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SERBS IN ASIA MINOR: 1313 AS THE BEGINNING OF THE EVRENOS DYNASTY?

Abstract: This paper reviews the possible origins of the Evrenos family, which spearheaded the Ottoman expansion in the Balkan Peninsula in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. First, it briefly introduces various approaches regarding Evrenos Gazi's ethnic and religious background. Second, relying on contemporary and near-contemporary primary sources, this paper shows how a Serbian military contingent campaigned alongside the Byzantines and their Muslim allies in Asia Minor in 1313. Lastly, it concentrates on the early political career of Evrenos' father Pranko Lazarat and traces his initial participation in Muslim political organizations in Asia Minor. In this way, relying on a number of Ottoman chroniclers and historians such as Aşıkpaşazade, this research will argue that Pranko Lazarat's political career in Asia Minor has started after the defeat of the Byzantine-Serbian expeditionary force in 1313.

Keywords: Evrenos Gazi, Byzantium, Ottoman Empire, Aydinids, Pranko Lazarat

“[And then there was the Famous Commander, that is, Evrenos Bey, who was the patron of pious deeds, the doer of good works, the courageous man who engaged in holy war, the tall and handsome man, he of excellent character, he who was a prince of the powerful. Most of the villages and towns comprising the interior of Rumeli were his conquests. That renowned Commander, he and his son have endowed pleasant soup kitchens (imarets) in seven different locations. It is related that when this famous Commander was residing in Gümülcine he was disturbed by some incident and moved to Siroz. At that point in time he turned his houses [in Gümülcine] into a soup kitchen (imaret). Afterwards he was unhappy and left there [Siroz] as well. When he came to Yenice Vardar he settled down there. Then he endowed his houses in Siroz to his imaret (soup kitchen). When the time had come that he journeyed to the other world [i.e., when he died] his Palace (saray) in Vardar was also turned into a soup kitchen (imaret). It is well known that the aforesaid pious Foundation is permitted to be the recipient of the incomes of several prosperous villages]”¹

¹ Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali Efendi, *Kitabü'l-Tarih-i Künhü'l-Ahbar* ed. Ahmet Uğur

Evrenos Gazi was a military and political leader who have arrived in Thrace with the Ottoman crossing of Hellespont after the 1350s. Early Ottoman sources reports that, he initially operated under the relative authority of the leading frontier figure in the region at the time, Hacı İlbeği.² With the demise of this figure after 1371, it appears that he began strengthening his regional position in Thrace, founding a new city in the plains of the river Axios by the name of Giannitsa (Yenice-i Vardar).³ Later, at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, he commanded the advance guards of the Ottoman army and served as the chief advisor of the Ottoman sultan thanks his familiarity with the landscape as well as the enemy military formations.⁴ Under the rule of Bayezid I, however, he focused on extending his political influence towards central and southern Greece, capturing the city of Tırhala and raiding several strategic locations including Corinth in Peloponnesus. In the subsequent years, Evrenos' military operations in the region were briefly interrupted due to the Ottoman military defeat against the Timurid forces at the Battle of Ankara in 1402 and following civil war between the warring Ottoman princes. Evrenos Bey played a central role during this period called Ottoman interregnum, since he appeared as a key figure in determining the ruling figure on the Ottoman throne providing military support to rival princes, Emîr Süleyman and Mehmed I. However, under Musa's short rule in Edirne, he came into conflict with the Ottoman state administration, a development which indicates the increasing tension and rivalry between the center and the frontier establishments in the Balkans at the time.⁵ On the seventeenth of 1417, Evrenos Bey had died to be buried in a mausoleum in his provincial center, Yenice-i Vardar, however, his descendants called Evrenosoğulları continued to exert a certain political influence in the Ottoman Balkans up until the end of the sixteenth century.⁶

(Kayseri: Erciyes Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1997), 126 The Turkish text reads: „Fe- amma eşher-i ümerası Evrenos Beğ'dir ki, sahib-i hayrat, ragıb-i meberrat, şir-merd-i pişe-i cihad, şeh-levend-i keramet-nihad bir emir-i büzürvar idi. Rum-ili 'nin İç-il 'i hükümündeki kura ve kasabatı ekseriyya ol feth itmişdir. Ol emir-i nam-dar kendinin ve evladının yedi yerde 'amayir-i latifesi vardır. Menkuldür ki, ol emir-i nam-dar evvela Gümülcine'de temekkün itmiş, bir hususa incinüb Siroz'da temekkün ider. Andağı evlerini 'ayniyle 'imaret tayin itmiş. Ba'dehu Siroz'da dahi hazz itmeyüb göçmüş. Vardar Yenicesi'ne varub ikamet itmiş. Bu kerre Siroz'daki evleri de 'amayir yirine mülhak itmiş. Vakta ki, sefer-i Ahiret'e gitmiş Vardar'daki saray dahi 'imaret olmuş. Meşhurdur ki, mezbur evkafda müsa'ade kasdına birkaç karye-i ma 'mure reca itmiş ... „, quoted in Heath Lowry and İsmail Erünsal, *The Evrenos Dynasty of Yenice Vardar: Notes Documents*, (Istanbul: Bahçeşehir University Press, 2010), 61.

