

στρατιώτες





*F. Corri
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Cavalleria Stradiotta

1515-50

(dal Gallere, "Storia Veneta")

VINKHUIZEN COLLECTION

DRAPER FUND

- 1: Stradiot, c.1500
2: Venetian light cavalryman, c.1500
3: Greek noble, early 16th C.





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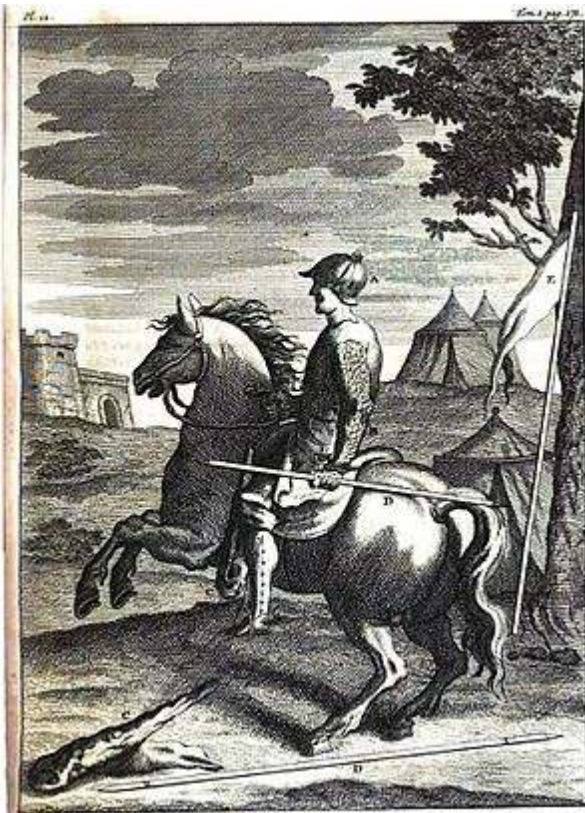
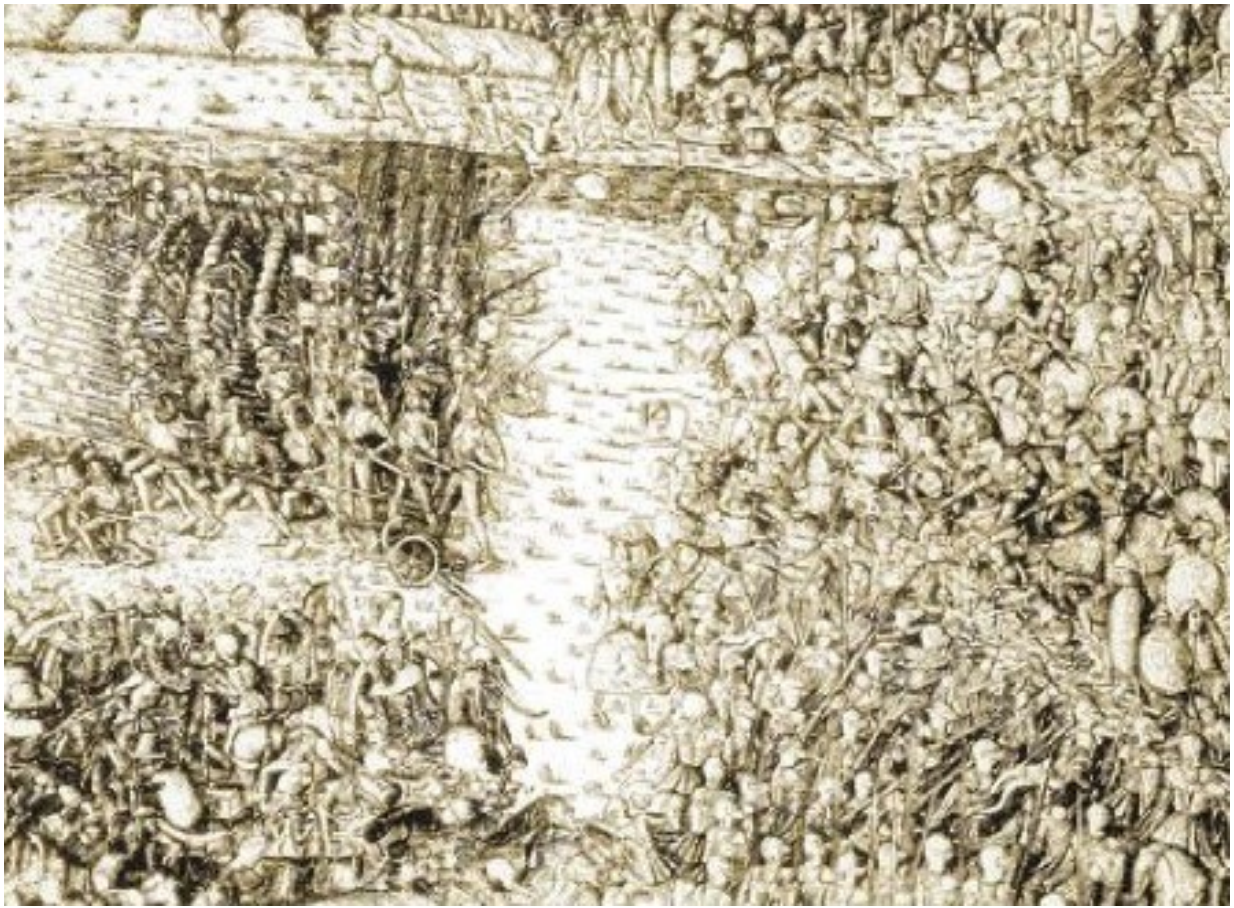
G. David del.

