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# ETHNIC MINORITY IN REGIONALIZATION

## THE CASE OF TURKS IN WESTERN THRACE

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### *I Introduction*

Western Thrace attracted the writer because of the presence of a Turkish population as an ethnic minority. In general, in the process of regionalization, an ethnic minority plays an important role, without which the process itself cannot be understood at all, because the ethnic minority is an essential component of the region. At the same time, the writer has long been interested in the socio-economic regionalization of modern Turkey. He wished to gather some information, which might enable him to compare the Turkish groups in the Republic of Turkey with those in Western Thrace in Greece, in connection with regionalization.

The writer visited Western Thrace at the end of 1980. He stayed at Komotini, which is the administrative center of Rodopi, one of the three prefectures of Western Thrace. During his eleven-day stay, he visited some villages around Komotini to interview both Greek and Turkish villagers. He also visited the prefectural office of Rodopi and the Turkish consulate general in Komotini, in order to obtain available materials. Further, he visited some Greek experts on the problems concerned, and some intellectuals and religious leaders of the Turkish communities, in order to discuss the minority situation with them.

### *II Brief Guide to Western Thrace in Connection with the Turkish Minority*

Western Thrace is located at the extreme northeastern corner of Greece, being bordered by the river Nestos on the west and by the river Maritsa on the east. Modern Thrace is the southern part of ancient Thrace (see Schmieder). It is divided into Western (or Greek) Thrace and Eastern (or Turkish) Thrace by the river Maritsa. Western Thrace comprises three prefectures of Greece: Xanthi, Rodopi and Evros, from west to east. It is 8,578 km<sup>2</sup> in area, 6.5% of

the country's total. Its population was 329,582 persons in 1971, only 3.8% of the national total (Statistical Yearbook, pp. 17-18).

Western Thrace, as part of medieval Thrace, was until recently inhabited by Turks as the majority ethnic group of the area. The present majority group, however, is Greek. The percentage of the Turks among the total population of Western Thrace was as high as 85 in 1921 (*Impact International*), while the equivalent figure for the present is in the range of 30 to 36. In Komotini, there were 17,500 Turks and 3,500 Greeks in 1920, the mufti of Komotini told to the writer. This implies that the share of the Turkish population was 83.3% in 1920. Now, however, the equivalent share is about 50%. The present Turkish population in the whole of Western Thrace is estimated to be 100,000 to 120,000 (De Jong, 1980b), of which about 75% are rural dwellers, and as the total population of Western Thrace was 329,582 persons in 1971 (Statistical Yearbook, p. 13), the ratio of the Turkish population to the whole is about 30 to 36 as mentioned above.

The Turks are the overwhelming major component of the Muslim population of the area, being followed by the Pomaks, who are concentrated in the mountainous district of Rodopi prefecture in the northern part of the area. Pomaks speak firstly Bulgarian, secondly Turkish and thirdly Greek in their daily life. Their ethnic identification is a matter of dispute. In the Greek opinion, the Pomaks are Greeks, because their ancestors are Macedonians, noted for their King Alexander the Great. Bulgarians, however, insist that the Pomaks are Bulgarians without doubt since they speak Bulgarian as their mother tongue, though they are living in Greek territory for the moment. Finally, the Turks in Western Thrace regard the Pomaks as an ethnic group very close to themselves, since not only are they Muslims but also they speak more and more Turkish in their daily life (see *Gerçek*, May 16, 1981). The Pomak population in Greek territory is said to be about 30,000 (De Jong, 1980b, p. 95). On the other side of the Rodopi mountains, which belong to Bulgaria, there are said to be about 45,000 Pomaks (oral information from a Greek expert). Muslim minorities in Western Thrace include sedentary Gypsies, too; their number is said to be about 5,000 (De Jong, 1980b, p. 95)

Western Thrace today is the most thinly populated area in Greece after Epirus. Its population density was 35.4 persons per square kilometer in 1971, comparing with the national average of 66.4 in the same year.

The economic activity of Western Thrace is almost exclusively based on agriculture. Because of its economic backwardness, Western Thrace is, along with the Aegean Islands region, the poorest region officially defined by the Greek Government (cf. Greek law L. 289/1976). Western Thrace is ranked first in Greece for the extensivity of its agriculture. The percentage of the area of extensive field of the total crop land area in Western Thrace was 92.6, highest in Greece, in 1978; the mean percentage for the country in that year

was 60.7 (Agricultural Statistics, p. 29).

