στρατιώτες
Parte 4°  Epoca moderna - Secolo XVII

REPUBLICA DI VENEZIA
Cavalleria Stradotta
1515-50

Dal Galleria, Storia Veneta

VINKHUIJSN COLLECTION
DRAPER FUND
1: Siradlot, c.1500
2: Venetian light cavalryman, c.1500
3: Greek noble, early 16th C.
French estradiot and his arms. Notice the short double-pointed spear ("arzegaye"). Engraving, 1724 (G. Daniel).
The *stradioti*, mounted troops of Albanian and Greek origin who initially entered Venetian military service during the Republic's wars with the Ottoman Empire in the fifteenth century, were among pioneers of light cavalry tactics in European armies in the early modern era. These warriors, who had previously served Byzantine and Albanian rulers, initially found asylum and employment in the Venetian strongholds of Napoli di Romagna, Corone, Modone, and Malvasia in the Peloponnesus. Later they were also stationed in Venetian holdings at Trau, Sibenico, Castellonuovo, and Zara in Dalmatia, and the islands of Corfu, Zante, Cephalonia, Crete and Cyprus. They were also introduced into Italy by the Venetians in the 1470's and participated in wars in Italy through much of the 16th century, not only for Venice, but also for other employers. It was in these wars that the *stradioti* made an impact on warfare in Italy and the west, chiefly by their style of fighting and tactics. The *stradioti* were armed and fought as light cavalry in a manner that developed from warfare among Byzantine, Slavic, Albanian and Ottoman forces. They carried spear, a long saber, mace, and dagger, and were attired in a mixture of oriental, Byzantine and western military garb. The *stradioti* continued the Balkan traditions of cavalry warfare, which used hit-and-run attacks, ambushes, feigned retreats, counterattacks and other tactics little known to western armies of the time.

A number of contemporary writers and later historians, notably Charles Oman,[1] Coriolano Cippico,[2] Marino Sanuto,[3] Philip de Comines,[4] F. L. Taylor,[5] Konstantinos Sathas,[6] John Hale,[7] M. E. Mallett,[8] and others, have recounted the activities of *stradioti* in Italy and the west. Some of these authorities even claimed that the *stradioti* were instrumental in the reintroduction of light cavalry tactics in western armies. In the sixteenth century, stradioti troops expanded their service to the armies of Milan, Genoa, Spain, France, the Holy Roman Empire, and England. Aside from their military activities, the stradioti were instrumental in the establishment of Greek Orthodox communities in Venice and Dalmatia.

This paper will investigate the origins of the *stradioti*, their ethnic and regional composition, their role in the armies of the 15th and 16th centuries, and their participation in the founding of Greek Orthodox Communities in the Italy and elsewhere. In the late fifteenth century, companies of *stradioti* were brought to Italy and served in Venice's armed conflicts on the *terrazima*. They entered service in Italy at the crucial period in which the military system of the Italian states, as well as their independence, were being threatened by transalpine armies in the late 15th century. One observer, Marino Sanuto, described the stradioti and their arrival in Venice thusly:[9]

> On 22 April [1482] the first ship of cavalry arrived which carried seven *stradioti* from Corone, who, when they disembarked at the Lido, paraded in their accustomed way before the unaccustomed crowd which marvelled at the speed of their horses and the skill of the horsemen... the stradioti are Greeks and they wear broad caps and tall caps, some wear corselets; they carry lance in hand, and a mace, and hang a sword at their side; they move like birds and remain incessantly on their horses...They are accustomed to brigandage and frequently pillage the Peloponnesus. They are excellent adversaries against the Turks; they arrange their raids very well, hitting the enemy unexpectedly; they are loyal to their lords. They do not take prisoners, but rather cut the heads of their adversaries, receiving according to their custom one ducat per head.

In another work Sanuto describes them again:[10]

> They have sword, lance with pennant, and mace. Very few wear cuirasses, generally they wear cotton cloaks, sewn in a particular fashion. Their horses are large, accustomed to hardships, run like birds, always hold their heads high and surpass all others in maneuver of battle. Countless of these *stradioti* are found in Napoli di Romagna and other areas of Greece which are under the *signoria* and they consider their fortified towns as their true armor and lance.

The French Memoirist, Philip de Commines, describes the stradioti that opposed the French at the Battle of Fornovo:[11]

> Marchal de Gie sent to the king word that he had passed the mountains, and that having sent out a party of horse to reconnoitre the enemy, they had been charged by the Estradiots, one of them called Lebeuf being slain, the Estradiots cut off his head, put it on top of a lance, carried it to their proveditor, and demanded a ducat. These Estradiots are of the same nature as the Genetaires [Spanish light cavalry]; they are attired like Turks both on horse and on foot, except they wear no turbans on their heads. They are a rugged people, couched all the year round on their horses. They were all Greeks, coming from places possessed by the Venetians, some from Napoli di Romagna [Nauplion], others from Albania at Durrazzo, and their horses are good and are all from Turkey...I saw them all at their first arrival at Venice, and they mustered on an island...numbering a good fifteen hundred, and they are stout, active men who greatly harry an opposing force when they set themselves to it.