² Adı asker içinde öteden beri gazalarda nam salmış Gazi Evrenos derler bahadır bir yiğit vardır. Sultan (Seyyid Ali) o yiğidi gazilere serasker tayin edip kalenin fethi için yollar. Bu arada Evrenos'a olur da başı sıkışırsa kendisinden himmet talep etmesini tembih eder. Seyyid Ali Sultan Velayetnamesi, ed. Rıza Yıldırım (Ankara: TTK, 2007), 20.

³ Heath W. Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 2003), 64.

⁴ Mehmed Nesri, *Kitab-i Cihan-Numa* ed. Faik Resit Unat and Mehmed Koymen, (Ankara: Turk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1957), 266.

⁵ Oruç Bey, *Oruç Beğ Tarihi*, ed. Necdet Öztürk, (İstanbul: Çamlıca Yay., 2008.), 45.

⁶ Heath W. Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (Albany, State University

Evrenos Gazi's ethnic and religious background have been a question of debate between scholars for more than a century. The first suggestion regarding the identity of this historical figure had made by an Austrian orientalist and historian by the name of Joseph Freiherr von Hammer who regarded Evrenos Gazi as a Greek renegade.⁷ This argument, however, later challenged by other researchers who presented various hypotheses regarding Evrenos Gazi's earlier career in the Karasid Emirate and his father's military activities in the Balkan Peninsula. Briefly, these approaches can be grouped into four main categories. Scholars including Hammer defended the idea that Evrenos Gazi was a Greek convert who participated in expanding Ottoman military structure, awakening to the nascent economic and political benefits in Bithynia in the first half of the thirteenth century.⁸ Besides this point of view, some others argued that Evrenos Gazi descended from a Latin warlord, possibly Catalan, who was active in the west Asia Minor in the early 1300s.⁹ Majority of scholars who are of Turkish origin, on the other hand, rejected these approaches, trying to connect his family line to Oghuz/Turkmen communities which have been present in the Balkans in the above-mentioned time period.¹⁰ Finally, last groups of scholars have developed a recent theory concerning the ethnic background of Evrenos Gazi in the latest years, revealing new findings about his Slavic ancestry.¹¹ In this section, I will briefly introduce various perspectives regarding the participation of Evrenos family into expanding Ottoman political organization and then defend my argument about Evrenos Gazi's ancestral lineage. I argue that Evrenos' father, "Branko Lazarat" -voluntarily or involuntarily- joined the military structure of the Aegean Turcoman principalities when the joint Byzantine-Serbian forces involved in armed conflicts between two rival Turkish strong men in the area, Sasa Bey and Aydınoğlu Mehmed Bey in the 1310s.

As stated earlier, Hammer led the discussions about the ancestral heritage of Evrenos Gazi, presenting him as a local Greek political figure who preferred to throw in his lots with the Ottomans. In defending this argument, he mainly relied on an Ottoman historical work by İdris-i Bitlisî who made an anachronistic connection between the Ottoman conquest of Bursa and the participation of Evrenos Gazi in the Ottoman military organization.¹² Therefore, according to Hammer's interpretation, Evrenos was the Greek governor of Bursa before

of New York Press, 2003), 64.

⁷ J. V. Hammer, *Osmanlı Devleti Tarihi I-II* (İstanbul: Üçdal Neşriyat, 1983), 114.

⁸ H. Adams Gibbons, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Kuruluşu* (Ankara: 21.Yüzyıl, 1998), 40.

⁹ İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devleti Teşkilatında Kapukulu Ocakları 2*, (Ankara: TTK, 1988), 49.

¹⁰ Kemal Karpat, "Gagauzların Tarihi Kökeni ve Folkloründen Parçalar" in *Balkanlarda Osmanlı Mirası ve Ulusçuluk*, (Ankara: İmge Yay., 2004), 385.

¹¹ Ayşegül Kılıç, "Evrenos Bey'in Babası Pranko Lazarat'ın (Pranko İsa) Vakfi Ve Türbesi", *GAMER*, I, 1 (2012): 62.

