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The village of Stravonikou and the population of Ithaca in the 1583 census of Kastrofylakas

Re-reading an old source in search of Venetian Ithaca

Gerasimos Livitsanis

‘Absolute numbers for populations anywhere in the world before the eighteenth century are largely a matter of guesswork’ warns Mark Mazower.¹⁶ With this in mind, this note offers a new treatment of the recording of the populations of Cephalonia and Ithaca made in 1583 for the Venetian administration by Petros Kastrofylakas, as part of a wider census of the Venetian dominions in the Eastern Mediterranean, including Crete and the other Ionian Islands. In his monograph on Cephalonia and Ithaca, Joseph Partsch cites elements of the census, while also voicing certain objections to the source.¹⁷ Partsch does not seem to identify any record in the manuscript that refers him to a census of the population of Ithaca. In response to the work by Partsch, the Cephalonian historian Tsitselis published the section of the census concerning Cephalonia.¹⁸ Tsitselis expressed his objections to the confusion caused by the structure and presentation of the census by Kastrofylakas. However, what is of interest for our purposes is that the village (*casale*) Vathi (*Vati*) appears with 162 inhabitants and Anogi (*Anoi*) with 184 inhabitants. In the footnotes, Tsitselis leaves *Vati* unidentified while *Anoi* is identified with the area of the same name on the Cephalonian peninsula Palliki. He does not seem to reflect that these two settlements may be toponyms of neighbouring Ithaca.

This is a translation, with adaptations, of an article published in Greek: ‘Το χωριό Στραβονίκου και ο πληθυσμός του Θιακίου το 1583 μέσα από την απογραφή του Πέτρου Καστροφύλακα’, *Κεφαλονίτικη Πρόσδος* 2023 (11), 33–36. Thanks are owed to the editor Amalia Voutsina for allowing its translation and publication in this updated form.

¹⁶ Mark Mazower, *The Balkans. From the end of Byzantium to the present day* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001), 26.

¹⁷ Joseph Partsch, *Κεφαλληνία και Ιθάκη. Γεωγραφική μονογραφία* (Athens, 1892), 117–118, note 2.

¹⁸ Ilias A. Tsitselis, *Κεφαλληνιακά Σύμμικτα*, vol. 2 (Athens, 1960), 662–673.

Another manuscript of the same census was published by Spanakis.¹⁹ Anogi appears again with 184 inhabitants but Vathi has here 497 inhabitants. More villages appear in the Spanakis edition than in the Tsitselis edition, including *Stravonicus* with 222 inhabitants.²⁰ However, neither Spanakis made any attempt to link the villages of *Vathì* and *Anoi*, let alone *Stravonicus*, with Ithaca. And yet, in two places Kastrofylakas clearly states that the scope of his census includes Ithaca: first, at the beginning of the list, where he notes that *Thiachi* was a district of Cephalonia ('Seguita il territorio a casal per casal et l'Isola de thiachi partnenzia detta Isola della Zaffalonia'); second, at the end where the number of priests on the two islands is stated ('Papati Greci in tutta l'isola et Diachi 220').²¹ With insightfulness, Sevasti Lazari proves that the difference in the population of *Vati* is due either to an error by the copyist of the manuscript consulted by Tsitselis or to a transcription error by Tsitselis.²² The correct number of inhabitants is the one in the Spanakis edition. The study by Lazari, nevertheless, still hesitates to identify the villages of *Vathì* and *Anoi* with the two homonymous toponyms of Ithaca.²³ The hesitation is partly justifiable. The way the census is presented is indeed problematic: 'The villages are brought together, jumping from one area to another', as Tsitselis notes. The villages are not grouped by region, nor was there provision for a separate record of the villages of Ithaca.

