christo Perevò,² is a Greek, well known as the Author of the History of Suli;³ he sojourned many years with the Suliotes, and, as appears by the present relation, was an eye-witness of what he describes.

The original Italian has been translated as closely as the different constructions of the two languages would permit, and there are several obscure passages, which seem to require explanatory notes. These could not be furnished by the Translator, who received the manuscript from a friend, with a request that it might (for reasons which do not require to be stated in this place) be got ready for publication without any delay.

The authentic account of the fate of the celebrated Ali Pacha,⁴ and the immediate cause which led to his destruction, will be read with great interest, as affording a curious insight into the nature of the war now raging in Greece.

* Author: Leigh Hunt / Transcribed and annotated by Serena Baiesi.

A compendious Relation of the Adventures of the Suliotes, from the year 1820 to the 2nd of September 1822, at which latter period they quitted the Fortress of Kiafa.⁵ Written at the Lazzaretto of Argostoli⁶ in Cefalonia, the 30th of September, 1822, by Captain Christo Perevò.

HAPPENING to have been at Suli,⁷ I think it useful and fitting to note down in a succinct manner the operations of the Suliotes, and also the events which took place relating to them, from the year 1820 to 1822.

When Ali Pacha had become odious in the eyes of the Sultan Mahmout,* and that the latter had begun to take measures for his destruction, the greatest part of the Suliotes, with the inhabitants of other towns in the neighbourhood of Suli, were living in the Island of Corfu,⁸ gaining their subsistence by their labour. They dared not enter into the service or submit to the protection of the Pacha, because he had declared with an oath that he should never die contented till he had succeeded in reducing the Suliotes to the same state as the people of Gardica.†⁹ When operations against the Pacha were commenced by the Sultan, the latter issued firmans,¹⁰ inviting all those Turks and Greeks, who had incurred the displeasure of the former, and were expatriated on that account to join him, in order to effect the ruin of the Pacha, and to reinstate themselves in the bosom of their country, and in the absolute possession of their property.

The Suliotes, hearing of such an order from their sovereign, and wishing to obtain precise information concerning it, sent four Ambassadors to the Ottoman Vice-Admiral, who

* Mahomet.¹¹

† Destroyed in a cruel manner by Ali, in revenge for some insult offered forty years before to his mother.

were favourably received, and obtained from him a confirmation of the Sultan's proclamation, and a renewed invitation to the same purpose, in consequence of which, about 200 men left Corfu, enrolling themselves under the orders of Ismail Pacha, surnamed Bassobey, to whom they were well known, he being a native of Janina¹² and having been for above twenty years in the service of Ali Pacha.

These 200 Suliotes, continuing in the royal service and behaving with activity and submission, entertained the firm hope of being able to return to their native home, according to the promise of the Pacha and the proclamation of the Sultan. Nevertheless, they were deceived in this hope, for the bravest and most faithful Beys and Agas,¹³ those who were always nearest to Ismail Pacha, being all Albanians, and feeling envious of the Suliotes, were constantly exciting him not to allow that people to return to their native land, according to the royal order, saying, that as soon as the Suliotes should take possession of their native country, they would be always against him, as had been found in times past.

The Pacha, both from his own inclination and from the instigations of the Beys, not only refused to the Suliotes permission to recover their own country, but formed also the project of putting them to death, when an opportunity offered without the risk of shedding the blood of his own troops. He thought the easiest way of effecting his purpose would be to send them back to Corfu, and thus on the shores to put his Ottoman project in execution. In consequence, he gave orders to intercept their passage from the heights, and to massacre the whole, dispersed as they would be here end there.

The Suliotes soon discovered the insidious projects, both of the Pacha and of the Albanian Turks. The peril in which

they found themselves, and their anxiety to return to their native soil, induced them to form an alliance with their first and implacable enemy Ali Pacha, in which, with no small difficulty, they succeeded.