ESTRADIOTS

Paris, Chez la Citoyenne, à la Force Nationale.

London, sold by Smeath, Juno & Co. in Bonnet's Alley.

Imp. Lemercier à Paris.



French estradiot and his arms. Notice the short double-pointed spear ("arzagaye"). Engraving, 1724 (G. Daniel).

***STRADIOTI* BALKAN MERCENARIES IN FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH CENTURY ITALY**

By Nicholas C. J. Pappas

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 *terrafirma*. 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 capes 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*. [12] 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*. [13]2

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. [14]3 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 *stratitotês* or *stratitotai*

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 *stradiotto* meant a wanderer or wayfarer, thus denoting an errant cavalrymen 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 Merkouriou Boua*, use *stratiotes/stratiotai*, the Greek word for soldier.[16] Latin sources, such as the dispatches of Jacomo Barbarigo, use the variant *stratiotos/stratiotorum* or *strathiotos/strathiotorum*[17] The bulk of primary sources in Italian, such as Coriolano Cippico, Marino Sanuto and Venetian state documents, use *stradiotto/stradioti*, adopted by this paper, or *strathiotto/strathioti*. [18] French sources, such as Philip de Comines, use the variation *estradiot/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 *stratiotes* 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 inedits a l'histoire de la Grece au Moyen Age*, edited by Konstantinos Sathas, as well as the indices of the fifty-odd volumes of *I Diarii 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, Zacharopoulos, Klirakopoulos, 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 their 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 Peloponnesus, 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 Peloponnesus 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 after the other in the Veneto-Turkish conflicts of first half of the 16th century, more and more military colonists resettled on the Ionian Islands, Dalmatia and Italy.[27] One Greek writer has estimated 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.[28]

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 vessels 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 stradiots, 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 *arbetes* 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 redoubtable 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 Luchisi, 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 cavalymen, 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 *hussars*, 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. become 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 *stradiotto*-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 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 *terrafirma*. 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 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 Riccoti, 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.