There are some discrepancies in both primary and secondary sources as to how the *stradioti* were armed. The majority of sources indicate that they were armed with sabres, or one-edged swords, maces and a short lance with iron points on each end known as an *arzagaye* or *assagaye*. Other sources indicate that they may have been armed with bows as well. They also seemed to have carried a type of eared dagger, which saw wide use in Italy. The *stradioti* are reputed to have introduced this dagger into western Europe, which came to be known generally as an *estradiot*. According to most sources the *stradioti* wore little or no armor. If they did, it was usually padded linen tunics or shirts of chain mail. Contemporary authors indicate that they were attired and armored like the Turks except that they wore no turban.[12] Since there was much intermingling of military styles, tactics, garb, and weaponry in the Balkans in the 14th and 15th centuries, it is difficult to say what aspects of weaponry; armor and attire were adopted from or lent to the Ottoman Turks. This writer believes it is safe to say that the *stradioti* were armed and attired in a mixture of Balkan and Turkish styles. There is no doubt that they later adopted some western arms and garb the longer they remained in service in Western Europe and in the Venetian-held areas of the Balkans and the Levant.

Two versions of the name *stradioti* have been cited by sources, while scholars have debated which of these versions is accurate. According to some authorities, the terms *stradiotto* and *stradioti* (plural) are Italian variants of the Greek *stratiotês* or *stratiotai*.
which generally means soldier, but in later Byzantine times meant cavalry man who held a military fief (pronoia). Other authors assert that stradioti came from the Italian root strada (road) and that the term stradioio meant a wanderer or wayfarer, thus denoting an errant cavalryman or warrior.[15] The question of the etymology of the appellation stradioti is further complicated by the various spellings and versions of the term in the primary sources. The few Greek sources, such as the Andragathêmata tou Merkoarion Boua, use stratiotes/stratiotai, the Greek word for soldier.[16] Latin sources, such as the dispatches of Jacomo Barbarigo, use the variant stratiotius/stratiotorum or strathiotes/strathiotorum.[17] The bulk of primary sources in Italian, such as Coriolano Cippico, Marino Sanuto and Venetian state documents, use stradiotoi/stradioti, adopted by this paper, or strathiotes/strathiotorum.[18] French sources, such as Philip de Comines, use the variation estradioti/estradiots.[19] Although arguments on the side of the wayfarer theory predominate, the fact that some of the older Latin sources from the early 15th century use a variation of the Greek stratiotai tends to make this writer favor the "soldier" theory. Be as it may, the term indicated light cavalry forces of Balkan origin, chiefly from Greece and Albania.

Most modern, as well as a good number of early authors have indicated that the stradioti were Albanian. This is true to a certain extent but has to be qualified. A Greek author made a study of the names of stradioti found in the most extensive documentary collection of materials dealing with the stradioti and found that some 80% of the names were of Albanian origin, while the rest were of Greek origin.[20] This writer looked over lists of stradioti in the same source, Mnemeia Hellenikes Historias: Documents ineditis a l'historie de la Grece au Moyen Age, edited by Konstantinos Sathas, as well as the indices of the fifty-odd volumes of I Diari di Marino Sanuto. This investigation found that indeed many of the names were Albanian, but a good number of the names particularly those of officers, were of Greek origin, such as Palaiologos, Spandounios, Laskaris, Rhalles, Comnenos, Psendakis, Maniatis, Spyliotis, Alexopoulos, Psaris, Zacharapoulos, Kliarapoulos, Kondomitis, etc. Others seemed to be of South Slavic origin, such Soimiris, Vlastimiris, and Voicha.[21] The study of names does not indicate that most of these troops came directly from Albania proper, as has been asserted by some authors. Fernand Braudel, for example, in his classic study of the Mediterranean in the 16th century somewhat kaleidoscopically describes the stradioti's history in the following manner:[22]

The story of the Albanians deserves a study in itself. Attracted by the 'sword, the gold trappings, and the honours', they left their mountains chiefly in order to become soldiers. In the sixteenth century they were to be found in Cyprus, in Venice, in Mantua, in Rome, in Naples, and Sicily, and as far abroad as Madrid, where they went to present their projects and their grievances, to ask for barrels of gunpowder or years of pension, arrogant imperious, always ready for a fight. In the end Italy gradually shut its doors to them. They moved on to the Low Countries, England, and France during the Wars of Religion, soldier-adventurers followed everywhere by there wives, children, and priests.

This description and others do not take into account that most of the stradioti did not come from Albania proper, but from the Venetian holdings in southern and central Greece, that is Malvasia (Monemvasia), Modone (Methone), Corone, Napoli di Romagna (Nauplion), the Mani, and Lepanto (Naupaktos). Most of the stradioti who entered Italy in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, together with their families, had been born in the Peloponnese, their progenitors having immigrated there in the late 14th and early 15th century. They had settled in southern Greece through the encouragement of the Byzantine Despots of the Morea, Theodore I Palaiologos (1384-1407) and Theodore II Palaiologos (1407-1443). The Albanians served as military colonists in the Peloponnese in the attempt of the Despotate, an appanage of the moribund Byzantine Empire, to survive the expansion of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans.[23] In addition, the Venetians began to settle Albanians in Napoli di Romagna (Nauplion) in the Argos region.[24] With the demise of the Byzantine state in 1453 and the dissolution of the Despotate of the Morea through civil war in the 1450's and 1460's, more and more of the Albanian and Greek stradioti found refuge and employment with the Venetians. The Venetians increasingly used them as troops in their conflicts with the Ottomans in Greece and the Levant in the second half of the 15th and throughout the 16th century.