Having then given five hostages into the hands of Ali Pacha, and taken his grandson Hussein Pacha in exchange, they departed in the night for Suli. The Turco Albanians called Ziulachioti, who then inhabited Suli, evacuated the fortress two days after the arrival of the Greek Suliotes; the commander of the Castle of Kiafa opened the gates, and the Suliotes entered, according to the orders of Ali Pacha. They were afterwards joined by three of Ali Pacha's commanders, the Selictar,* Tahir Ambasi, and Ago Muhurdar, having with them a body of nearly seven hundred Albanian Turks. As soon as they had joined the Suliotes, they attacked the enemy in divers parts, driving them from many strong places. After a month, however, the Selictar, the first of the above-mentioned commanders, deserted, taking with him about three hundred Albanian Turks; the other two officers remained with the Suliotes.

In the month of July, 1821, at the time when the town of Arta¹⁴ was besieged, Tahir Ambasi was sent to Messolongio¹⁵ and to the Morea¹⁶ to procure warlike instruments. Being arrived there, and having witnessed the calamities and injuries inflicted by the Greeks upon the Turks, he changed his opinion; and immediately returning to the camp recounted all those events to his countrymen, exciting them at the same time, if they were true Mussulmans, to unite themselves to the royal troops, and to leave the Suliotes; "For," said he, "these also fight for their religion and their liberty, like their countrymen of the Morea and of Romelia."¹⁷

The sword bearer.¹⁸

The words of Tahir Ambasi had the most successful effect on the hearts of the Albanian Turks, who had joined the Greek Suliotes; and with one will and common consent they marched to Janina, where, deceiving Ali Pacha, they delivered him alive into the hands of his enemy, who put him to death. The Greek Suliotes, being thus left alone in the camp, returned to defend their country.

After the death of Ali Pacha, the General in Chief of the Sultan's army, Hursit Pacha,*¹⁹ began to recruit fresh troops in order to march against the Peloponnesus. All the Albanian Beys and Agas dissuaded him from such a project, telling him that none of them would march against the Peloponnesus as long as the Suliotes remained alive in their own country; adducing for a reason, that before they could reach the Peloponnesus, the Suliotes would have reduced their wives and families to slavery.

These words of the Albanian Turks had such effect upon the intentions of Hursit Pacha, that without the least delay he moved with twenty thousand men against the Suliotes. The inhabitants of the villages in the neighbourhood of Suli, much alarmed by the multitude and impetuosity of the enemy, and by the prospect of the devastation which must take place on their approach, took refuge in Suli, carrying with them above fifty thousand beasts—sheep, goats, oxen, and beasts of burthen. The people themselves amounted to ten thousand souls.

On the 18th of May, 1822, the Turks approached Suli, making the attack on all sides. The Suliotes, although they were few compared with the multitude of the enemy, opposed them with great valour on every side; but the foe, after a heavy repulse and much loss of blood,

* Called also Chourchid Pacha.

made himself master of the Castle of Santa Veneranda, of San Donando, of the Gardelina, of the Samonichi, and of the mountains of Cumbolo and Strithozza,²⁰ from whence they attacked the fortress of Kiafa with two mortars.

A few days afterwards the enemy attempted, by a strong effort, to make himself master also of the Davarico,²¹ from whence the Suliotes supplied themselves with water; but these latter shewing themselves boldly to his forces, opposed them heroically, so that the battle lasted for twenty-one hours; and although all the first and bravest commanders among the Turks were present in the conflict, the Turks turned their backs to the Suliotes, retiring with danger to their camp in the mountains of Strithozza. Of this battle, as well as of the preceding, the History of Suli will give the most faithful and precise account.

The siege which the Turks carried on against the Suliotes was so close, that there only remained to the latter a circumference of seven miles,—a stony, inaccessible, and sterile position. The poor animals, not finding pasture, were deaf to the voice of their masters: they went in numbers towards the enemy, who got possession of above one-third of them: some afterwards served for food for the besieged, and the rest perished with hunger, as did all the beasts of burthen. The atmosphere consequently became infected, and a contagious disorder soon made its appearance, the progress of which was so rapid, that from fifteen to twenty persons died each day. The countrymen seeing the destruction of the cattle, the pestilence among the men, the scarcity of their accustomed food, and even in some instances the total want of bread,—and, moreover, being unable to fix any limits to the siege, arrived at such a height of absurd despair, that keeping in their own hands the positions committed to their care, they treated clandestinely with the

enemy, in order to give them up to him; and, what was still more horrid, these same countrymen, in order to render the Turks favourable to them, and to prevent their remembering all the evils which they had committed against them whilst they were united to the Suliotes, promised to give up those situations also which were near to the fortress, and finally to cause the Fortress of Kiafa itself to be delivered up to them. They had it easily in their power to fulfil these promises, their numbers amounting to two thousand, and the Suliotes were scarcely five hundred. The Turks, though they had an opportunity so favourable to their views, were nevertheless so much impressed with the alarm caused by the former and the recent battles, that they supposed that impossible which was perfectly easy to achieve, and gave the countrymen to understand that they would not undertake such an enterprise,—so much did they doubt the promises of these villagers.