1. Sir Charles Oman, *The History of the Art of War in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1937), pp. 41, 92, 109-111.
2. Coriolano Cippico, *Della guerre de' Veneziani nell' Asia dal 1470 al 1473* (Venice, 1796), p. 10.
3. Marino Sanuto, *La spedizione di Carlo VIII in Italia*, ed. R. Fulin (Venice, 1883), pp. 313-314; idem, *Commentarii della guerra di Ferrara* (Venice, 1829), p. 115.
4. Philippe de Comines, *Memoires*, vol.2, (London and Paris, 1747), pp. 27-28; and Philip de Commines (sic), *The Memoirs of Philip de Commines, Lord of Argenton: Containing the Histories of Louis XI and Chales VIII, Kings of France, and of Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy*, ed. and tr. by Anrew R. Scoble, vol. 2 (London, 1856), pp. 200-201.
5. F. L. Taylor, *The Art of War in Italy, 1494-1529* (Cambridge University Press, 1921), pp. 72-73.
6. Konstantinos Sathas, *Hellenes stratiotai en tei dysei kai he anagenensis tes hellenikes taktikes* (Athens, 1885). Originally published in the journal *Hestia*.
7. M. E. Mallet and J. R.Hale, *The Military organization of a Renaissance State: Venice ca. 1400 to 1617* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1984), passim.
8. Mallet and Hale, *The Military organization of a Renaissance State*, passim.
9. Marino Sanuto, *La spedizione di Carlo VIII in Italia*, ed. R. Fulin (Venice, 1883), pp. 313-314.
10. Marino Sanuto, *Commentarii della guerra di Ferrara* (Venice, 1829), p. 115.
11. Philippe de Comines, *Memoires*, vol.2, (London and Paris, 1747), pp. 27-28; and Philip de Commines (sic), *The Memoirs of Philip de Commines, Lord of Argenton: Containing the Histories of Louis XI and Chales VIII, Kings of France, and of Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy*, ed. and tr. by Anrew R. Scoble, vol. 2 (London, 1856), pp. 200-201;

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 Construction, Decoration, and Use of Arms and Armor in All Countries and at All Times* (New York: Jack Brussel, 1961), pp. 77, 408-409.
13. Stone, *A Glossary of the Construction, Decoration, and Use of Arms and Armor*, pp. 214-215.
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Stradioti

Da Wikipedia, l'enciclopedia libera.

Gli **stradiotti**, **stradioti** o **stratioti** (**greco**: στρατιώτες) erano mercenari **greci** e **albanesi** ortodossi che formavano unità militari di cavalleria della **Repubblica di Venezia** e del **Regno di Napoli** nel **XV** e **XVI secolo**. Il memorialista francese **Philippe de Commines**, descrive gli stradioti così: *"Sono tutti greci, provenienti dai possessi veneziani, alcuni da **Napoli di Romagna** [Nauplion], altri dall'**Albania** presso **Durrazzo**, e i loro cavalli sono di buona qualità e arrivano dalla **Turchia**..."* I veneziani li utilizzarono inizialmente nelle loro campagne contro l'**Impero ottomano** e, dal **1475** circa, come truppe di frontiera in **Friuli**. A partire da questo periodo, iniziano a sostituire completamente la cavalleria leggera veneziana nell'esercito della Serenissima. Impressionati delle tattiche non ortodosse degli Stradioti, altre potenze europee (come **Francia** e **Spagna**) rapidamente iniziarono a reclutare mercenari dalle medesime regioni. Il termine italiano *stradioti* può essere un prestito dal greco *stratiotai* (**greco**: στρατιώται significa *soldati*) o potrebbe derivare dal termine *strada*, nel senso di 'viandante'.^[1] Gli stradioti erano mercenari e ricevevano la paga solo finché il loro servizio militare era necessario.^[2] Venivano reclutati in **Grecia**, **Albania**, **Dalmazia** ed in seguito a **Cipro**.^[3] Molti degli stradioti erano greco-albanesi (**Arvaniti**, specialmente dal **Peloponneso**) e **greci** con una piccola percentuale proveniente da altri popoli balcanici.^[4] Fra i loro comandanti vi erano membri di alcune antiche e nobili famiglie bizantine greche quali i **Paleologi** e i **Comneni**.^[5] Furono dei pionieri delle tattiche di cavalleria leggera durante la loro era. Impiegavano delle **tattiche colpisce e scappa, imboscate**, finte ritirate e altre complesse manovre. In certi aspetti, queste tattiche ricordavano quelle degli **Spahi** e degli **Akinci** ottomani. Gli stradioti erano famosi per essere chiassosi, attacabrighe e talvolta sleali, ma la loro abilità aveva più importanza di ogni offesa alla sensibilità degli europei. Ebbero alcuni notevoli successi contro la cavalleria pesante francese durante le **Guerre Italiane del Rinascimento**.^[6] Usavano delle lance chiamate **Assegai**, così come delle **spade**, **mazze**, **balestre** e **daghe**. La loro uniforme tradizionale era un insieme di indumenti **ottomani**, **bizantini** ed **europei**: l'armatura era inizialmente un semplice **usbergo**, ma divenne più pesante con il passare del tempo. Dal XVI secolo gli Stradioti non vennero più ampiamente impiegati.