Western Thrace is noted for its tobacco production. The Turks in Western Thrace are regarded as the best tobacco growers in Greece (oral information from a Japanese expert tobacco buyer). The tobacco raised here is the so-called Oriental type. This acquires the best quality when it is grown in a field with little water and little fertility (oral information from several Japanese expert buyers in Greece and Turkey). The Turks in the area have a common tendency to settle in the relatively higher parts of the area, as will be shown later. The higher the location, the dryer and the less fertile the land is. So, even leaving aside the skillfulness of the Turks (tobacco growing was originally introduced from Turkey to Greece), they can be regarded as better tobacco growers because of the better location of their lands for tobacco growing.

**Table 1 West Thracian Position in Greek Tobacco Production**

	Area sown		Production	
	Greece	Thrace	Greece	Thrace
Irrigated land	100.0	2.1	100.0	1.2
Non-irrigated land	100.0	12.2	100.0	10.6

Source: Agricultural Statistics of Greece, Year 1978, p. 38

### *III Historical Background of Western Thrace*

The establishment of the Province of Rumelia of Ottoman Turkey opened up the region to settlement by the Turkish population (Carter, pp. 281-2, Schmieder, p. 209). Komotini, or Gümülcüne, as it is called in Turkish, saw its first Turk in 1361; his name was Gazi Evrenos Bey (oral information from a Turkish teacher in a village north of Komotini).

At the end of World War I, the Turkish population was such a clear ethnic majority in the region that Western Thrace was excluded from the compulsory exchange of Muslim and Greek Orthodox minorities agreed upon by the Treaty of Lausanne of 30 January 1923. (This fact of exclusion, incidentally, permits us to regard Western Thrace as a region – an areal unit – as far as the Muslim population is concerned.) The treaty granted the Turkish population certain rights of religious freedom and self-education with the right of the maintenance of *awqafs* or religious foundations.

Article 40 of the Treaty of Lausanne states as follows: “*Traité de Paix, signé à Lausanne le 24 juillet 1923. Article 40. Les ressortissants turcs appartenant à des minorités non-musulmanes jouiront du même traitement et des mêmes garanties droit et en fait que les autres ressortissants turcs. Ils auront*

notamment un droit égal à créer, diriger et contrôler à leurs frais toutes institutions charitables, religieuses ou sociales, toutes écoles et autres établissements d'enseignement et d'éducation, avec le droit d'y faire librement usage de leur propre langue et d'y exercer librement leur religion. And article 45: Les droits reconnus par les stipulations de la présente Section aux minorités non-musulmanes de la Turquie, sont également reconnus par la Grèce à minorité musulmane se trouvant sur son territoire."

At the end of 1910s, some Greeks came to the area in spite of the legal prohibition, escaping from Anatolia where the war for Turkish national independence was going on. In 1923, there were no more than 7 or 8 Greek villages in the region. Greek immigrants built houses and cultivated land. Mr. Venizeros of Greece, thus, visited Ankara in 1930 to get an *ex post facto* allowance from the Turkish authorities, and entered into an agreement. It is reported that "in the whole period of 1939 to 1951, about 20,000 people left the region for Turkey. Migration to Turkey continues to the present day . . . In addition, owing to settlement and natural increase, the Greek population of Western Thrace has multiplied at least six times, so that the Muslim element, from being a majority, has now become a minority" (De Jong, 1980b, p. 96).

Since 1967 (*Gerçek* Mar. 4, 1981), when tensions between Greece and Turkey increased on account of the occurrence of conflict in Cyprus (cf. *Asahi Shimbun*, Mar. 16, Sep. 10, Nov. 17, 17 [evening], 18 [evening], 19, 24, 25, Dec. 5, and 30, 1967), the number of Turkish migrants from Western Thrace to Turkey has sharply increased. Since then, the Turks in Western Thrace have become to complain of being deprived of the right to obtain licences for driving cars or tractors, to buy immovables including cultivated land, to repair their own houses, to be allowed business licences, and to have access to official loans or credit (*Gerçek*, Mar. 4, 1981). They also have begun to complain of the deterioration of educational conditions in their community's schools and of reductions in the number of Muslim teachers in favor of Greek Orthodox teachers. "Since 1968," De Jong states, "only graduates from a special teacher training college in Thessaloniki are qualified to be teachers at the community's schools" (De Jong, 1980b, p. 98).