In time the Venetians introduced some of these stradioti into their forces in Italy. Three factors probably played a role in the extensive use of these troops by the Venetians. One important factor was that there was an abundance of these troops. The small Venetian holdings in Greece could not employ the large number of refugee stradioti that sought asylum and employment. By the end of the 15th century some stradioti companies were transferred and reassigned to the Venetian-held Ionian Islands of Corfu, Cephalonia, and Zante.[25] Soon afterwards, other stradioti were sent to Italy, to the Venetian-Ottoman border in Friuli, and to the Dalmatian holdings of Sebenico (Sibenik), Spalato (Split), Zara (Zadar), Trogir, and Bocca di Cattaro (Kotor).[26] As the Venetians lost one stronghold on the mainland Greece that the number of Albanian and Greek stradioti that settled in Venetian territories and in Italy reached 4500 men, together with their families they numbered about 15,500. If one includes those settled in Southern Italy and Sicily, the numbers reach about 25,000.[27]

A second factor in the widespread employment of stradioti by the Venetian Republic was economy. The pay of the stradioti was lower, at least until 1519, than western mercenaries, be they Italians, Swiss, Germans or others.[29] The stradioti were not mercenaries in the strictest sense, they were refugees who maintained themselves and their families in exile by their skill at arms. Wherever they were garrisoned or deployed, they brought their families and settled them at or near their place of duty. Indeed the stradioti seemed to appreciate honors and privileges over pay. The stradioti actually sought out favors in the form of parades and titles, and the frugal Venetian government was only too glad to oblige them. This is evidenced by the titles their leaders accumulated and the sentiments expressed in the poems, both in Greek and Italian, which dealt with their exploits.[30] They also appreciated the right to practice their religion, the Greek rite, be it Orthodox or Uniate. The stradioti were instrumental in the founding of Greek Churches in Venice, Naples and the towns of Dalmatia, as will be elucidated later.

The third factor in the Venetian preference in employing stradioti was the troops' unorthodox tactics and methods of fighting, which could be utilized in different ways. The stradioti's light cavalry tactics matched those of Ottoman sipahi (feudal) and akinci (irregular) cavalry, which made them an asset to Venice in the garrisons of its Balkan and Levantine possessions, where they were maintained well after the 16th century. In Italy and elsewhere in Western Europe they proved to be useful in scouting reconnaissance, and in raiding forces in disarray or retreat, as seen in the descriptions above. According to the most important study of the Venetian army, "They may have been especially praised for raiding deep into enemy-occupied country where
opportunities for loot were freest..."[31] However the style and conduct of the stradioti was criticized, according to some Venetian officials, they were "Anti-Christian, perfidious, born thieves and potential traitors..." and "...so disobedient that they can do us no good."[32]

The most notorious example of their reputed unreliability was in the crucial battle of Fornovo of 1494 in which they wasted their tactical advantage by looting the French baggage train. According to one description of the battle:[33]

In the rout of the baggage train the Stradioti had captured thirty-five pack horses, including those with the richest loads, and it will be estimated that, when all was reckoned up, spoils up to the value of at least 100,000 ducats had fallen into the hands of the Italians. The losses included, the King's sword and helmet, two Royal standards, several royal pavilions, the King's prayer book and relics...the rich fittings and vessals of his chapel,...[and] an album full of portraits of the mistresses to whom Charles had given his affections in the various cities of Italy. The rich booty served as a pretext upon which the Venetian signory proceeded to set up a claim of victory, decreeing to their general a triumphal entry and a splendid reward.

The battle of Fornovo was not a victory for Venice and its allies but rather a serious turning point in Italian history, according to Charles Oman:[34]

...[T]he stradioti, from whom much had been hoped, turned out to be savages who lost their heads when they saw plunder available, and forgot the purpose for which they had been told off. It was clear, after July 6, 1495, that the Italian states could not survive if defended by mercenary armies who fought on the old principles of much pay, no casualties, and the pleasant chance of rich ransoms.