Note

1. ↑ Pappas, Nicholas.
2. ↑ Hoerder, 2002.
3. ↑ Nicolle, 1989.
4. ↑ Pappas and Patapiou.
5. ↑ Nicol, 2002; Pappas.
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Collegamenti esterni

- [Articolo sugli insediamenti albanesi in Italia che parla anche degli stradioti](#)
- [Libro sugli stradioti](#)
- [Articolo su IT.CULTURA.STORIA.MILITARE.ON-LINE](#)
- [Citazione sugli stradioti](#)
- [e-book sugli stradioti \(pdf\)](#)

STRADIOTI ED IMPIEGO IN TERRAFERMA by anabasis - 08/03/02

Ringrazio Raffaele Greco per le precisazioni circa i reparti di "stradioti" 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

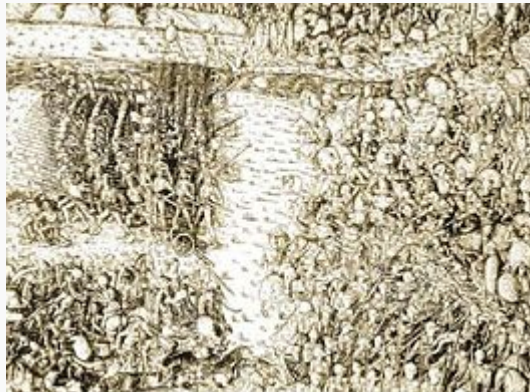
Salve Anabasis, il numero di effettivi non penso sia mai stato facilmente ipotizzato anche per la loro difficile "inquadratura" all'interno delle forze armate veneziane. Però se qualcuno ha qualche dato sarei molto interessato anche io. Qualche numero preso da un volumetto Osprey lo cito più in basso 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 estremamente 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. Vestiti in modo strano e selvaggio, imprevedibili sul punto d'onore e abituati al saccheggio (come si resero famosi nella battaglia di Fornovo) combattevano principalmente ancora con lance da mischia leggere, spade e archi composti. Tendevano a fuggire davanti alle truppe di fanteria ottomane o europee fornite di armi da fuoco, ma si dimostravano estremamente efficaci contro la cavalleria turca che combatteva, sotto molti aspetti, allo stesso modo. A partire tuttavia dal tardo 16o secolo e dall'inizio del 17o, molti stradiotti adottarono a loro volta pistole e carabine di cavalleria.

Gli stradiotti di Dalmazia erano stanziati in otto centri principali, anche se passavano la maggior parte del tempo in stazioni decentrate più prossime alle frontiere. Cento Stradiotti erano di base a Corfù con distaccamenti nelle altre isole dello Ionio, mentre quelli di Creta erano di basso livello, in parte perché ciò era dovuto a una carenza di cavalli nei paesi del Mediterraneo orientale. Davide "Mr. Clark" Botta **Reply di Mariangela Gamboni - 08/03/02** Gli stradioti furono usati dai Veneziani nel corso del'400 nei balcani, e, a partire dal 1475, in Italia, ad iniziare dal Friuli (dove venivano utilizzati contro le incursioni Turche). A partire dal 1470-1480 sostituirono sempre più la cavalleria leggera di origine italiana. Erano la tipica cavalleria leggera irregolare, adatta alla schermaglia, al raid ed all'imboscata. Erano molto feroci e indisciplinati (a Fornovo non dovevano saccheggiare il campo nemico, ma aggirare le linee francesi, poi videro il campo francese e.....). Col tempo il loro armamento e la loro protezione si appesantì, avendo adottato lance leggere, corsetto e elmo metallico, ma originariamente portavano solo un po' di armatura in maglia, ed erano armati con una specie di giavellotto, mazza ed una specie di sciabola; più tardi si dotarono di armi da fuoco. Anche la loro estrazione etnica si ampliò: da prima solo Albanesi, poi anche Croati e Greci. poiché la maggior parte dei pesanti e poco mobili eserciti europei dell'epoca non aveva cavalleria leggera (con l'eccezione dei Ginetti spagnoli), si dimostrarono utili nei compiti appunto di cavalleria leggera, ma non erano di grande uso in una grossa battaglia campale.

