

Transhumance on Taygetos in the *Chronicle of Morea**

G. L. HUXLEY

This short study examines a passage in the *Chronicle*, of interest to historical geographers. Having described the foundation of the castle at Mistra (Myzethra), the *Chronicle* in its Greek version states that the *zygos* of the Melingoi—that is, the massif of Pentadaktylos or Taygetos—had passes and great villages and people who revered no lord. To keep the insubordinate Melingoi in check William II de Villehardouin caused the castle of Maïne also to be built.¹

When the castles of Mistra and Maïne were complete, the rich *archontes* of the Melingoi were not willing to be subject to the Franks. However, the common people said that they should submit, though with honour and without the performance of *corvées* such as were undertaken by the villages in the plains. Their reason was that since the two castles had been built, they had not been able to come down to the plains to live by trade nor had they been able to live in the mountains.²

Accordingly, the rulers of the Melingoi were compelled to come to terms with Prince William. The events recounted thus far are described in the Greek version. The French version has a lacuna, but now takes up the narrative again (§206): “. . .] contre le prince. Et quant il orrent assés debatu leur conseil, si s’accorderent a ce que il envoiassent leurs messages au prince, demandant franchise de non estre tenu de servir comme li villain dou pays, mais qu’il le serviroient en fait d’armes quant il en auroit mestier.”³ According to the Greek version they also asked to pay no tribute (H. 3025). The Prince then made an agreement with the Melingoi, since he recognized the strength of the land wherein they dwelt—“pour le fort pays ou il demouroient.” But later, the better to constrain and to subject them in the mountains of the Slavs, he had another castle built at Leftro (Beaufort).

* The text was written in 1986 for a colloquium on mountains in historical geography, held in Sofia. No publication followed. A paper concerned with Slavs is an apt vehicle to convey my admiration of Professor Marcovich’s profound and powerful scholarship.

¹ H. 2985–3007 ed. J. Schmitt, *The Chronicle of Morea* (London 1904) 200.

² H. 3008–19.

³ Ed. J. Longnon, *Chronique de Morée* (Paris 1911) 74.

The commons complained that they could not live in the mountains: The main reason was, we may suppose, that the mountains were too cold in winter. But they also complained that they could not come down to do business in the plains. Here the likely reason was that they needed to trade off their surplus stock and to sell their cheeses—or to barter them. The complaints show that the Slavonic Melingoi were engaged in pastoral transhumance, in accordance with ancient Mediterranean practice, on the Taygetos range.⁴

The building of the castles enabled the Franks to exercise some control upon the seasonal movement of the Melingoi off the mountain. It is most unlikely that William excused the descending Slavs from all payment of dues as they passed near Mistra on the way to the Lakonian plain. So the request to be *enkousatoi* (< *exkousatoi*), alleged to have been made according to the Greek version of the *Chronicle*, would not have been granted. It is safe to infer that one of the intentions of William II in building his castles was to be able to tax the Melingoi as they moved with their livestock. They dwelt in the mountains but needed to come down to the plains of Lakedaïmonia and Messenia. They also needed to go up to the highest pastures when the snows had melted. Their movements may be compared with those of the Chataigneraie of Corsica, whose seasonal migrations begin midway between the summer and the winter pastures. In sixteenth-century Castille there were royal tolls upon the main routes to the sheep-fairs; and in fifteenth-century Apulia taxation was imposed upon transhumant shepherds with their flocks by defining sheep-routes and tracks connecting the resting pastures with the winter pastures.⁵ Thus the aim of Prince William's castle-building can be seen to be not only military but also economic. He could not conquer the mountains, but he was able to benefit from the traditional economy of the mountainy people.

It is recognised in the *Chronicle* that the leaders of the Melingoi were rich. Being rich they were more exposed than the commons to the social influence of powerful neighbors—Byzantine, Frankish, and later Byzantine again after the East Roman recovery in the Morea. An illustration of exposure to external influence among the Melingan *archontes* is the dedicatory inscription of 1331/2 from Oitylos.⁶ Herein is recorded the rebuilding of a church of St. George at the expense of the Melingoi Kyr Konstantinos Spanis and Kyr Laringkas [S]lavouris and a lady Anna. Also mentioned are a certain Kopōgis and his wife Eleune. Of the names

⁴ There is a helpful description of the physical characteristics of the Taygetos range in P. Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia: A Regional History 1300–362 B.C.* (London, Boston and Henley 1979) 21–22.