A scholar who is not familiar with the historical geography of Ithaca hardly realises that the sixteenth-century *Stravonicus* and today's Exogi are the same village. Joseph Partsch quotes an extract from the report of the *proveditor* of Cephalonia Angelo Basadonna in which it is stated that in 1590 Ithaca had about 1,500 inhabitants in three villages (*ville*), Vathi

¹⁹ Stergios G. Spanakis, 'Οι οικισμοί της Επτανήσου και οι κάτοικοί των τον 16^ο αι.', In *Πρακτικά Ε' Διεθνούς Πανιωνίου Συνεδρίου*, vol. 1 (Argostoli, 1989), 107–127.

²⁰ Ibid 120.

²¹ Ibid 119, 123.

²² Sevasti Lazari, 'Η συγκρότηση του επτανησιακού πληθυσμού: Η απογραφή του Πέτρου Καστροφύλακα (1583) και του Fr. Grimani (1760)', In *Πρακτικά Ζ' Πανιωνίου Συνεδρίου*, vol. 2 (Athens, 2004), 301–347, 345.

²³ Ibid 304.

(*Vati*), *Anoi* and *Stravonichio*.²⁴ In 1628, Andrea Moresini, the *proveditor* of Cephalonia in the period 1621–1622, wrote that Ithaca had three villages, the largest being *Vathi*, *Annai* (Anogi) and *Oxoi* (Exogi).²⁵ Therefore, in the period between 1590 and 1620 the place name of the village changed from Stravonikou to Exogi, as it remains until today.²⁶ Even in Ithaca, however, the place-name of Stravonikou was until recently almost forgotten. In 1951 the Ithacesian P.G. Callinicos published from his personal archive a will dated to 1585, which reads ‘I, Thodoris Prosalentis, standing in my house on the island of Ithaca in Stratonikou in the parish of St. Marina, ...’²⁷ Callinicos transcribes ‘Stratonikou’ and identifies the village with the present-day village of Stavros.²⁸ In a later edition of the will, Callinicos transcribes more correctly ‘Stravonikou’ [Στραβονίκου] and, based on the known location of the church of Agia Marina, identifies the village with today’s Exogi.²⁹ Agia Marina is located right in the centre of Exogi, although the current church is a twentieth-century building. The archivist and historian Stamatoula Zapanti located and published a Cephalonian notarial act for the sale of land from 1565 in which we read that one of the parties: ‘...sold [to the other] the fields that he had bought in the area of the village of Stravonikou’.³⁰ Zapanti’s familiarity with Ithaca allowed her to understand that the act of the Cephalonian notary refers to Ithaca and not to Cephalonia. On the contrary, the editors of the notarial

²⁴ Partsch, *Κεφαλληνία και Ιθάκη*, 147, note 1; See now also Kostas G. Tsiknakis, *Οι εκθέσεις των Βενετών Προνοητών της Κεφαλονιάς (16^{ος} αιώνας)* (Athens: Εθνικό Ίδρυμα Ερευνών, 2008), 123.

²⁵ Andrea Moresini, *Corsi di penna, e catena di materie sopra l’Isola della Ceffalonia*. (Venice, 1628), 102. Annai is likely a misprint for Annoi.

²⁶ Vlachos has also shown that between roughly 1600 and 1630 the toponym used for Exogi was ‘Dragoniko’ [Δραγονικό]: Petros Vlachos, *Εκκρεμείς λογαριασμοί της Ιθάκης με την μεσαιωνική Ξ ενετική ιστορία (της)* (Ithaca, 2021), 81–100.

²⁷ P.G. Callinicos. ‘Μια Θιακιά διαθήκη του 1585’, *Ελληνική Δημιουργία* 74 (1951): 407–410, 407.

²⁸ But see also Ippokratis A. Kokkinis, ‘Ο Αρχιδούκας Σαλβάτωρ για την Ιθάκη’, *Ελληνική Δημιουργία* 74 (1951): 361–363, 362, who identifies ‘Stavronision’ with Exogi.

²⁹ P.G. Callinicos, *Επτανησιακά (κατά το πλείστο Ιθακησιακά) Σύμμεικτα*, 2nd ed. (Athens: Domos, 1991), 85, 89–90.

