

JOSEPH GEORGIRENES

Bishop of Samos & Ikaria 1666 - 1671

Joseph Georgirenes was consecrated as Archbishop in October 1666 and served about 5 years as Archbishop of Samos and Ikaria, leaving, to live on Patmos, when after the subjugation of Crete in 1669 the Turks became more populous and therefore more abusive to the Greeks. He was originally from Milos but little is known about his early life other than he served 6 years as a young boy on Mount Athos. He seems to have stayed on Patmos about 2 years and appears to have then gone to Italy where it is known that he tried to reconcile the Rome with the Orthodox Church.

Samos and Ikaria had originally come under the jurisdiction of Rhodes but had broken away to be directly under the Patriarch of Constantinople and Archbishop Georgirenes was the 7th Archbishop to serve.

As Archbishop after he was appointed by the Patriarch in Constantinople and received his patent from the Grand Signor he would have presented his credentials to the Turkish Authority of the region i.e. The Cadee.

He would then summon the head of the island "The Proesti" and all the priests and have his appointment entered into the public records. They would then accompany the new Archbishop to the main church of the region where he would be enthroned on the Archbishop's throne in the church and everyone comes to pay their respects and kiss his hand.

His income would be from a set collection from all the churches in his region and also from baptisms, weddings and funerals for which he would receive a fee.

According to the book " Voyage into the Levant" ,written by Joseph de Pitton and printed in 1718, it would seem that Georgirenes probably had an income of roughly 2000 crowns per annum while he served as Archbishop of Samos and Ikaria. In addition he would have a further income from blessing the waters in May and be entitled to all the milk and cheese produced that day and receives 2 beasts from every herd.

Of his time as Archbishop we know only what he himself writes in his book in 1677. The book in fact covers the state of the Isles of Samos, Patmos and Ikaria and the Holy Mount, Mount Athos. It tells us very little about the Archbishop himself.

There is far more documentation of his time in Great Britain where he seems to have gone to get another book published "Anthologion", this book however

never did appear in Print. It must be said that at the time he was in England the atmosphere regarding religion was alive with intrigue Charles II was on the throne and there with the understanding that he would not re-introduce Catholicism back into England. His brother James was a staunch Roman Catholic and in fact Georgirenes dedicates his book to him.

By 1676 we see him in Paris where he links up again with Antonine Gallard, who he had met in Patmos when Gallard was serving as French Ambassador and Collector. It was Gallard who persuaded Georgirenes to write down his impressions and knowledge of the islands of the NE Aegean where he had served as Archbishop. Gallard also translated the book into French. It was through Gallard that Georgirenes met Rev. Thomas Smith fellow of Magdalen and Oxford and a student of the Greek Church.

According to an article in the London Gazette at the time Georgirenes was in London it would seem he was not a very commanding person and it is also stated that he spoke no English:

An indifferent tall man, and slender, with long black hair, having a wart on the left side of his nose just against his eye, a Cut under his eye, and Black Whiskers and very little beard.

It would seem though that he had an ability to make friends and influence people.

He seems to have bestowed on, the then King of France, Louis XIV 13th century gospel manuscripts that he had taken from Patmos. These can be found in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* with inscriptions that state that they were given by Joseph Georgirenes to King Louis XIV in 1675. It is presumed that he received some favours for these gifts but what those favours actually were is unknown.

Whilst in London Joseph Georgirenes was involved in two projects, to build the first Greek Orthodox Church in London and to set up a college in Oxford for Greeks.

BUILDING OF THE FIRST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH IN LONDON:

In 1674 three Greeks living in London had pressed the Privy Council for the right to build a Greek Orthodox Church. They were Daniell Bulgaris(a priest), Louis Obinaty and Demetry of Contantinople. Permission was granted on the 8th Jan 1675. By 1676 when Joseph Georgirenes arrived the project had yet been started. Georgirenes added his weight to the project and approached Bishop Compton whose support he attained together with his fellow bishops and other donors.

There was already a patent issued by the king for the Greeks to exercise their religion freely which among other things stated that some of the Greeks were serving on His Majesties ships and on Merchant ships. It seems to have been understood that these Greeks would be naturalised and indeed Bugaris was in 1675.

Georgirenes, using this, approached Dr Nicholas Barbone, MP for Sussex who was a developer in Soho. Barbone pledged a site in Soho and offered to pay for the foundations. By March 1677, the King, noting that Georgirenes had managed to collect funds to start the building actually contributed £100.