Nevertheless in subsequent campaigns the stradioti impressed the Venetians and their adversaries with their tactics, which included repeated attacks and disengagement, which enticed opposing forces to pursue. Enemy forces would lose formation and become even more vulnerable to the stradioti attacks. Opponents would have to deploy infantry armed with arquebus, or artillery in defense against the stradioti.[35]

Other states also discovered these tactical assets and began to wean away stradioti from Venetian service by better pay or conditions of service. According to Comines and others, France under Louis XII recruited some 2000 stradioti in 1497; some two years after French forces in Italy encountered them at Fornovo. Among the French they were known as estradiots and argoulets. The use of the two names has led some historians to consider that there were two separate corps of light cavalry in service to the French king.[36] However it seems that the two terms were initially interchangeable, and only later indicated separate forces. Some historians have identified the term argoulet with the Greek argetes or Argive, because it seems that a significant number of troops who went over to the French service originally came from Napoli di Romagna (Nauplion) on the Argive plain near the ancient Greek city of Argos.[37] The French maintained a corps of light cavalry known as estradiots or argoulets until the reign of Henry III.[38]

Naples under Spanish suzerainty also recruited stradioti in the late 15th and early 16th century. The first entry of stradioti into Neapolitan or Spanish service occurred in the 1470's in the wake of a revolt in the Mani under one Korkodeilos Kladas. A Neapolitan ship picked up the rebels and brought to them Neapolitan territory, where together with Albanian refugees under the son of Scanderbeg, John Kastrioti, they participated in fomenting a revolt in the Himara (Cheimarra) region of Epirus. After the failure of this insurrection, most of Kladas' and Kastrioti's men, together with other refugees from Himara, served the Spanish in Italy.[39] Later in 1538, after the Venetians abandoned Corone, the Spanish government in Naples accepted many refugees from that Peloponnesian town and region, some of whom had served the Venetians as stradioti. These troops now took on service with the Spanish in Naples. Spain continued to employ stradioti in the 16th and 17th century, chiefly in Naples and elsewhere in Italy.

The most important recruiting area for these troops was Cheimarra.[40] Since Spain and Naples were connected with the Holy Roman Empire through the person of Charles V in the first half of the 16th century, stradioti were soon found serving the Habsburgs not only in Italy, but also in Germany and the Netherlands. Among those who distinguished themselves in Habsburg service and became knights of the Holy Roman Empire were the captains Iakovos Diassorinos, Georgios Bastas, the Brothers Vasilikos, and the redoubtabel Merkourios Bouas. Bouas was given titles by the Venetians and French as well.[41] Henry VIII also employed Stradioti in France and England, notably under the captains Thomas Buas of Argos, Theodore Luchi, and Antonios Stesinos. The former was named colonel and commander of stradioti in Henry's service at Calais.[42] There is also some evidence that Greeks served as cavalrymen, together with Serbs, in the Muscovite armies in the late 16th and early 17th century, during the notorious "Time of Troubles."[43]

By the end of the 16th century, however, the number of stradioti companies employed in Italian and other western armies dwindled. The creation of light cavalry formations, borrowing from the traditions of the stradioti, as well as those of the Spanish genitours (genitaires) and the Hungarian huusers, replaced the stradioti in many European armies. These new units, made up of natives or various ethnic groups, also added firearms to their panoply, and the mention of stradioti, argoulets, estradiots, Albanese, Albains, Greci, Levantini, etc. became less and less frequent. Western armies had formed their own light cavalry units and relied less and less upon the stradioti.

There are indications that the stradioti were called both Albanians and Greeks in various sources for good reason. While the bulk of stradioti rank and file were of Albanian origin from Greece, by the middle of the 16th century there is evidence that many had become Hellenized or even Italianized. The most telling examples of this phenomenon are in the works of Tzanes Koronaios and Manoli Blessi. The former work is a long epic poem in vernacular Greek on the exploits of one of the most famous of stradioti, Merkourios Bouas, in the armies of Venice, France, and the Holy Roman Empire. The author, Koronaios, seems to have been stradioti-troubadour of Zantiote origin that was a companion of Merkourios Bouas. In his poem, which is a paean to Merkourios Bouas, Koronaios gives Bouas' mythological pedigree, which includes Achilles, Alexander the Great and Pyrrhus. The language of the poem, the pedigree and other allusions, give an indication of the process of Hellenization of the Albanian stradioti.[44] Manoli Blessi's poetic works, songs of the stradioti, are in Italian with many words and phrases in Greek, very colloquial Greek.

There are no Albanian words in his poems.[45] Hellenization was perhaps well on its way prior to service abroad, since Albanian stradioti had settled in Greek lands for two generations prior to their emigration to Italy. Since many served under Greek commanders and served together with Greek stradioti, the process continued. Another factor in this assimilative process was the
stradioti's and their families' active involvement and affiliation with the Greek Orthodox or Uniate Church communities in Naples, Venice and elsewhere. Hellenization thus occurred as a result of common service and church affiliation.[46] Stradioti troops were still employed by some Italian states, notably Venice and Spanish Naples. The hiring and maintenance of stradioti troops was continued in Naples until the early 18th century. Most of these troops were later recruited from Epirus and Southern Albania, in particular from the Greco-Albanian region of Cheimarra. According to histories of the Reggimento Real Macedone, a Balkan light infantry force which served the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies between 1735 and 1820, its first commander and organizer was one Count Strates Gkikas, who is described as a veteran stradiotto. This may be further indication of stradioti in Neapolitan service into the eighteenth century.[47]