E' possibile ipotizzare il loro numeri di effettivi? Mi pare che a Fornovo (1494) ce ne fossero 1000 o 2000; ad Agnadello (1509) 3000 (ma nel numero si deve comprendere anche un po' di cavalleria leggera italiana). Nel 1480 ve ne erano 6 squadroni in servizio dei Veneziani (uno squadrone era di circa 500 uomini). I Francesi, che privi di cavalleria leggera propria, avevano subito le "attenzioni" degli Stradioti, ne assoldarono poi qualche migliaio. > *Grazie dell'attenzione.* Prego. Gianfranco

Stratioti

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia



French painting of c. 1500 depicting Albanian stradioti of the [Venetian Army](#) at the [Battle of Fornovo](#)^[1]

Active	15th to 18th century
Type	Mercenary unit
Role	Light cavalry

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.^[2]

Name The Italian term *stradioti* is either a loan from the Greek word *stratiotai* ([Greek](#): στρατιώται), i.e. *soldiers*,^[3] or derives from the [Italian](#) word *strada* ('street'), meaning 'wayfarer'.^[4] The Albanian stradioti of Venice were also called *capelletti* (sing. *capelletto*) because of the small red caps they wore.^[5]

History The stradioti were recruited in [Albania](#), [Greece](#), [Dalmatia](#), [Serbia](#) and later [Cyprus](#).^{[6][7][8][9]} Most modern historians have indicated that of the Stratioti were mostly [Albanians](#).^[4] 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.^[4] Among their leaders there were also members of some old Byzantine Greek noble families such as the [Palaiologi](#) and [Comneni](#).^{[4][10]} 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.^[4]

Middle Ages During the 12th century, [Byzantine Emperor John II Komnenos](#) (1118–1143) settled Serb prisoners as stradioti *military colonists* around [Izmit](#), present-day Turkey.^[11]

Early modern period

Italy The Venetians first used stratioti 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](#).^[12] The mercenaries were recruited from the Balkans, mainly Christians but also some Muslims.^[13] 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](#),^[14] and the [Scuola dei Greci](#) (Confraternity of the Greeks), in a neighborhood where a Greek community still resides.^[15] 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 stradiots 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 stradiots."^{[16][17]} Impressed by the unorthodox tactics of the stratioti, 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^[18]. 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^[19]. According to others "estradiots" were Albanian horsemen and "argoulets" were Greeks, while Croatians were called "Cravates"^[20]. 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^[21]. 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.^[22]). Units of Carabins seem to exist at least till early 18th c.^[23] Corps of light infantry mercenaries were periodically recruited from the Balkans or Italy mainly during the 15th—

17th centuries. In 1587, the [Duchy of Lorraine](#) recruited 500 Albanian cavalrymen, while from 1588 to 1591 five Albanian light cavalry captains were also recruited.^[24]

Spain Stratioti were first employed by Spain in their Italian expedition (see [Italian Wars](#)). [Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba](#) ("Gran Capitan") 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*"^[25]. Units of estradiotes served also in the Guard of King Ferdinand and, along with the "Alabarderos", are considered the beginnings of the Spanish Royal Guard^[26].

England In 1514, [Henry VIII of England](#), employed units of Albanian and Greek stradioti during the battles with the [Kingdom of Scotland](#).^{[15][27]} In the 1540s, [Duke Edward Seymour of Somerset](#) used Albanian stradioti in his campaign against Scotland.^[28]

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.^[29]

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 stradioti of the Venetian army, Hungarian [hussars](#) and German mercenary cavalry units (*Schwarzreitern*).^[30] 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](#).^[31] 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^[32].