³⁰ Stamatoula S. Zapanti, *Κεφαλονιά 1500–1571. Η συγκρότηση της κοινωνίας του νησιού*. (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 1999), 382–383.

register of another Cephalonian notary of the Castle of St. George, Nikolaos Kapianos, did not recognise that an act for the establishment of a religious brotherhood in the village of Stravonikou in 1575 in fact refers to Ithaca and not Cephalonia: ‘... the undersigned brothers in the church of Panagia Mesosporitissa which is in the village of Stravoniko, ...’.³¹ The church of Panagia Mesosporitissa is located in the village of Exogi at a distance of 130m northwest of Agia Marina. The present church is of the nineteenth century with more recent repairs.

Returning to the census of Kastrofylakas, if we sum up the inhabitants of all three villages, we have a population of 903 persons in Ithaca. This number is significantly below the approximately 1,500 inhabitants reported seven years later by Basadonna in 1590. Even if Basadonna exaggerates, something which Partsch suggests in respect of his record of the population of Cephalonia, the difference is not easily bridged.³² One possible interpretation could be the rapid rise of the population in the years before 1590. Were the conditions in place to justify such a rise? In 1574 the Cephalonian *proveditor* Vincenzo da Molin omits to note the population of Ithaca, although he seems to have conducted a census. However, he seems to consider the number low because during the Venetian-Turkish war of 1570–1573 the island had been abandoned.³³ Clearly the abandonment was temporary — for safety — and after 1573 the number of inhabitants would follow an upward trend as the inhabitants gradually returned. This perhaps explains the rate of increase between the two sets of information, from Kastrofylakas in 1583 and Basadonna in 1590. Besides, in the three notarial documents mentioned above, the same persons appear in the years 1565, 1575 and 1585. Presumably, they and many others would have left the island and returned after the war.

The comparison of the population between the three villages also raises questions. The 497 inhabitants of Vathi are justified if one considers that this is the most flat and fertile part of the island, it has semi-

³¹ Vagionakis et al., *Νικόλαος Καπιάνος, νοταριακές πράξεις, Κάστρο Κεφαλονιάς (1571–1576)* (Athens: Εθνικό Ίδρυμα Ερευνών, 2008), 102–104.

³² Partsch, *Κεφαλληνία και Ιθάκη*, 117, note 2.

³³ Tsiknakis, *Οι εκθέσεις*, 60 and 54.

mountainous and mountainous cultivable land, extensive pastures, and an excellent natural harbour which is praised by all the Venetian *proveditori* who refer to it. The village of Anogi is located in the most mountainous and barren part of the island and its small population is possibly justified. The number that can hardly be justified is the mere 222 inhabitants of Stravonikou. The above notarial deeds inform us that the inhabitants of Stravonikou cultivated fields not only near the village, but as far as the port of Polis to the south and Frikes to the east. The area is large and no less fertile than that of Vathi. In addition, it has semi-mountainous and mountainous areas for cultivation and grazing, as well as ports for fishing and shipping. Was there any reason for the northern Ithaca to be more sparsely populated than the southern? Incidentally, the *proveditor* of Cephalonia in 1572–74 Vincenzo da Molin notes that the northern part of Erisos around Fiskardo remained uninhabited and uncultivated because the population feared pirates from Lefkada.³⁴ It is therefore not impossible that northern Ithaca, which is very close to Lefkada, was sparsely populated for fear of pirates.

Another possibility is that Kastrofylakas deliberately did not record part of the island's population. Shall we speculate that there were people whom the state bureaucracy perhaps did not wish to register? Tommaso Porcacchi, in the second edition of his work in 1576, states that Ithaca was inhabited mainly by fugitives (*fuorusciti*) from Cephalonia, Zakynthos and Corfu.³⁵ Something similar is reported by the Dutch pilgrim Jan van Cootwijk, who passed through the Ionian Islands in 1598. According to Cootwijk, Ithaca was the seat of exiles ('exulum sedes').³⁶ Cootwijk's chronicle was published in 1619 and it is likely that he knew Porcacchi's work. The latter had contacts with senior Venetian officials who were able

³⁴ Ibid 55.