¹² Bitlisî gives the date of the conquest of Bursa as 706 (1306) according to Hijri calendar. However, this event had happened twenty years later in 1326. "Ol tekvur-i Bursa evvela Evrenos-ı bi-haya idi" İdris-i Bitlisî, *Heşt Bihîşt I*, ed. M. Karataş and S. Kaya-Y. Baş, (Ankara: Betav Yay., 2008), 172.

being converted to Islam; thus, thanks to his noble lineage, he was able carve out a career for himself in the Ottoman politics.¹³ Later, this standpoint was also shared by an American researcher by the name of Herbert Adams Gibbons who asserted the idea that the “western” elements in the early Ottoman principality were mainly responsible its rise as a regional power at the time. As put forward by him, the governor of Bursa, Evrenos, was disappointed with Constantinople’s disinterest in the Anatolian politics; therefore, he decided to cooperate with the Ottoman forces in return.¹⁴

This argument, however, severely criticized by later historians who presented a number of theories regarding Evrenos’ lineage. The Turkish historians in the early republican era, for example, relied on various strategies to prove Evrenos’ alleged connection with several Turkish communities active in the Balkans and west of Asia Minor. A highly influential Turkish scholar of the twentieth century, F. Köprülü spearheaded these criticisms, putting forward his etymologic claims in his attempts to reveal the “Turkish” origins of Evrenos name. According to him, the word “Evrenos” has a clear resemblance with an ancient Turkic word, “Evren” which means cosmos and appears in one of the earliest Turkic inscriptions, Kutadgu Bilig; therefore, Evrenos must be a Turkish given name.¹⁵ Afterwards, several non-Turkish researchers also began supporting this argument about Evrenos’ Turkish origins, presenting their own personal opinions without initiating a specific research on the issue. D. Nicol, for instance, is in the opinion that Evrenos Gazi was a Turkish military leader under the command of Michael Palaiologos, before declaring his allegiance to Osman Gazi.¹⁶ Colin Imber, on the other hand, seems to have followed the same patten, portraying him as a Turkish warlord who conquered Macedonia under the nominal authority of the Ottoman sultan.¹⁷ Besides these approaches, a Turkish historian called Kemal Karpat, reworted an idea which was expressed by Paul Wittek before, making a connection between the name, Evrenos and a mountain called Evren in the south of Varna. Thus, as he implies, Evrenos might have descended from a Turkish-Christian community by the name of Gagauz which has been mainly located in the Dobruja region in the late middle ages.¹⁸

Aside from this, a recent hypothesis was set forth by Heath Lowry who argued that Evrenos might have had a western European ancestry. Relying on the historical information provided by a Catalan chronicler Ramon Muntaner and Pachymeres, Lowry thinks that the leader of the Catalan contingent which joined the Turks in 1305, must have been the father of Evrenos Bey, İsa Prangı.¹⁹

¹³ J. V. Hammer, *Osmanlı Devleti Tarihi I-II* (İstanbul: Üçdal Neşriyat, 1983), 114.

¹⁴ H. Adams Gibbons, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Kuruluşu* (Ankara: 21.Yüzyıl, 1998), 40.

¹⁵ Fuad Köprülü, *Osmanlı Devleti'nin Kuruluşu* (Ankara: T.T.K, 1999), 83.

¹⁶ Theodore Spandounes, *On the Origins of the Ottoman Emperors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 15.

¹⁷ Colin Imber, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu 1300-1650* ed. Şiar Yalçın (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniv. Yay., 2006),17.

¹⁸ Kemal Karpat, “Gagauzların Tarihi Kökeni ve Folkloründen Parçalar” in *Balkanlarda Osmanlı Mirası ve Ulusçuluk*,” (Ankara: İmge Yay., 2004), 385.

¹⁹ Heath W. Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (Albany, State University

He further notes that there is a substantial possibility that “Prangi” is the distorted version of the word “Frengi” which signifies western European ancestry in the Islamic world. Therefore, he asserted that this Catalan lord might have developed a career for himself in the Karasid realm, being converted to Islam and participating in their military structure. Later, his son, Evrenos, appeared as one of the leading military figures at the time when the Ottomans began annexing the Karasid realm, a development which paved the way for him to join the Ottoman military structure and pursue new career opportunities in Thrace.

Finally, this approach was confuted by recent findings introduced by a Turkish scholar by the name of Ayşegül Kılıç who revealed Serbian origins of Evrenos’ father, İsa Prangi.²⁰ First, focusing on a relatively less known endowment records of Evrenos’ son, İsa Bey, she put forth that Evrenos’ father’s name was recorded in an atypical fashion as “Pranko Lazarat” in this document.²¹ Then, in an effort to confirm that this phrase is not made by mistake by the script, she compared the endowment record with other archival information which came down to us from the sixteenth century, finding out its widespread use in the Slavic-inhabited areas.²² Subsequently, she traced the use of “Pranko” in the Byzantine sources, concluding that the Serbian family/dynastic name, “Branković” was recorded as such in these documents. Also, considering that Evrenos’ father has a mausoleum where he died presumably during a military action in the region Kichevo in the Republic of North Macedonia today, she suggested the idea that this figure should have had ties with the regional Serbian aristocracy in this area.²³