Equipment The stradioti 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 stradioti received wages only as long as their military services were needed.^[33]

Notable stratioti

- [Mercurio Bua](#)
- [Krokodeilos Kladas](#)
- [Giorgio Basta](#)
- Matthew Spanoudes (or Spadugnino), a stradioti who earned the title of "Count and Knight of the Holy Roman Empire" from [Emperor Frederick III](#).^[34]
- [Palaiologos](#) (also Paleologos) family:
 - Graitzas Paleologos, a leader of the stradioti.^[35]
 - Manolis Paleologos, Nicolos Paleologos^[36]
 - Teodoros Paleologos ("capo"), Ioannes (Zuan) Paleologos, Alexandros Paleologos^[37]
- Demetrios [Laskaris](#), son of Isaakios, unit commander.^[38]
- Isaakios [Laskaris](#), killed in the battle of Fornovo (1495)(Sathas)

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1. [^] [Nicolle & McBride 1988](#), p. 44.
2. [^] [Tardivel 1991](#), p. 134.
3. [^] Trecanni (ed.), *Grande Enciclopedia Italiana*, "Stradioti": "dal basso greco στρατιώται"; [Societa Italiana di Studi Araldici 2005](#), p. 3: "dal greco *stratiōta*".
4. [^] [a b c d e Pappas](#) (Sam Houston State University).
5. [^] [Folengo & Mullaney 2008](#), p. 491.
6. [^] Nicolle, 1989.
7. [^] B. N. Floria, "Vykhodtsy iz Balkanakh stran na russkoi sluzhbe," *Balkanskia issledovaniia*. 3. Osloboditel'nye dvizheniia na Balkanakh (Moscow, 1978), pp. 57-63.
8. [^] Hungary and the fall of Eastern Europe 1000-1568 by David Nicolle, Angus McBride: "John Comnenus [...] settled Serbs as *stratioti* around Izmir..."
9. [^] Nicol, Donald M. (1988). *Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural relations*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press. p. 37. "Young men recruited from among Greeks and Albanians. They were known as stradioti from the Greek word for soldier."
10. [^] Nicolle, 2002: p. 16
11. [^] [Nicolle & McBride 1988](#), p. 16.
12. [^] [Setton 1976](#), p. 494; [Nicolle & Rothero 1989](#), p. 16.
13. [^] [Detrez & Plas 2005](#), p. 134.
14. [^] [Detrez & Plas 2005](#), p. 134, Footnote #24.
15. [^] [a b English Historical Review 2000](#), p. 192.
16. [^] Guicciardini ,Sidney Alexander's translation, p. 95
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19. [^] [Daniel R.P.G. \(1724\) Histoire de la milice francoise, et des changemens qui s'y sont Amsterdam, vol. 1, pp. 166-171.](#)
20. [^] [Virol M. \(2007\) Les oisivetes de monsieur de Vauban, edition integrale, Champ Vallon, Seyssel, p. 988, footnote 3.](#)
21. [^] La Grand Encyclopedie, Eole-Fanuucci, Paris (undated), vol. 16, article "*Argoulet*"
22. [^] [Bonaparte N. Études sur le passé et l'avenir de l'artillerie, Paris, 1846, vol. 1, p. 161](#)
23. [^] [Boyer Abel \(1710\) The history of the reign of Queen Anne, year the eight, London, p. 86.](#) A list of French captured by the British at the battle of Tasnieres (1709) includes an officer of the "Royal Carabins"
24. [^] [Monter 2007](#), p. 76.
25. [^] [Historia del Rey Don Fernando el Catolico: De las empresas y ligas de Italia, book V, p. 3.](#)
26. [^] [LA GUARDIA REAL](#)
27. [^] [Higham 1972](#), p. 171.

28. [^ Hammer 2003](#), p. 24.
29. [^ Howard 2009](#), p. 77.
30. [^ Downing 1992](#), p. 66.
31. [^ Nicolle & Rothero 1989](#), p. 36.
32. [^ DeCommines, Philippe](#), *Lettres et Negotiations*, with comments by Kervyn De Lettenhove, ed. 1868, V. Devaux et Cie. Bruxelles, vol. 2, p. 200, 220: "quinze cents estradiotes grecs ou albanais, "vaillans hommes" qui recevaient in ducat par tete d' ennemi qu'ils rapportaient a leurs chefs".
33. [^ Hoerder 2002](#), p. 63: "Throughout Europe footmen replaced knights, that is, cavalry. They used new weapons and came with regionally varying skills: English archers and crossbowmen, Swiss pikemen, Flemish burgher forces, and, later, Italian gunfighters or exiled Albanian and Greek *stradioti* on light horse (from Italian *strada*: street). Mercenaries hired on for pay under "military enterprisers" received wages only as long as work was available."
34. [^ Nicol 1994](#), p. 104; [Nicol 1992](#), p. 417; [Nicol 1968](#), p. 231.
35. [^ Nicolle & Rothero 1989](#), p. 16.
36. [^ Cronaca Cittadina II](#).
37. [^ Medin, Antonio](#). *La Obsidione di Padua del MDIX, ed. Romagnoli*. Bologna, 1892.
38. [^ Sathas 1867](#), p. 97.