On November 12, 1980, the Greek parliament passed a law relating to the *awqafs* of the Muslim communities in Western Thrace. The *awqafs* have financed cultural and educational as well as religious institutions of the Muslim communities. They have also helped the poor of the communities. The situation which followed this new law or Act 1091/1980, was described by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of December 3, 1980, as follows: "Griechische Türken Protestieren, Athen (AP) Führende Vertreter der türkischen Minderheit in Griechenland haben sich über die Verabschiedung eines Gesetzes beschwert, durch das sie ihre Rechte beeinträchtigt sehen. Wie in Athen verlautete, haben zwei griechische Parlamentsabgeordnete türkischer Abstammung bei Staats-

präsident Karamanlis protestiert und mit der Niederlegung ihrer Mandate gedroht, falls das Gesetz nicht annulliert wird. Nach dem vor zwei Wochen verabschiedeten Gesetz sind die Verwaltungsgremien von Einrichtungen der türkischen Minderheit, etwa von Moscheen oder Schulen, künftig von den griechischen Behörden aus einer Kandidatenliste auszuwählen, die von der türkischen Gemeinde vorgelegt wird. Bisher konnte die türkische Gemeinde ihre Vertrauensleute direkt wählen. Die etwa 100 000 Türken in Nordost-Griechenland sehen in der Neuregelung einen Verstosß gegen ihren in Friedensvertrag von Lausanne 1923 fixierten Status."

The *Impact International* writes: "Before the military coup of 1967, the directors (*müdürs*) used to be elected by the local Muslims, but the junta took over the power of nominating the *müdürs*. However, in practice both the urban *awqaf* continued to be managed by elected *mutawallis* (trustees) under the supervision of the muftis of Komotini (Hüseyin Mustafa) and Xanthe (Mustafa Hilmi)." The muftis are the accredited and acknowledged religious leaders of the community.

The right to elect the *müdürs* will be restored to the Muslim population as before by the new law, but at the cost of the following conditions according to a Turkish newspaper. Firstly, the administrative boards for the arrangement of the Muslim minority, such as mosques or schools, will be chosen by the Greek authorities from a candidate list presented by the Muslim communities. Each *awqaf* should be maintained on a self-paying basis, instead of under mutual aid as it has been done until the enforcement of the new law. Small *awqafs* cannot be maintained under this condition. And the budget for each *awqaf* is required by the new law to be presented for checking by the prefect (cf. *Hürriyet Gazetesi*, Jan. 9, 1981).

The deterioration of the living conditions of the Muslim communities in Greece observed by the Turkish side is explained by Greeks almost uniformly in the following way. The Greek population in Turkey (in Istanbul, Gökçeada and Bozcaada) has gone down from 119,400 in 1934 to 19,190 in 1977 – evidently because of suppression in present Turkey (to quote *Impact International*). On the other hand, the Muslim population in Western Thrace has not at all diminished. This fact proves the generosity of the Greek people toward the Turkish minority. The Turkish side seems most likely to deny this kind of explanation. In the writer's personal opinion, it may be quite difficult to come to any final conclusion without objective surveys and particularly without considering the different living conditions between the footloose Greek merchants in Istanbul and the sedentary Turkish peasants in rural Greece.

#### *IV Some Aspects of Regionalization in Western Thrace*

##### *IV-a Strong Inclination for Islam Shown by the Turkish Inhabitants*

Any visitor to Western Thrace can observe a common and clear tendency among the Turkish inhabitants, as soon as one establishes contact with them. This is their strong inclination for Islam, irrespective of age, sex, or degree of education.

One day during the writer's stay in Western Thrace, the mufti of Xanthi told him that there was almost no Turk in Western Thrace who did not attend mosque on Friday. If one could not attend, even for good reasons, he had to have the sense of sin.

The mufti is the highest leader of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, his leadership being not merely confined to religious affairs. Thus, the then Prime Minister Rallis addressed his reply, dated Jan. 30, 1981, to the note of protest by the 62 representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace (Dec. 12, 1980), to the muftis of Xanthi and Komotini (cf. *Gerçek*, Mar. 4, 1981). The writer observed, in a clerk's room of the mufti of Komotini, when he visited him, that two small boys in their early teens addressed the mufti in a highly courteous way.