The Suliotes, penetrating the sentiments of the countrymen, often assembled them together, representing to them that submission to the Turks could only be ruinous to their families and to themselves,—and this they might judge of from the massacre of so many other Christians. The Suliotes furnished them with as much money and provisions as they could, and begged them to submit to the siege for some months longer, declaring that if in that time the siege should not be raised or some exterior succour arrive, then all would unanimously demand peace, on the condition, however, of honourable capitulations. All these exhortations and prayers to the countrymen were in vain; so that the Suliotes, rendering them responsible towards God for all the evil which might happen to them through their means, consented to let them go out, foreseeing an intestine war if

they any longer opposed their firm resolutions. Even this, however, would not satisfy the countrymen, who insisted that all, without the least exception, and at the same time, should be given up; but the Suliotes answered them, that they should much prefer death to submitting themselves to the Turks.

Being thus forced to try both to escape the danger and to render vain the promises made to the Turks by the countrymen, the Suliotes informed them that they also were desirous of peace, but that they wished to go to the Ionian islands; for which purpose it was necessary to obtain the permission of the British Government.²²

The Suliotes having thus agreed with the countrymen, proposed this plan to the Turks, who immediately sent emissaries to the British Consul at Prevesa.²³ The consent of the Suliotes to surrender, and to emigrate to the Ionian islands, had in view to prolong the time for their surrender, and to drive away the countrymen, hoping during this delay for some succour or some change of circumstances,—also in order to quiet the enemy, and to lull him; and that with good reason, because, being weak in numbers, they could not guard their respective posts from an invasion on the part of the enemy. In the mean time, the emissaries could not succeed in obtaining their demand, because the British Consul had left Prevesa three days before for Zante,²⁴ there to meet the Governor-General of the Ionian States. The emissaries therefore went on to Zante, and there having a conference with the Governor on the object of their mission, received a flattering but not an affirmative answer.

From the ambiguity of the General's answer, the countrymen felt all their fears renewed, and though they had before taken the resolution of not separating themselves from the Suliotes, they now surrendered themselves.

In consequence, the Turks, still more animated by the diminution of the troops of the Suliotes since the surrender of the countrymen, and impatient at the General's answer, changed their sentiments, resolving on the violation of the treaties. Two days afterwards, therefore, they proposed to the Suliotes, in an imperious manner, that they should surrender the fortress and pass to Suli, to Zieurati,²⁵ or to Ath-lanza,²⁶ with their families,—after, however, having given the guarantee of twenty hostages, which should be delivered up to the Turks. Also, that in one of these places they should wait for the decisive answer of the General, to whom the Suliotes had again sent to demand one, and at the same time to request the ships necessary to transport them. The Suliotes answered them, that, wise and great men as they were, they ought not to break the convention: but the Turks were but little attentive to the words of the Suliotes, concluding that they arose entirely from fear.

The Suliotes, seeing the obstinacy of the Turks in demanding the fortress in the above manner, wrote to them to abide by the treaties already made, or to have recourse to arms; and that the Lord God, who knows the just and the unjust, would reward every one according to his deeds. Moreover, the Suliotes swore unanimously amongst themselves, rather to die with arms in their hands than to go out of the fortress at the order of the Turks. The second day after taking this determination, which was on the 14th of August, they all received the sacrament, preparing themselves for death. This firm and heroic resolution, being made known to the Turks by means of their spies, intimidated them and confirmed the first conventions, which were as follows:—

1st. That both sides should send letters and emissaries to the Commander-in-chief of the Ionian Islands, that the Su-

liotes might know if they should be received in those islands.

2dly. That all provisions and military stores belonging to the Suliotes, whether public or private property, should be paid for by the Turks according to their price in the neighbourhood.

