

Méropi ANASTASSIADOU and P. DUMONT, *Les grecs d'Istanbul et le patriarcat œcuménique au seuil du XXI siècle*, Paris, CERF, 2011. ISBN 278-2-204-09324-8.

By the end of the nineteenth century, there were more than 150,000 (Orthodox Christian) Greeks living in Istanbul; at the beginning of the 21st century, only 2,000 (and probably less) were left. *Les grecs d'Istanbul et le patriarcat œcuménique au seuil du XXI siècle* by Méropi Anastassiadou and Paul Dumont deals with the turbulent history and the present situation of these “Stambouliotes”.

In the introduction, the authors emphasize the particular identity of the Greeks in Istanbul, explaining why they should be labeled “Romioi” rather than “Greeks”, although the authors themselves do not use this term very consistently in their book. The first chapter reveals the demographic decline of the Greek population in Istanbul, due to a number of well-known historical calamities. The Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 guaranteed the rights of the Turkish citizens of Greek origin and of the Greek citizens, residing in the city, but in the following decades these rights were gradually curtailed. During World War II, the Stambouliotes were — like all minorities — burdened with taxes and recruited in labour service units, which incited many of them to emigrate after the war. The conditions in which the Stambouliotes lived grew worse after World War II, due to events related to the Cypriote crisis. The notorious riots in 1955, during which thousands of Greek mansions and shops in Istanbul were destroyed, resulted in a relatively limited emigration. In 1964, however, those who had remained were more or less forced to leave Turkey. The events of 1974 provoked a last major wave of emigrants. Only elderly people, individuals well integrated in Turkish society (businessmen, academics, musicians) or people strongly concerned with the survival of the community, decided to stay.

The second chapter focuses on the Stambouliote Diaspora in Greece and elsewhere, their societies, publications and gatherings abroad and in Istanbul. The Greek schools — without a doubt one of the chief features of the Greek presence in Istanbul — are comprehensively dealt with in the third chapter. After World War I, there were still more than 17,000 pupils in Istanbul receiving a Greek education; after World War II, there number was reduced to less than 4,000, and, after a short revival in the early 1950s (due to Turkey’s improved relations with Greece, an ally against the Soviet threat), the deteriorating political circumstances drastically brought down also the number of pupils. In 2005-2006, the Greeks schools still remaining — seven primary and three secondary schools, staffed with 96 teachers — had only 228 pupils. The decrease cannot be explained solely referring to the massive emigration, though. The Greek schools also suffer from restrictive administrative measures, imposed by the Turkish authorities. Besides, the Turkish and especially the foreign schools in Istanbul offer particular advantages. The education in the Greek schools is not always on the required level. There are problems with (lacking) text books, with the teaching staff (consisting of Turks, Turkish Greeks and Greeks from Greece), with the language proficiency both in Greek and Turkish of many pupils). Education in the Greek schools tends to serve the survival of the Stambouliote community rather than the personal development of the pupils.

The demographic decline and its consequences for the Greek schools would be even more dramatic if there was not the influx of Arabophone Orthodox Christians into the Stambouliote community. Living in southeast Turkey, these Arabophones to the Patriarchate of Antioch in Syria until they were transmitted to the authority of the Patriarch of Constantinople in 1990. As so many other Turkish citizens, they left their home villages in search for a better life in Istanbul and other big cities (or a country in Western Europe). In Istanbul, they joined the Stambouliote community, whose leaders welcomed and protected them as coreligionists, and were rapidly urbanized and Graecized. Although they substantially increased the number of “Greeks”, tensions emerged as well between them and the

autochthonous Stambouliotes as a result of linguistic and social differences. The Arabophones are also accepted in the Greek schools, although their poor command of Greek often causes additional pedagogical problems.

The fourth chapter discusses the pivotal role of the Patriarchate within the Greek community in Istanbul. The Orthodox Church, its liturgical feasts and the “social events” it organizes is the glue of the community and the Patriarch — since 1991 the charismatic Bartholomaios I — is its uncontested leader, spokesman and guardian. The powers of the patriarch have been drastically curtailed by the Turkish law ever since the establishment of the Turkish Republic. One of the chief problems today appears to be the closure of the Theological High School on Halki (Heybeliada) in 1971, when all private institutions for higher education in Turkey were closed down. The Theological High School used to provide the Patriarchate with human resources. Relations with the Church of Greece are also tense, as most Greeks consider the Patriarchate as Turcophile. In addition, there exists a conflict of competences concerning the dioceses, included into the Greek state after the establishment of the Church of Greece in 1850. These dioceses (e. g. in Macedonia and Thrace) formally still belong to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, but have been “temporarily” administered by the Athens since 1928. Lately, the Patriarchate of Constantinople has to cope also with the increasing influence of the Patriarchate of Moscow in the Orthodox Christian world. The limited legal powers the patriarch enjoys in Turkey are compensated by the moral authority he has acquired with his involvement in environmental issues and in promoting the dialogue between the world religions Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism and Islam. The Turkish authorities initially disliked the patriarch’s ecumenical and political ambitions, but currently, with a view to the Turkish accession to the EU, they consider them as beneficial to their purpose.

Chapter five describes the “identitarian fabric”, sustained by meetings, theatrical performances, charity *et cetera*, mostly of a religious nature and fatherly fostered by the patriarch. Chapter six deals with the relations with the “locals” — the Turks. Of particular interest is the increasing occurrence of “mixed marriages” between a Stambouliote and a non-Orthodox Christian. A growing tolerance concerning such marriages can be observed; marriages with Turks, however, remain to be disavowed, although their number is also raising. During the last decade, the Turkish government has issued a number of amendments to the constitution that have somehow improved the fate of all minorities in Turkey and have created the necessary conditions for more relaxed relations between Stambouliotes and Turks. Currently, many educated Turks display a growing fascination for all things Greek, as transpires from the many exhibitions, book translations, theatre performances *et cetera*, promoting Greek culture in Turkey. Modern Greek studies too enjoy an increasing popularity in Turkey (and vice versa). In the final chapter, the authors summarize the preceding chapters, guiding the reader along the Stambouliote “lieux de mémoire” — the Aghia Sophia, the Phanari Quarter, the Blachernai Church, the monastery of Balıklı, and further the remaining Greek schools, monasteries and graveyards.

*Les Grecs d’Istanbul* combines a scholarly unbiased survey of the history and the present state of the Istanbul Greeks with a captivating picture, written very much “from within”, of an agonizing community which, according to the authors, may still — or again — be viable thanks to the increasingly tolerant and even encouraging policy of the Turkish state towards it.

Raymond Detrez