No Muslim woman in Western Thrace walks in the street without being veiled, according to the Muslim custom.

There are, of course, various ways of thinking, from progressive to conservative, among the Turks in Western Thrace. Even someone who behaves as a leftist, however, seems to believe in Islam deeply. Thus, the Turks in Western Thrace are united firmly as Muslim people. The Turks' religious unity may be due in fact partly to their hard circumstances. They may strive to realize their ethnic identity through being more religious.

This reminds the writer, who is interested in the Tatars, an ethnic minority in present-day Japan, that a leader of their community one day told him why the Tatars are as religious as Muslims. If Japanese society were more open to them, he explained, the Tatars might not be so religious and united.

It is a rather common experience for present-day visitors to the Republic of Turkey to find a lot of intellectuals who are attracted to Kemal Atatürk, at least partly because of his establishment of religious freedom in Turkey. Some of them never attended a mosque. The religious atmosphere among the Turks in Western Thrace is very different from that in the Republic of Turkey, though both populations are equally Muslims.

##### *IV-b Vertical Distribution of Communes by Ethnic Group in Western Thrace*

There are no official data to identify communes by ethnic group in present-day Greece. In addition, "since 1977 all Turkish geographical names have been replaced by Greek names and the use of these Turkish names in

official documents, petitions, etc., and in print has equally been prohibited" (De Jong, 1980a, pp. xii-xiii). It is not easy to identify each commune by ethnic group. De Jong, of the University of Leiden, has, through his field work in Western Thrace, much improved on Klaus Kreiser's work 'Die Siedlungsnamen Westthakiens nach amtlichen Verzeichnissen und Kartenwerken,' published in 1978. Most communes in Western Thrace have been identified ethnically as a result of De Jong's work. But this excellent work is still incomplete. The writer tried to fill in some missing pieces through his field work, helped by several Turkish informants in Rodopi Prefecture. Though his work was confined to Rodopi Prefecture, there are still 15 unidentified communes, or 8.4% of the total number of the communes, in the prefecture.

The communes are classified into three zones geographically, by altitude: lower than 200m, between 200 and 600m, and higher than 600m. Though this classification was rather conventionally done, deriving from the coloured expression of altitude in the base map utilized, the result is interesting for what it discloses of the social relations among the ethnic groups in Rodopi Prefecture. The result is shown in Table 2 and Figure 1.

This result may be interpreted in two ways. In the first interpretation, the Muslim inhabitants might have been evicted from the lower and flatter area in the course of history, as the Greek inhabitants in occupying it. In the second interpretation, the Muslim inhabitants might have missed (or have been obliged to miss) their chances to descent into the lower and flatter area in the course of modern history, when the lower and flatter area has gained more economic and cultural value mainly because of innovations in transportation and communication and the eradication of malaria.

Considering the real course of the history of the region, the latter interpretation seems to be by far the more rational. In other words, most of the Muslim inhabitants of the region have not – or, more likely, could not have – adapted well to the modern capitalistic way of life, which has developed in the lower and flatter area.

It can be observed, thus, that the relatively urban Greeks and the relatively rural Muslims, most of whom are Turks, are co-existing in the process of the development of modern capitalism, the former living in the relatively lower and flatter area, relatively richer and more civilized; the latter in the relatively higher and more ragged area, relatively poorer and less civilized. "Civilized" means, of course, in this context, civilized in a capitalistic way. The two ethnic groups are co-existing within a system which is based on conflict. Logically, regionalization cannot be realized without some kind of conflict, because regionalization is always in the process of development, and development always requires conflict. The question is what form the conflict takes. In Western Thrace, Greeks seem to be scarcely hostile to their Turkish neighbors. The writer was told by several Turks during his stay in Komotini that they can walk