Likewise stradioti continued to be employed by Venice as capelatti (rural gendarmes) in the Terra Firma well into the seventeenth century. Stradioti companies also continued to be garrisoned in some of the towns of Dalmatia (Sibenik, Trogir, Zadar, Split, and Kotor), and on the Ionian Islands of Cephalonia, Corfu and Zante.[48] On the Ionian Islands the stradioti continued their service through the 18th century. This stradioti were descendents of refugees from the lost Venetian holdings on the mainland who had settled on the islands in the 15th and 16th centuries. They received land and privileges, and served as cavalry and participated in Venice's conflicts with the Turks throughout the 17th century. Eventually these units became anachronisms, their ranks virtually a hereditary caste. Some of the stradioti or their descendents became in time members of the Ionian nobility, while others took to farming and other pursuits. By the late 17th and early 18th centuries, Venetian authorities found it necessary to reorganize the stradioti companies. On Zante, for example, they reduced their numbers and privileges because of absenteeism and discipline problems in the rank and file. Nevertheless the stradioti formations remained in nominal service through the 18th century. The Corfiote Stradioti Company existed until the end of Venetian rule and the French occupation in 1797.[49]

One can say that the stradioti in time were assimilated into the local Italian, South Slavic and Greek populations of the areas in which they were settled. But nonetheless they did leave their impact upon the areas in which they sojourned. As mentioned earlier, the stradioti were instrumental in the founding of Greek churches, Uniate or Orthodox (or both in some cases) in Venice and Naples in Italy, as well as Pola, Trogir, Zadar, Split, and Sibenik, in Northern Dalmatia. In all of these regions, the stradioti and their families melted into the milieu of the church communities and eventually into the society at large. In northern Dalmatia, there was, as one authors calls it in German, a kirchensymbiose; a slow acculturation of Greek (stradioti) and South Slav elements in the Orthodox Church communities in predominantly Catholic Dalmatia until most of the old stradioti families eventually identified themselves as Serbs by the 19th century. Similar processes may have occurred in the Greek Church communities in Italy as well. The stradioti were first integrated into the Greek church community and then assimilated into the general society of the Italian towns.[50]

As we have seen in this brief study, companies of stradioti were brought to Italy in the late fifteenth century and served in Venice's armed conflicts on the terraferma. It was in these wars that the stratioti made an impact on warfare in Italy and the west, chiefly by their style of fighting and tactics. The stradioti were armed and fought as light cavalry in a manner that developed from warfare among Byzantine, Slavic, Albanian and Ottoman forces. They carried spear, a long saber, mace, and dagger, and were attired in a mixture of oriental and Byzantine military garb. The stradioti introduced the Near Eastern methods of cavalry warfare, which used hit-and-attacks, ambushes, feigned retreats, counterattacks and other tactics little known to western armies of the era. The activities of the stradioti has been noted by a number of historians, notably Charles Oman, Mario Sanuto, Coriolano Cippico, Erculi Ricotti, Daniel Hardy, Konstantinos Sathas, John Hale, Franz Babinger and others, some even claiming that the stradioti were instrumental in the reintroduction of light cavalry tactics in western armies. In the sixteenth century, stradioti troops also served the armies of Milan, Genoa, Spain, France, the Holy Roman Empire, and England. Aside from their military activities, the stradioti were instrumental in the establishment of Greek Orthodox communities in Venice and Dalmatia.

2. Coriolano Cippico, Della guerra de' Veneziani nell' Asia dal 1470 al 1473 (Venice, 1796), p. 10.
12. the term *assagaye* does not seem to be of Balkan origin, but rather from the Portuguese. The genitaires or genitours, the Iberian light cavalry of Moorish origin, seem to have used a similar lance, which was common in the Near East and the Islamic world. This type did not have two spearpoints, as indicated by some sources, but rather had a spike on the butt end. This spike was used to keep the lance upright in the ground in camp when not in use. This not only kept the lance ready for action, but also kept the lance head from wear and lance as a whole from being bent by leaning it against something. They were much shorter and lighter than Western European lances. The spike at the butt counterbalanced the lance head which made it maneuverable in a melee. See George Cameron Stone, *A Glossary of the Contraction, Decoration, and Use of Arms and Armor in All Countries and at All Times* (New York: Jack Brussel, 1961), pp. 77, 408-409.


14. Contemporary illustrations of stradioti can be found in Sathas, *Hellesen stradioti*, p. 5.


21. *Mnemeia Hellenikes Historias*, vols. 1, 4, 6-9;


32. Mallet and Hale, p. 376.


37. Sathas, *Hellenikoi Stratitatoi*, pp. 11-14

38. Gabiele Daniel in his *Histoire de la Milice Francaise* vol. 2 (Paris, 1721), pp. 168, divides the stradioti in the 16th century French army into two separate corps of *argoulets* and *estraidiots*.


**Note**

1. Nicholas C. J. Pappas, "Stradioti: Albanian mercenaries in fifteenth and sixteenth century Italy" (Online Article).

**Bibliografia**

- (EN) Nicholas C. J. Pappas, "Stradioti: Balkan mercenaries in fifteenth and sixteenth century Italy" (Online Article).
Stradiotti ed impegno in terraferma

by anabasis - 08/03/02

Ringrazio Raffaele Greco per le precisazioni circa i reparti di "stradiotti" quale reparto di legione straniera ante litteram nella Repubblica Serenissima (a proposito di "albanesi nella legione straniera italiana"). La mia domanda è: furono massicciamente utilizzati da Venezia nelle varie guerre di terraferma? E' possibile ipotizzare il loro numeri di effettivi? Grazie dell'attenzione.