This point of view was later partially shared by Heath Lowry who published a book in 2012 on the possible Serbian origins of Evrenos’ father “Pranko Lazarat”. However, he seems to not agree with Kılıç’s idea about the reading of “Pranko” as “Branković”, suggesting that this should have a distorted pronunciation of a Slavic name, “Branimir”. He further notes that this figure was probably a Serbian local lord who decided to throw in his lots with the “Ottomans”, converted to Islam and took the Muslim name İsa. His son, Evrenos, also converted to Islam retaining his Slavic name albeit in a distorted version.²⁴

Although I concur with the idea that Pranko Lazarat was a Serbian provincial lord who became Muslim, taking a new name, I do not think that he joined the “Ottomans” since they were not active in Thrace until a relatively late period. Secondly, I am not in the opinion that he participated in the Turkish military forces from the Balkans; instead, I think we should look to Anatolia. When the Ottomans had initiated their invasion of Karasid realm, Pranko Lazarat seems to have died afore. Therefore, early Ottoman chroniclers do not mention him;

of New York Press, 2003), 58.

²⁰ Ayşegül Çalı Değerli, „Gazi Evrenos Bey“ (Doctoral Thesis, Ankara University, 2011), 55.

²¹ *Ibid*, 59.

²² *Ibid*, 60.

²³ *Ibid*, 243.

²⁴ Lowry, W. Heath, *Fourteenth Century Ottoman Realities in Search of Hacı-Gazi Evrenos*, (Istanbul: Bahcesehir University Press, 2012), 8.

instead, they portray his son, Evrenos Gazi, as a full-grown raider lord active in the Karasid realm. I think they would somehow mention Pranko Lazarat in their works if he himself participated in the Ottoman military structure, considering his importance as the father of the Evrenos Gazi, who was the most prominent raider commander in the Balkans in the end of the fourteenth century. Indeed, Pranko Lazarat joined the Turkish forces who were militarily active in Thrace in the first half of the fourteenth century, however, these groups were not the Ottomans as Lowry argued in his book.

In this light, I argue that Pranko Lazarat joined the Turkish political establishments in the Aegean region in 1313 when a group of Serbian provincial soldiers engaged in military exploits against the Aydinid Emirate. Enveri states that a Turkish political figure, “the son-in-law of the ruler of Menteşe”, Emir Sasa Bey appeared in west Asia Minor in the early 1300s, rallying a substantial Turcoman military force round him.²⁵ First, he directed his attention to the Byzantine cities of Tire and Birgi, and then initiated his naval operations against the Byzantine islands by pillaging Chios.²⁶ At the same time, another Turkish lord, the commander of the Germiyanid forces, Mehmet Bey, seized the city of Ayasulug from the Byzantines and began appearing as a local power in the area.²⁷ Although these two Turkish lords cooperated against the Byzantines initially, later they came to see each other as regional rivals. Also, it appears that Mehmed had the military superiority over Sasa Bey at the time, since his military stance gradually strengthened with the participation of the Germiyanid units in his cause, a situation which eventually forced Sasa Bey to seek for allies to properly take up the challenge presented by Mehmed’s forces.²⁸ In such a situation, Enveri reports that Sasa Bey aligned himself with the “Christians”, in an attempt to achieve the balance against Mehmed Bey.²⁹ However, considering that the Byzantine regional authority was collapsing in the west Asia Minor after the Catalan withdrawal in 1304 and the subsequent fall of the Byzantine strategic locations in the area, it is not within the realm of possibility that Sasa Bey cooperated with a local Christian force; thus, we should look elsewhere.

Around the time when the intensity of the political rivalry between Sasa and Mehmed Beys had increased, the Byzantines were dealing with a group of Turkish raiders who led by a commander called Halil Ece in Thrace; however, I think, after the removal of this figure they carried their military operations to Anatolia in a bid to eliminate the “nests” of these raiders, having been supported by the Serbian provincial soldiers. The Byzantine sources hints that Halil Ece was one of the commanders of the Turcopole units in the Byzantine army.³⁰

²⁵ “Sasa beg derler idi bir yazi er gelmiş Aydın eline evvel meger.” *Le Destan D’Umur Pacha*. ed. Irene Melikoff-Sayar, (Presses Universitaires de France: Paris, 1954), 47.

²⁶ “Evveli Birgi’yi feth eylemiş Aydinogluni getürmiş toylamış.” *Ibid*, 47.

²⁷ “Aydinoğlu Ayasolugı gelüp feth eder hem da’iresini alup.” *Ibid*, 47.