³⁵ Tommaso Porcacchi, *L'Isola piu Famose del Mondo* (Venice, 1576), 96.

³⁶ Jan van Cootwijk, *Itinerarium Hierosolymitanum et Syriacum* (Antwerp, 1619), 44; See Romina N. Tsakiri, 'Η Ιθάκη μέσα από τις μαρτυρίες των Βενετών αξιωματούχων κατά τον 17^ο αιώνα: Κρησφύγετο πειρατών, παρανόμων και εξοριστών', In *Πρακτικά Ι' Διεθνούς Πανιονίου Συνεδρίου*, vol. Η' (Corfu, 2015), 635–644, for a fascinating account on exiles and outlaws residing in Ithaca.

to pass on reliable information to him.³⁷ The phenomenon of the settlement of exiles in Ithaca also seems to be referred to by the careful wording of Basadonna, who in his report to the Senate in 1590 proposed that exiles be allowed to settle in Ithaca by granting uncultivated land until they had served their sentence.³⁸ Here perhaps Basadonna is proposing a way to legitimise a reality to which the Venetian officials had turned a blind eye. It is therefore possible that a number of inhabitants who had settled in Ithaca to evade the law were not included in the census of Kastrofylakas.

It is furthermore possible the information received by Kastrofylakas from Ithaca was not accurate for all parts of the island. The three villages mentioned, Vathi, Anogi and Stravonikou, correspond to the three main residential enclaves of the island (see Figure 1). In each of them, in addition to the main settlement, there must have been other smaller settlements. In the long run, the size, location and character of each settlement within such a settlement area could change according to circumstances. It may therefore be that the census data for the settlement area of Vathi was more complete than those of the other two. Bearing in mind that the seat of the governor of the island (the *capitano*) was also located in the settlement of Vathi — though we do not yet know its exact location — it is possible that the population of all the settlements, large and small, were recorded more thoroughly in the southern part of the island than in the north. It is also possible that some inhabitants of the northern part of the island, taking advantage of their relative distance from the administrative centre, did not wish to be censused, in order to avoid paying the tithe. In conclusion, despite these outstanding problems of interpretation, the purpose of this note has been to show with clarity that Ithaca is not left out from the census of Kastrofylakas in 1583.

³⁷ Veronica Della Dora, 'Between the garden and the island: Mirror images and imaginative geographies of Greece in Thomaso Porcacchi's *L'isole più famose del mondo, 1572*', In *Viewing Greece: Cultural and political agency in the Medieval and Modern Mediterranean*, edited by Sharon E.J. Gerstel (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 185–206, 185.

³⁸ Tsiknakis, *Οι εκθέσεις*, 128.