Reply di Mr. Clark - 08/03/02

Salve Anabasis, il numero di effettivi non penso si a mai stato facilmente ipotizzato anche per la loro difficile "inquadratura" all'interno delle forze armate veneziane. Però se qualcuno ha qualche dato sarei molto interessato anche io. Qualche numero preso da un volumetto Osprey lo cito più in basso ma si tratta solamente di qualche distaccamento. Per la loro "conformazione", trattandosi di una cavalleria leggera, irregolare, contraddistinta da alta mobilità, tattiche di schermaglia e formazioni aperte, quindi eternamente adatta alle scaramucce di frontiera, non si sposava con la trasformazione che iniziò ad attuarsi all'inizio del 16o secolo che vedeva sempre più l'utilizzo di grandi armate che cercavano il "colpo decisivo" ai danni dell'avversario, quindi non direi che furono usate massicciamente se non per i compiti descritti prima. Degni di nota alcuni notevoli successi nel 1516 contro la cavalleria pesante francese. Però, nelle loro tattiche si dimostrarono abilissimi. 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The Stratioti or Stradioti (Italian: stradioti or stradiotti), were mercenary units from the Balkans recruited mainly by states of southern and central Europe from the 15th until the middle of the 18th century.

**Name** The Italian term stradioti is either a loan from the Greek word stratiotai (Greek: στρατιώται), i.e. soldiers, or derives from the Italian word strada ('street'), meaning 'wayfarer'. The Albanian stradioti of Venice were also called capelletti (sing. capelletto) because of the small red caps they wore.

**History** The stradioti were recruited in Albania, Greece, Dalmatia, Serbia and later Cyprus. Most modern historians have indicated that of the Stratioti were mostly Albanians. According to a study by a Greek author, around 80% of the listed names attributed to the stradioti were of Albanian origin while most of the remaining ones, especially those of officers, were of Greek origin; a small minority were of South Slavic origin. Among their leaders there were also members of some old Byzantine Greek noble families such as the Palaiologi and Comneni. On various medieval sources Stradioti are mentioned either as Greeks or Albanians. This mainly happened because the bulk of stradioti rank and file were of Albanian origin from regions of Greece, but by the middle of the 16th century there is evidence that many of them had been Hellenized and in some occasions even Italianized. Hellenization was possibly underway prior to service abroad, since stradioti of Albanian origin had settled in Greek lands for two generations before their emigration to Italy. Moreover, since many served under Greek commanders and together with the Greek stradioti, this process continued. Another factor in this assimilative process was the stradioti's and their families' active involvement and affiliation with the Greek Orthodox or Uniate Church communities in the places they lived in Italy.

**Middle Ages** During the 12th century, Byzantine Emperor John II Komnenos (1118–1143) settled Serb prisoners as stradioti military colonists around İzmit, present-day Turkey.

**Early modern period**

**Italy** The Venetians first used stradioti in their campaigns against the Ottomans and, from c. 1475, as frontier troops in Friuli. Starting from that period, they began to almost entirely replace the Venetian light cavalry in the army of the Republic of Venice. Apart from the Albanian stradioti, Greek and Italian ones were also deployed in the Battle of Fornovo. The mercenaries were recruited from the Balkans, mainly Christians but also some Muslims. In 1511, a group of stradioti petitioned for the construction of the Greek community's Eastern Catholic Church in Venice, the San Giorgio dei Greci, and the Scuola dei Greci (Confraternity of the Greeks), in a neighborhood where a Greek community still resides. Stradiots as part of the Italian allied army at Fornovo (2,200 men-at-arms, "more than 2,000" light horse, and 8,000 foot) in 1495. The stradioti were for the most part Albanians and from the provinces near Greece, who had been brought into Italy by the Venetians, and retaining the same name they had in their country, are called stradioti.” Impressed by the unorthodox tactics of the stradioti, other European powers quickly began to hire mercenaries from the same region.

**France** France under Louis XII recruited some 2000 stradioti in 1497, two years after the battle of Fornovo. Among the French they were known as estradiots and argoulets. The term "argoulet" is believed to come either from the Greek city of Argos, where many of argoulets come from (Pappas), or from the arcus (bow) and the arquebuse. For some authors argoulets and estradiots are synonymous but for others there are certain differences between them. G. Daniel, citing M. de Montgomeri, says that argoulets and estradiots have the same armoury except that the former wear a helmet. According to others "estradiots" were Albanian horsemen and "argoulets" were Greeks, while Croatians were called "Cravates". The argoulets were armed with a sword, a mace (metal club) and a short arquebuse. They continued to exist under Charles IX and are noted at the battle of Dreux (1562). They were disbanded around 1600. The term "carabins" was also used in France as well as in Spain denoting cavalry and infantry units similar to estradiots and argoulets (Daniel G.(Bonaparte N.). Units of Carabins seem to exist at least till early 18th century. Corps of light infantry mercenaries were periodically recruited from the Balkans or Italy mainly during the 15th—
In 1514, the Duke of Lorraine recruited 500 Albanian cavalymen, while from 1588 to 1591 five Albanian light cavalry captains were also recruited.