²⁸ “Beş qarındaş idi işbunlar tamam, ulusi Mehmed beg anun nik o nam/ biri Osman u Qaraman u Hasen Hamza begdür kiçisi ki dinle sen/ Germiyan elinden edüp fethi bab, Germiyan tutaridi ana rikab.” *Ibid*, 46.

²⁹ Hem hasedden fitne Sasa eyledi, mu’miniken avn-i tersa eyledi.” *Ibid*, 48.

³⁰ Pachymeres, George. Georges Pachymèrès, *Relations Historiques* 13, ed. Albert Failler, (Paris, 1984–2000), 695.

However, sensing the political and economic opportunities that had aroused in Thrace in the early 1300s, he decided to participate in the Catalan company, offering his military service to them.³¹ After the departure of the Catalans to the central Greece, however, he preferred to stay behind, focusing on his raiding activities in Macedonia and Eastern Thrace. Having cut the connection between Constantinople and Thessaly, Halil Ece gradually became a source of concern for the Byzantines who made a purported agreement with him, promising a safe-conduct to him and his companions on their return to Anatolia. In fact, the Byzantines had other plans as they requested a military assistance from their allies at the time, the Serbians, who sent a contingent of two thousand feudal cavalries to support their operations.³² It seems that at the end of the military conflicts, the allies were able to overcome their opponents, killing some of them and forcing others to surrender to the Genoese to be sold as slaves in Galata district.³³ However, the Byzantine-Serbian military activities did not end here as Oikonomides convincingly argues that after the elimination of Halil's forces, a second Serbian cavalry detachment had arrived.³⁴ According to him, considering that Thrace was cleared from the Turks as of 1312, the Byzantines directed these units to the area where the raiders have originated from: the Aegean region.³⁵

In this light, I argue that when the allied forces arrived in the Aegean coast, they aligned themselves with Sasa Bey who stuck in a challenging situation in the face of Aydinid Mehmed Bey's growing political influence in the region; however, the allies had been defeated in the ensuing battles which resulted in the imprisonment of some of the provincial Serbian lords. Enveri reports that at the time when allied Christian forces appeared in the Aegean coast, Sasa Bey's military capabilities were severely diminishing due to the reinforcements that Mehmed Bey secured from the Germiyanid principality. In the face of such a situation, Sasa tried to throw in his lots with the newly appeared Byzantine-Serbian force, turning his old enemies into friends.³⁶ Oikonomides asserts that, this expedition was in a piratical character; that is, they did not aim to have long-term territorial gains.³⁷ Instead, reinforced by the Serbian contingents, the Byzantines sought to make a display of power, in a bid to give a clear mes-

³¹ Nicolas Oikonomides, "The Turks in Europe (1305-13) and the Serbs in Asia Minor (1313)", *The Ottoman Emirate (1300-1389)* ed. Elizabeth Zachariadou. (Rethymnon: Crete University Press, 1993), 163.

³² *Ibid*, 166.

³³ "εἰς τὸν βασιλέα, στέ οἱ ἐν Αἰγὸς Ποταμοῖς καὶ ἐν τῇ Συκῇ βαρβαροὶ παρά τῶν ἡμετέρων ἀπωλοντο." Manuelis Philae, *Carmina* ed. E. Miller, v. I, (Paris: Excusum in Typographico Imperiali, 1855), 220-225.

³⁴ Nicolas Oikonomides, "The Turks in Europe (1305-13) and the Serbs in Asia Minor (1313)", *The Ottoman Emirate (1300-1389)* ed. Elizabeth Zachariadou. (Rethymnon: Crete University Press, 1993), 166.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 166.

³⁶ Nicolas Oikonomides, "The Turks in Europe (1305-13) and the Serbs in Asia Minor (1313)", *The Ottoman Emirate (1300-1389)* ed. Elizabeth Zachariadou. (Rethymnon: Crete University Press, 1993), 168.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 163.

sage to their enemies that they still have the capabilities to engage in military operations in the area. As hinted by Enveri, the Byzantine army initially joined Sasa Bey's forces and then, they headed towards the headquarter of Mehmed Bey in Ayasulug. However, it appears that they were subsequently defeated by Mehmed Bey's forces, a development which forced the Byzantines to withdraw from the area and Sasa Bey to surrender to his enemies to be executed, being accused as the enemy of the faith. Regarding these military encounters between the two parties, Enveri says that Mehmed Bey's forces "killed and vanquished the infidels".³⁸ He also adds that Mehmed Bey gained so much loot from the vanquished enemy.³⁹ Referring to these verses, I think, some of the feudal Serbian lords have fallen captive to the Aydinids and then carve out a career for themselves in their military structure, being converted to Islam. The word that Enveri used to signify the defeat of the Christians was "sımak". This is an old Anatolian Turkish word to convey the idea of submission of the enemy by force, but not necessarily by killing. An early Ottoman chronicler who wished to write about a surrendering or routing enemy unit during a military encounter could also use the same word. Aşıkpaşazade, for instance, rely on the verb "sımak" in the same context while conveying the idea of the "submission" of the infidels of Moldovia during Mehmed II's campaigns in the area.⁴⁰ The other word that Enveri used on to signal the defeat of the Christians in the same sentence was "kırmak" which obviously means to kill. However, I think Enveri does not use these words as synonyms; instead, he wants to give the message that, after the military defeat of the Christians, -at least some of them- accepted the authority of Mehmed Bey. Besides Enveri's work, there is no other primary source evidence which relates the armed conflicts between Sasa and Mehmed Bey at the time, however, Pranko Lazarat's military activities in Thrace and his subsequent demise in southern Macedonia -possibly- in the 1330s seems to support this view.