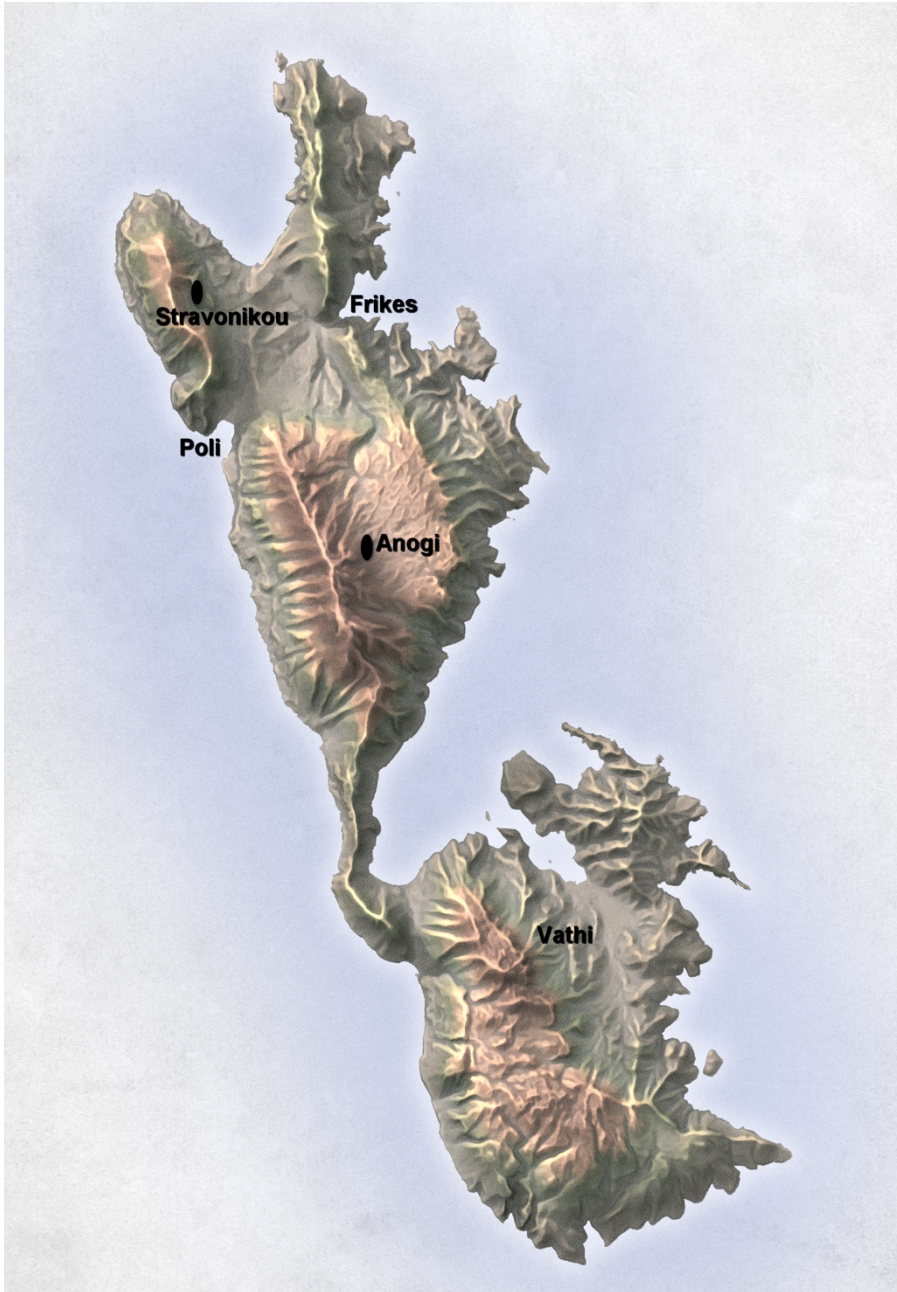


Figure 1. Map of Ithaca with toponyms mentioned in the 16th century sources (Map: Markku Ylisirnio).

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Abstract

This article re-examines an already published source for the population of Ithaca in 1583. It is a census undertaken by the Venetian administrator Petros Kastroyfylakas, in which scholars had so far failed to identify the toponyms of Ithaca, and, therefore, supposed that Ithaca was not included. A consideration of this census with respect to Ithaca's historical geography allows better appreciation of an important historical source for Ithaca.

Περίληψη

Αυτή η ανακοίνωση επανεξετάζει μια δημοσιευμένη πηγή σχετική με τον πληθυσμό της Ιθάκης το 1583. Είναι η απογραφή πληθυσμού του Βενετού αξιωματούχου Πέτρου Καστροφύλακα, στην οποία οι μελετητές μέχρι σήμερα δεν είχαν καταφέρει να ταυτίσουν τα τοπωνύμια της Ιθάκης και, ως εκ τούτου, συμπεραίνουν πως η Ιθάκη δεν είχε συμπεριληφθεί. Ωστόσο, η προσέγγιση αυτής της απογραφής με αναφορά στην ιστορική γεωγραφία της Ιθάκης επιτρέπει την καλύτερη εκτίμηση μιας σημαντικής ιστορικής πηγής για την Ιθάκη.