Spain

Stratioti were first employed by Spain in their Italian expedition (see Italian Wars). Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba (“Gran Capitán”) was sent by King Ferdinand II of Aragon (“the Catholic”) to support the kingdom of Naples against the French invasion. In Calabria Gonzalo had two hundred “estradiotes Griegos, elite cavalry”[27]. Units of estradioti served also in the Guard of King Ferdinand and, along with the “Alabarberos”, are considered the beginnings of the Spanish Royal Guard.[28]

England In 1514, Henry VIII of England, employed units of Albanian and Greek stradioti during the battles with the Kingdom of Scotland.[29][30] In the 1540s, Duke Edward Seymour of Somerset used Albanian stradioti in his campaign against Scotland.[31]

Holy Roman Empire

In the middle of the 18th century, Albanian stratioti were employed by Empress Maria Theresa during the War of the Austrian Succession against Prussian and French troops.[32]

Tactics

The stratioti were pioneers of light cavalry tactics during this era. In the early 16th century heavy cavalry in the European armies was principally remodeled after Albanian stratoi of the Venetian army, Hungarian hussars and German mercenary cavalry units (Schwarzreitern). They employed hit-and-run tactics, ambushes, feigned retreats and other complex maneuvers. In some ways, these tactics echoed those of the Ottoman sipahis and akinci. They had some notable successes also against French heavy cavalry during the Italian Wars.[33] They were known for cutting off the heads of dead or captured enemies, and according to Commines they were paid by their leaders one ducat per head[34].

Equipment

The stratioti used javelins, as well as swords, maces, crossbows and daggers. They traditionally dressed in a mixture of Ottoman, Byzantine and European garb: the armor was initially a simply mail hauberk, but became heavier as years passed. As mercenaries, the stratioti received wages only as long as their military services were needed.[35]

Notable stratioti

- Mercurio Bua
- Krokodeilos Kladas
- Giorgio Basta
- Matthew Spanoudes (or Spadugnino), a stratioti who earned the title of “Count and Knight of the Holy Roman Empire” from Emperor Frederick III.[36]
- Palaiologos (also Paleologos) family:
  - Graitzas Paleologos, a leader of the stratioti.[37]
  - Manolis Paleologos, Nicolas Paleologos[38]
  - Teodoros Paleologos (“capo”), Ioannes (Zuan) Paleologos, Alexandros Paleologos[39]
- Demetrios Laskaris, son of Isaakios, unit commander[40]
- Isaakios Laskaris, killed in the battle of Fornovo (1495)(Sathas)

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**ARBITALIA lajme**

*Un interessante libro sugli Stradioti (di Francesco Marchianò)*

“Nu la sèmo de Albania/ Strattiòti palikàri/ kiè in kavállo, in tèrra, in màri/ nol stimèmo la Turchia” (“Noi siamo d’Albania/ stradioti eroi di fama/ che sul cavallo, a terra e in mare/ non abbiamo timore della Turchia”) recita un antico canto, in lingua mista, degli Stradioti, mercenari balcanici, soprattutto albanesi, noti soldati di ventura al servizio di signorie italiane e grandi potenze in lotta in Italia ed in Europa, nei secoli XV-XVIII.

Lo studioso arbërësh, il compianto Dott. Paolo Petta, ha dedicato a questi soldati un interessante volume avvalendosi di una vasta, rigorosa ed attendibile documentazione inedita che risulta essere anche un validissimo contributo per una ricostruzione della presenza degli Arbërëshë in Italia nella metà XV sec.

L’autore esordisce sostenendo che la prima meta dell’esodo degli Albanesi, dopo l’invasione turca della
loro patria, siano state le Marche dove si sono messi al servizio dei Malatesta o di liberi comuni come contadini e soldati, venendo spesso in guerra fra di loro. Ma la presenza di albanesi, non solamente come gente d’arme ma anche come funzionari o inservienti, si registra anche in tutta la piana padana, come nella stessa Milano, dove, in un tale Alessio Tarchetta, al servizio di Francesco Sforza, si costruì all’interno del Duomo un’edicola dedicata alla Madonna.

Il Petta, inoltre, prosegue nella sua disamina smontando e ridimensionando l’esistenza di Demetrio Reres (o meglio Renes) e figli, che una consolidata storiografia arbëreshe menziona erroneamente come i primi albanesi a giungere nel Meridione d’Italia. Infatti in proposito sostiene: “Si può’ dunque essere certi che il documento citato dal Rodotà, e da tanti altri dopo di lui, è stato fabbricato da un compiacente notaio palermitano che simulò di redigere il transunto; e che Demetrio Reres o non è mai esistito, o è esistito (probabilmente col nome di Renes), al tempo di Alfonso [d’Aragona] o magari un po’ più tardi, come capo di stradioti o forse come <gubernator> di una terra calabrese di proporzioni limitate”.