We do not have any reliable historical data which indicates that the Ottomans engaged in military operations in southern Macedonia until 1360s and even 1370s; however, it is known that Aydinid Umur Bey was militarily active in the area to support his Byzantine ally, John VI Kantakouzenos long before that time.⁴¹ On top of that, the Byzantine sources reports that he had lost a considerable number of his troops while participating in raiding activities in the area adjacent to Thessaloniki.⁴² Therefore, I argue that Paranko Lazarat who

³⁸ "Geldi beş qardaşı ile dèrdi çeri, uyrşuban qirdi sıdı kafiri." Le Destan D'Umur Pacha. ed. Irene Melikoff-Sayar, (Presses Universitaires de France: Paris, 1954), 47.

³⁹ "Ol yazada qatl oldı ol dahi, çoq yanimet mal alur mir-i sahi." Ibid, 48.

⁴⁰ The phrase Aşıkpaşazade used is as follows: "Anı beyan ider kim padişah Kara Bogdan'ı kim sıdı, döndi, Tuna kenarına geldi." Regarding "Kara Bogdan'ı kim sıdı" part, since it is not possible to "kill" a geographical location, the author clearly wants to give the message about the submission of at least a group of Moldovian population. Aşıkpaşazade, *Osmanoğulları'nın Tarihi* ed. Kemal Yavuz and Yekta Saraç, (İstanbul: MAS Matbaacılık, 2003), 542.

⁴¹ Nikephorus Gregoras, *Nicephori Gregorae Byzantina Historia Vol 2*, ed. Ludwig Schopen and Immanuel Bekker (Bonn: Weber, 1829), 652.

⁴² "ἐπει δ' ἡ φορά τοῦ χειμῶνος ἐκείνου νύκτωρ καί μεθ' ἡμεραν αἶε πρὸς τό

had a new name, İsa, after his conversion, had lost his life during the Aydınlı campaigns in the Balkans; that is why Evrenos Gazi commissioned the erection of a mausoleum for his father in Kirchevo later. Although I agree with the fact that there had been other Turcoman raiding units active in Thrace in the first half of the fourteenth century, many of them were led by lowborn opportunistic Turcoman ringleaders; therefore, it is not very convincing to argue that a relatively high-ranking provincial lord possibly from a Serbian aristocratic family would join them.⁴³ One exception to that might be, Karasid Yahşi Bey who was militarily active in Thrace in the 1330s; however, he was not a successful political figure in Thrace as was defeated by the Byzantines on two different occasions. Aside from this, another question regarding Pranko Lazarat's decision to join the Turks could be worded as follows: Did Pranko Lazarat anticipate the rise of a great Turcoman Emirate in the Balkans beforehand, rushing to side with them to share their material and political gains?⁴⁴ This seems also implausible to me, thinking that Serbia under the rule of Nemanjić dynasty was a prosperous nation, capable of extending his political and economic influence as far as Adrianople in the east and Peloponnesus in the south. Therefore, it is not convincing to argue that a Serbian provincial aristocrat willingly joins the Turks in Anatolia during the heyday of the Serbian Empire in the pre-1355 period.

Besides this, Evrenos' age at the year of his death also reinforces my argument since considering that he was over one hundred in 1417, he must have been born in the 1310s.⁴⁵ Although it was mentioned by some of the Ottoman chroniclers that Evrenos Gazi had died at the age of one hundred twenty-nine, this seems to be an exaggeration.⁴⁶ However, thinking that Evrenos was a fully-grown military figure during the Ottoman annexation of the Karasid realm in the 1340s, it appears that he was at least close to one hundred when he died. Lowry thinks that Evrenos was a Serbian warrior who followed his father's footsteps

ακμιαίτερον προύκοπτε, και ανελπιστον τέως ετίθει τό του αέρος μειδιάμα, και άμα πολλη και συνεχής τις έπενεμετο φθορά τόν Περσικών στρατόν, ήν ή του χριμόνος έτικτεν ύχημή και προς γε τών άναγκαιών ή άπορια[...]" Ibid, 652.