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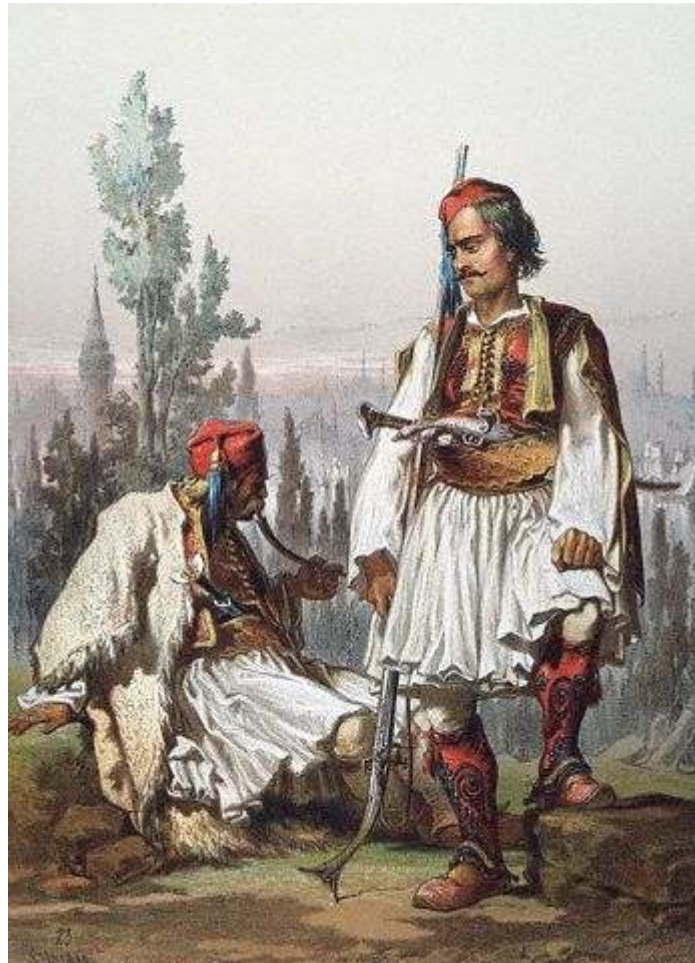
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ARBITALIA Iajme

Un interessante libro sugli Stradioti (di Francesco Marchianò)

“Nu la sèmo de Albania/ Strattiòti palikàri/ kiè in kavàllo, 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 arbëresh, 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 Arbëreshë 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 pianura padana, come nella stessa Milano, dove un tale Alessio Tarchetta, al servizio di Francesco Sforza, fa costruire 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 redigerne 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 porzioni 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 Meschino"), 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, al soldo di Francia, Spagna, Venezia, Papato, Ducato di Milano, Turchia, ecc... avendo come astuti condottieri i Busicchio, i Bua, i Peta, i Boccali, i Mathes, i Basta, i Renesi, etc... che eccellono per doti di comando e, purtroppo, anche per episodi di crudeltà, spesso gratuita, da cui non è immune lo stesso Skanderbeg, che si comporta con i metodi dei crudeli signori del tempo.

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

Carmine Abate, di M. Kuteli, D. Agolli, P. Istrati, M.Ahmeti, F. Kongoli, S. Godo, Kadare, Spasse, Migjeni, etc...

Scheda del libro:

Paolo Petta: "Stradioti – Soldati albanesi in Italia (sec. XV-XVIII)", pp. 156, €. 7,75.

Libri e cataloghi si possono richiedere presso:

2000 Argo p.s.c.r.l., Corte dell'Idume, 73100 Lecce -Tel.: 0832/241595 - Fax: 0832/303630.

The stradioti 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]