⁵ F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, tr. S. Reynolds, I (London 1979) 88–94.

⁶ H. Ahrweiler, "Une inscription méconnue sur les Mélingues du Taygète," *BCH* 86 (1961) 1–10 (= *Etudes sur les structures administratives et sociales de Byzance* [Variorum reprints, London 1971] No. XV).

[S]lavouris certainly, and Kopôgis almost certainly, are Slavonic. Both Konstantinos Spanis and Laringkas [S]lavouris use the title Kyr; moreover, the inscription is dated in the name of the Emperor Andronikos Palaiologos. The influence of Byzantium among *archontes* downhill at Oitylos is manifest.

Yet the Slavs of Pentadaktylos kept still to their old ways, their conservatism being typical of highlanders living far from administrators based in the plains or close to them. In the fifteenth century their Slavonic tongue was still alive up in the mountains, as we learn from the Greek traveller Laskaris Kananos.⁷ In about 1438 he visited a Sth[l]avounia near Lübeck; there, he thought, was the original home of the Peloponnesian Zygiotai—that is, of the inhabitants of the Taygetan *zygos*. He also remarked that in many villages of the Sth[l]avounia (Wendenland) the same language was spoken as that of the Zygiotai. We do not have to accept that the two tongues, of the Wends and of the Zygiotai, were identical in the fifteenth century, but they were recognisably similar; and Laskaris Kananos provides secure evidence for the continued presence of Slavonic-speakers on the Pentadaktylos in his time.⁸ The persistence of Slavonic speech is also consonant with the names of certain upland villages in the Taygetos range. Orovo, Trikotsovo, Liasinova are among such names to be found on the western flanks still today; on the eastern there are Longanikos, Polovitsa, Longastra and others.⁹ Among the locally nomadic highlanders of Taygetos there was linguistic and social continuity long after the restoration of Byzantine power in the plains of the Peloponnese from the ninth century onwards. The continuity extended in time even beyond the building of castles at Mistra, Maïne and Leftro in the thirteenth century. In the mountains, among mobile and elusive pastoral folk, old ways and old

⁷ Vindobonensis historicus graecus 113, saec. XVI, fol. 174–75. Text in S. P. Lambros, *Parnassos* 5 (Athens 1881) 2–3. Comment in Vilh. Lundström, *Smärre Byzantiniska skrifter* I (Upsala/Leipzig 1902) 28–29. Tr. in *Byzantinische Geschichtsschreiber II: Europa im XV. Jahrhundert von Byzantinern gesehen*, ed. E. v. Ivanka (Graz 1954) 99–105.

⁸ Laonikos Chalkokondyles I 31, 14 and 19–20 (ed. E. Darkó [Budapest 1922]) was also aware of their presence; he connects their speech with that of Croats and Poles. Concerning Taygetos and the west Arkadian Skorta as Slavonic *Rückzugsgebiete* see also the useful remarks of M. W. Weithmann, *Münchener Zeitschrift für Balkankunde* 2 (1979) 159–60, but we must bear in mind the possibility that there were already transhumant Slavs on Taygetos before the Byzantine reconquest of lowland Lakonia and Messenia began in the ninth century. Before the reconquest not all the Slavonic incomers were necessarily lowlanders such as the Ezeritai of the Helos plain; some even of the Ezeritai dwelt on Mount Taygetos (Const. Porph., *DAI* 50, p. 232, 20–21 M.J.), and in Lakonia mountain Slavs may well have been coeval with settled Slavs in the plains from the time of their first arrival in the late sixth century. On the Slavonic settlement see *Lakonikai Spoudai* 3 (1977) 84–110.

⁹ See e.g. Dion. and Vas. Loukopoulou, *Morphologikos Chartes Peloponnesou* (Athens, Stoa Nikoloudi 10, n.d.). Slavonic toponymy in Lakonia and Messenia is gathered by Max Vasmer, *Die Slaven in Griechenland, Abh. Pr. Akad. Wiss. p.-h. Kl.* 1941, 12 (Berlin 1941) 160–76.

speech, despite the efforts of lowland administrators and builders of castles,
died hard.

Trinity College, Dublin