⁴³ While Lowry does not reject the possibility of the aristocratic background of Pranko Lazarat, Kılıç thinks that he must have been descended from a Serbian noble family based in Macedonia. Lowry, W. Heath, *Fourteenth Century Ottoman Realities in Search of Hacı-Gazi Evrenos*, (Istanbul: Bahcesehir University Press, 2012), 8. Ayşegül Çalı Değerli, „Gazi Evrenos Bey“ (Doctoral Thesis, Ankara University, 2011), 61.

⁴⁴ It was argued by several scholars that the monks of Athos, for example, perceived the rise of the Ottomans in the Balkans in advance, hurrying to secure an official document from the Ottoman sultan, Orhan, in a bid to enjoy their economic privileges in the future. Elizabeth Zachariadou, „Monks and Sailors Under the Ottoman Sultans” *Oriente Moderno* 20/81 (2001): 141.

⁴⁵ „May God illumine his grave and may his dust be fragrant to the mercy of Almighty God, and his approbation, on Wednesday, the seventh of the month of Shawwal in the year 820 of the Hijra [Wednesday, November 17, 1417].” quoted in Heath Lowry and İsmail Erünsal, *The Evrenos Dynasty of Yenice Vardar: Notes Documents*, (Istanbul: Bahçesehir University Press, 2010), 136.

⁴⁶ According to this calculation, he must have been born in the 1280s, which seems to be highly unlikely.

and converted to Islam.⁴⁷ As I mentioned before, he gives the original name of Evrenos' father Branko as Branimir therefore, he thinks that "Branko" cannot be associated with the royal "Branković" family.⁴⁸ I also concur with this approach, however, locating the birth of Evrenos Gazi to the post-1313 period. We do not have any historical records which indicates Evrenos as "Abdullah" which is a name given to the new converts. Besides this, some of the early chronicles shunned from portraying him as a convert. Therefore, I think, conversely, he seems to have born Muslim retaining his family name "Vranješ, Vranešić, Vraneš" which is still a common surname among the Slavic people in the Balkans (one example is Slavko Vraneš who is a Montenegrin former professional basketball player, and the other example is Jurica Vranješ, a Croatian former professional footballer). This pattern is also observable among other frontier families, for instance, it is also known that Malkoçoğlu (Malković) was a Serbian warrior family which participated in the Ottoman military organization after the Battle of Maritsa in 1371, adjusting to the realpolitik in the region at the time.⁴⁹ Founder of this family, Malkoç Bey, had been even assigned as one of the commanders of the advance guards during the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, which gave way to the "Kosovo Myth", becoming important forming Serbian national identity.⁵⁰

Therefore, the question arises: Why did Evrenos Gazi was operating under the Karasid banner if his father, Pranko Lazarat, was an Aydinid commander? The answer is simple: the raider leaders under the command of the Turcoman lords were highly independent in their military actions, being ready to change their allegiance whenever a better opportunity arose in the neighboring principalities.⁵¹ As I mentioned before, Pachymeres states that a considerable number of troops from the Aegean Turcomans had joined the Ottomans in pursuit of the material gains before the Battle of Bapheus in 1302.⁵² Also, we know that Aydinid Umur Bey and Sarukhanid Süleyman Bey were conducting their military operation together in Thrace in the 1330s and 40s, having been supported

⁴⁷ Lowry, W. Heath, *Fourteenth Century Ottoman Realities in Search of Haci-Gazi Evrenos*, (Istanbul: Bahcesehir University Press, 2012), 8.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 8.

⁴⁹ Fatih Bayram, "Sultan I. Ahmed Tarafından Sadrazam Malkoçoğlu Ali Paşa'ya Tevcih Edilen Engürüs Seferi Serdarlığı Berati" *Dîvân* 33/44 (2018), 94.

⁵⁰ Mesut Uğurlu, "Kosova Efsanesi" *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları (HÜTAD)* 14, (2011): 241.

⁵¹ In his historical work, Oruç Bey presents the intimate relationship that Aydinid Mehmed Bey had formed with other western Anatolian principalities. According to him, when Süleyman Paşa attempted to cross to Anatolia, leaving his possessions behind in Thrace, Mehmed Bey prevented this saying to him that "you are not allowed to move to Anatolia". "O vakit el beğlerinden Aydın Beğ'in oğlunun oğlu Gazi Umur Beğ deniz yüzünde gemilerle gazilerle gaza ederdi. Evliyalığı zahir olmuş er idi. Süleyman Paşa, Bolayır'ı aldıka Gazi Umur Beğ beraberdi. Süleyman Paşa'ya: «Paşa Sultan! Şimdiden sonra artık Anadolu'ya geçmeye sana izin yoktur.» dedi. Süleyman Paşa, Umur Beğ'in sözünü dikkate aldı. Takdirde olsa gerekti." Oruç Bey, *Üç Osmanlı Tarihi- Oruç Bey Tarihi*, ed. Nihal Atsız, (İstanbul: Ötüken, 2011), 35.