3dly. That the Turks should be answerable at Noli²⁷ for the ships which were to convey them, but which should nevertheless be furnished with Ionian flags.

4thly. That the Turks should take care to transport the baggage of the Suliotes, their wives and families.

5thly. That the Turkish troops encamped at Glechi,²⁸ by which place the Suliotes would have to pass, should retire farther.

6thly. That the Turks should give to the Suliotes, as hostages, the nearest relations of the most notable Pachas, Beys, and Agas, who were present at the siege of Kiafa, until the Suliotes should be all embarked.

7thly. Until the respective ships should have all arrived at Athlanza, and until the Suliotes should have received the hostages, neither men nor baggage should quit the fortress.

All these conditions were scrupulously respected by both sides, until the arrival of the answer of the Most Excellent Arch General* and Governor, Adam,²⁹ who generously permitted the Suliotes to take refuge in the Ionian Islands, and magnanimously acceded to the prayers of both parties; who also, for the complete safety of the Suliotes, sent three ships of war, to secure by their presence the embarkation of the Suliotes, and subsequently accompany them to Asso³⁰ in Cefalonia, where they are ordered for thirty-one days, to *abate their obstinacy*†.

* Arci Generale.

† Scontare la contumacia.

EDITORIAL NOTES

¹ The Suliotes were a tribe of Greeks of the area of Souli in Epirus. They were active in the resistance to the Turks during the Greek war for independence (1821-32), a revolt by the Greeks against the Ottoman Empire, leading to the creation of an independent kingdom of Greece. Byron mentions the Suliotes in his *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812), Canto II.

² Christoforos Perraivos (1773-1863), Greek officer during the Greek War of Independence and author.

³ Perraivos's *History of Suli and Parga* (1815, trans. 1823) was a memoir of his service as an officer. It includes historical information about the Suliote refugees in the island of Corfu.

⁴ Ali Pacha Tepelenë (1744-1822), Albanian ruler. He served as the Ottoman Pasha of Janina from 1788 to 1822.

⁵ Fortress located in Souli, which was built by Ali Pacha after 1803. The fortress had a key role in Ali Pacha's strategy to subjugate the Suliotes.

⁶ Argostoli, town on the island of Kefalonia, Greece.

⁷ Suli (Souli), in the region of Epirus, northwestern Greece.

⁸ Corfu, Greek island in the Ionian Sea to which most of the Suliotes had been exiled after Ali Pacha sieged the area of Suli.

⁹ *Gardica*: Hunt's spelling of *Kardhiq*, a village in Albania.

¹⁰ Firman, royal mandate or decree issued by the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire.

¹¹ Mahamud II (1785-1839), Ottoman sultan from 1808 to 1839.

¹² Ismail Pashabey, native of Ioannina, city in the region Epirus, northwestern Greece, was a former ally of Ali Pacha.

¹³ Beys and Agas are Turkish titles for civilians or officers used in the Ottoman Empire.

¹⁴ Arta, city in northwestern Greece, in the Epirus region.

¹⁵ Missolonghi, city situated in western Greece.

¹⁶ Morea was the name used for the Peloponnese peninsula in southern Greece during the Middle Ages and early modern period.

¹⁷ Romelia, historical region administrated by the Ottoman Empire, corresponding to the Balkans.

¹⁸ Mispunctuation: asterisk at the beginning of the note missing from the copy-text.

¹⁹ Hurshid Ahmed Pasha (d. 1822), Ottoman general. He killed Ali Pacha in January 1822.

²⁰ *Castle of Santa Veneranda ... Cumbolo and Strithozza*: Unidentified locations.

²¹ Unidentified reference.

²² Since 1809 the Ionian Islands were under the British rule.

²³ Preveza, city in the region of Epirus, northwestern Greece.

²⁴ Zante, southernmost and third largest of the Ionian Islands of Greece.

²⁵ Unidentified location.

²⁶ Unidentified location.

²⁷ Unidentified location. Considering the geographical context of the article, it is unlikely that Hunt refers to the Italian city in Liguria.

²⁸ Unidentified location.

²⁹ Sir Frederik Adam (1781-1853), a Scottish major general who became Lord High Commissioner of the Ionian Island between 1823 and 1832.

³⁰ Asso, village in the west coast of the island of Cephalonia.