There was however by August a delay in that the Bishop of London offered an alternative site in Soho to the one that Barbone had offered and was instrumental in arranging the property deal needed to acquire it. It would seem though that the alternative site at Hog Lane was leasehold and Georgirenes did not understand the full implications and therefore this decision turned out to be ill fated. Building started in 1677 but the site was owned by a Mr Frith who also undertook the brickworks. By the end of the year Frith was being sued by others for using bad bricks. The building of the church was dependant on Subscriptions and so progress was slow.

It would seem that when Joseph Georgirenes went to England he was accompanied by a Lawrence Georgirini (also from Milos and probably a relation). Lawrence had acquired a skill in pickling Mackerel and requested a patent in order to ply his trade offering the proceeds for the maintenance of the church. He was granted a 14year patent as the government was interest in the trade and also as a means of vicutalling of the armed forces.

By October 1678 the church was sufficiently ready but Georgirenes then got caught up in light from the "Popish Plot". The Popish Plot was a

fictitious conspiracy concocted by Titus Oates that gripped England in anti Catholic hysteria between 1678 and 1681.¹ Oates alleged that there existed an extensive Catholic conspiracy to assassinate Charles II, accusations that led to the execution of at least 15 men and precipitated the Exclusion Bill Crisis. Eventually Oates' intricate web of accusations fell apart, leading to his arrest and conviction for perjury.

He was also involved in a court case against his servant Dominico Gratiano who he claimed had absconded with funds for the church. It came to trial in Bristol but failed due, Georgirenes claims, his ignorance of the English language and the law. Gratiano then made counter claims linking Georgirenes to the Popish Plot and claiming that Georgirenes had boasted that he would be celebrating Mass in Bristol Cathedral, that the Duke of York would soon be King and that he, Georgirenes would soon have a Bishopric. Nothing came of this accusation but there were also other problems that arose.

By 1681 it was decided that the site and the church would be sold, this could have been due to the fact that it was some distance from where the Greek community had settled in London. It was at this stage that the full implications, of the lease for the site, were uncovered and it proved difficult to recoup their costs. There ensued an exchange with the Parish of St. Martin's in the Field. The Parish offered only £200 for the building and on the refusal of this offer the Parish proceeded and took possession of the building under the terms of the lease. In 1682 Georgirenes published his own account but nothing more was heard of him or his fellow Greeks in Soho. The building was eventually taken over by French Huguenots and actually survived till 1934.

An inscribed plaque was on the original church and taken down and is now to be seen on St.Sophia's Cathedral in Bayswater. The Greeks use to worship at the Russian Orthodox Chapel in London up to the 1820's when due to the change in Greece a number of wealthy Greeks moved to London and a new Church was finally built in 1850.

SCHEME TO EDUCATE GREEKS IN THE UK IN THE 1600's:

It was Joseph Georgirenes who first suggested the possibility that Greeks come to the UK for the sole purpose of studying. In 1677 he visited Oxford to raise money for the building of the Greek Orthodox Church in Soho and Anthony Wood (an Antiquary, employed by Oxford University) had the feeling that Georgirenes might also be there in connection with a scheme for creating a Greek College at Oxford in particular at Gloucester Hall. There had been some talk of converting the Hall for the education of 20-30 Greek students.

In 1682, Georgirenes did in fact write to William Sancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury, requesting that, at any one time, 12 Greek student be allowed to be instructed in the Doctrine of the Church of England with a view for them to return to Greece to preach. He does not specifically request Oxford in the 1682 letter but it is however unusual for a Greek Orthodox ex-Archbishop to suggest that Greeks study the Doctrines of the Church of England. Georgirenes asked Sancroft to impart this request to The King as well as to the Bishop of London, Henry Compton. Though quite high up people seem to have been involved in this idea nothing ever came of it till at least 10 years later.

Benjamin Woodroffe took over as principal of Gloucester Hall in 1692 and the scheme was implemented with a proposal for 20 youths, aged between 14 between 20, be brought from Constantinople and Antioch. The students were to get free passage from The Levant Company.

It was in fact 1699 before the first students arrived with the exception of one solitary student, Dionysius the Greek, mentioned in 1693.

Thus the idea first put forward by Georgirenes did in fact come to be even though nearly 20 years later.

There is no record of when Joseph Georgirenes left England, if indeed he ever did. For the time he was there he always let people believe that he was an Archbishop even though by the time he arrived there he was in fact an ordinary priest or monk. He was, however, a resourceful person as he managed to infiltrate the highest ranks of society, both royal and academic and all this without being able to speak English on his arrival. Maybe those presents to King Louis XIV of France actually did pave his way into English Aristocracy.

Sources: Wikipedia. - Popish Plot

www.British-history.ac.uk: www.culture24.org.uk

Google Books: Anglicanism & Orthodoxy by Peter M Doll