⁵² Georges Pachymérés, *Relations Historiques* 10, ed. Albert Failler, (Paris, 1984–2000), 365.

by the Karasid military units.⁵³ Aside from Umur Bey's traversing the Karasid realm to reach the Hellespont, Karasid commanders were also active in Thrace concurrently; thus, they must have had personal bonds with the raider units who were operating under other Turcoman lords.⁵⁴ Therefore, the increasing crusader threat towards the western Anatolian principalities in the 1330s and 1340s and occasional military defeats in the Aegean as well as Thrace, made it unfruitful for at least some of the Aydinid lords to stay in a defensive position.⁵⁵ Besides this, the death of Pranko Lazarat in the Balkans during these military operations, might have personally urged Evrenos Gazi to look for other political opportunities in the adjacent territories. Therefore, in my opinion, he threw in his lots with the Karasids, deeming this move as the best option for his future political career in the region.

In essence, reinforced by the Serbian provincial cavalry forces, the Byzantines initially managed to eliminate the Turkish raiders in Thrace in 1312 and then, launch a counterattack against the Aegean Turcoman principalities in the following year. A local lord in the region by the name of Sasa Bey who was put in a difficult political situation by Aydinid Mehmed Bey, welcomed the aggressors with open arms, rushing to make an alliance with them. Subsequently, the allies could not fulfil their political objectives in the area, having been defeated by Aydinid forces which led to the imprisonment of several Serbian lords by the Aydinids. Pranko Lazarat was probably one of the Serbian captives who later converted to Islam and initiated a new political career for himself as a Muslim raider commander this time. After the death of this figure during the Aydinid military operations in Macedonia in 1330s and 40s, his son, Evrenos, seems to have participated in the Karasid military structure, looking for a better political career himself in this frontier principality. This later paved the way for Evrenos to pursue new political opportunities and establish his own political enterprise in Thrace in the subsequent period following the Ottomans annexation of the Karasid realm in the 1340s.

⁵³ Enveri says that Sarukhanid Süleyman Bey had lost his life due to an illness during the campaigns in Thrace: "Saruhan oğlu Süleyman beg ki var, haste oldu yolda qıldılar qarar." *Le Destan D'Umur Pacha*. ed. Irene Melikoff-Sayar, (Presses Universitaires de France: Paris, 1954), 125.

⁵⁴ Feridun Emecen, *İlk Osmanlılar ve Batı Anadolu Beylikler Dünyası*, (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2016), 247.

⁵⁵ "Bildî paşa kim gelür çoqluq firenk, içleri kin tolu tişlaridi cenk/ görünür bu söz-deken nağah gemi, toldurup avaz-i yavya aleml/ gemilertün kimisidi Rodosun kimi Babosun kimi Eyribosun." *Le Destan D'Umur Pacha*. ed. Irene Melikoff-Sayar, (Presses Universitaires de France: Paris, 1954), 111.

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СРБИ У МАЛОЈ АЗИЈИ: 1313. КАО ПОЧЕТАК ДИНАСТИЈЕ ЕВРЕНОС?

Питање етногенезе и религиозности Гази Евреноса одавно је део академских дискусија. Научници из различитих дисциплина покушавали су да објасне порекло Евренос династије, али ипак нису успели пронаћи одговарајуће упориште за своје претпоставке. У једној недавно објављеној студији о Отоманском вакуфу у Северној Грчкој Ајзегул Дегерли навела је могуће српске везе Евреноса оца Иса Прангија који се помиње као „Пранко Лазарат“. Касније је сличну идеју поделио и Хит Лори који Пранко препознаје као Бранковић. У овом раду се говори о политичким околностима у Малој Азији и на Балкану крајем тринаестог и почетком четрнаестог столећа. Посебна пажња је указана Каталанцима, као и чињеници да се српско-турска сарадња није окончала елиминацијом турака. Ослањајући се на отоманске изворе, у раду се говори о српским војним великашима који су врло вероватно пали у руке Ајдинида, тако да су постепено почели служити њиховим јединицама. Пранко Лазарат је можда један од таквих појединаца будући да је његов маузолеј подигнут у Кичеву, данас у Републици Северној Македонији. Он је по свим приликама изгубио живот на страни ајдинидских војних јединица у периоду од 1330. до 1340. Његов син Евренос Гази је постао истакнут великаш на турској страни (Карасиди), али је сасвим могуће претпоставити и реконструисати његову прошлост и корене.