Il libro, che risulta scorrevole grazie ad un linguaggio comprensibile nonostante la complessità della materia, continua con la descrizione di tipi di stradioti e levantini, tratti dalla letteratura dotta e popolare dell’epoca citando così il Tasso, Andrea da Barberino (“Il Guerrin Meschin”), l’umanista arbëresh Michele Marullo Tarcaniota, il Pulci, Matteo Bandello, il Burchiello, etc… nelle cui opere gli albanesi vengono presentati come personaggi grotteschi, ameni, guasconi, irriverenti ed irridenti dei poteri dell’epoca.

Ma, andando avanti, il Petta rivela invece il vero volto dei mercenari stradioti, spesso usati dalle varie signorie come abili sicari, evidenziando la loro abilità nel cavalcare nelle incursioni, l’abbigliamento, la struttura di comando, i meccanismi di reclutamento e di paga, le tecniche belliche, la loro ferocia davanti al nemico ma anche i loro rarissimi gesti di umanità, il loro senso del dovere (“besa”) verso il committente, la resistenza ai disagi e lo spirito poco incline alla disciplina ed al rispetto delle regole cavalleresche, allora già in decadenza. Essi si battono su tutti i fronti di guerra (Italia, Morea, Fiandre, Albania del Sud, Boemia, Dalmazia, Tirolo, Carnia, Lepanto, Valtellina, …), dal secolo XV al XVIII, all’epoca citando così il Tasso, Andrea da Barberino (“Il Guerrin Meschin”), l’umanista arbëresh Michele Marullo Tarcaniota, il Pulci, Matteo Bandello, il Burchiello, etc… nelle cui opere gli albanesi vengono presentati come personaggi grotteschi, ameni, guasconi, irriverenti ed irridenti dei poteri dell’epoca.

Il vasto repertorio di comandanti, soldati e reparti mercenari albanesi si conclude con il Reggimento “Real Macedone”, voluto da Carlo III di Borbone nel 1739, che si distinse contro gli austriaci durante la guerra di successione austriaca a Velletri, nel 1744. Il Petta ci informa che il primo comandante fu un tale Giorgio Corafà di Cefalonia, che aveva contatti con i massoni Samuele Pompilio Rodotà e Pasquale Baffi, e che nel reggimento si arruolarono anche molti arbëreshë, fra cui si distinse come valido ufficiale il nonno di Antonio Gramsci, originario di Plataci.

L’ultimo comandante del Real Macedone fu Dhimitër Leka di Dhërmi (o in greco Drimades), villaggio dell’Albania Meridionale, il quale, nonostante fosse fedele ai Borboni non si rivelò un persecutore di liberali ma, anzi, li protesse. Al generale Leka, il Vate della lingua albanese Girolamo De Rada dedicherà il Milosao (1836).

I vari moti liberali del Risorgimento videro qualche volta opposti nella battaglia rivoluzionari arbëreshë e soldati dello stesso sangue. Il glorioso reparto venne sciolto nel 1860 da Garibaldi.

Prima di concludere bisogna sottolineare che il libro di Paolo Petta, apparso nel 1996, è passato inosservato nella stampa periodica arbëreshe mentre è andato a ruba nelle librerie di grossi centri e nelle vendite via internet.

Paolo Petta, arbëresh nato nel Veneto da una famiglia proveniente da Piana degli Albanesi (Hora), è stato funzionario del Senato ed autore di libri ed articoli di carattere giuridico e costituzionale. Anche suo è l’interessante lavoro “Despoti d’Epiro e Principi di Macedonia” sempre pubblicato dalla Editrice Argo. Con la caduta del regime enverista i rapporti fra l’Albania e la Puglia si sono intensificati mettendo in luce l’operosità e la generosità della gente pugliese che, oltre a subire i drammatici esodi, ha accolto umanamente i profughi ed ha dato avvio ad un nutrito scambio di relazioni culturali che sono sfociate nello sviluppo di case editrici che pubblicano libri e qualificate riviste in cui spiccano importanti lavori di autori italiani, albanesi ed arbëreshë.

E’ il caso dell’Editrice Argo (con sede a Lecce) che, tramite prestigiose collane specifiche, molto ben curate dal punto di vista tipografico, ha dato ampio spazio alla cultura mondiale, mediterranea e panalbanese del passato e del presente in cui spiccano i nomi dello storico Paolo Petta, del romanziere
The stratioti or stradioti (Greek: στρατιώτες, Italian: stradioti or stradiotti), were Greek, Albanian and Serbian mercenaries who formed military cavalry units of the Venetian Republic and the Kingdom of Naples in the 15th and 16th centuries.

According to a Greek author who studied the documentary evidence, around 80% of the listed names attributed to the stradioti were of Albanian origin while most of the remaining ones, especially those of officers, were of Greek origin; a small minority were of South Slavic origin.

Albanian condottieri

* Alessio Albanese (d. 1513)
* Andrea Albanese (Andrea Tosco, died ca. 1510)
* Coletto Albanese, died February, 1511
* Demetrio Albanese (died 1509)
* Giovanni Musacchio (ca. 1458 - 1530)
* Giovanni Chiuchiari, from Megalopolis. Died ca. 1555.[10]