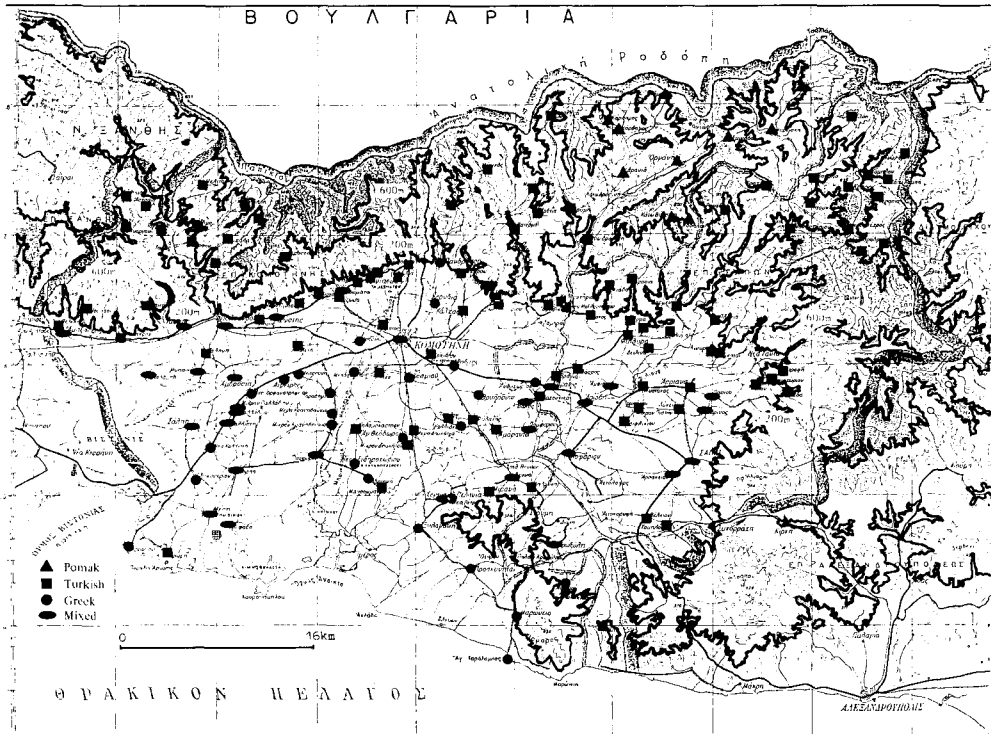


Table 2 Vertical Distribution of Communes by Ethnic Groups in Western Thrace  
December, 1980

Communes by ethnic group	Rodopi Prefecture			Komotini County			Sapai County					
	Lower than 200m	200-600m	Higher than 600m	Total	Lower than 200m	200-600m	Higher than 600m	Total	Lower than 200m	200-600m	Higher than 600m	Total
Pomak share	0	8	2	10	0	8	2	10	0	0	0	0
Turkish share	0.0	80.0	20.2	100.0	0.0	80.0	20.0	100.0	-	-	-	-
Greek share	55	36	5	96	33	22	0	55	22	14	5	41
Mixture of Greeks and Turks	57.3	37.5	5.2	100.0	60.0	40.0	0.0	100.0	53.7	34.1	12.2	100.0
Unidentified share	28	0	0	28	27	0	0	27	1	0	0	1
Total	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
	30	0	0	30	21	0	0	21	9	0	0	9
	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
	15	0	0	15	7	0	0	7	8	0	0	8
	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
	128	44	7	179	88	30	2	120	40	14	5	59
	71.5	24.6	3.9	100.0	73.3	25.0	1.7	100.0	67.8	23.7	8.5	100.0

Source: De Jong, 1980a; Information acquired orally by the writer in 1980; and the map of Rodopi Prefecture

Figure 1 Vertical Distribution of Communes by Ethnic Group in Western Thrace



Source: De Jong, 1980a, information acquired orally by the writer in 1980, and the map of Rodopi Prefecture

in the street calmly without feeling any threat from the Greeks, even at midnight. But when someone visits the prefectural office, he can soon find that there is no official of Turkish descent except for three persons working with brooms. The basic conflict is still centered in the outer world, both within Greece and internationally.

*IV-c Some Information on the Present Situation of the Villages Visited by the Writer*

Village name	Neon Sidirohorion (Greek)	Agioi Theodori (Greek)	Bayatlı (Turkish) Pagouria (Greek)	Semetli (Turkish) Symbola (Greek)
Ethnicity	Greek community	Greek community	Mixed community of Greeks and Turks	Turkish community
Location	11 km SSW of Komotini	8.5 km S of Komotini	12 km SW of Komotini	6 km N of Komotini
Population	1,300 400 households	630 200 households	127 households	350 70 households, among which 60 are Greek
Population change	Almost no change for these 20 years	20 years ago, the popula- tion was 400.		
Main occupation	Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture
Temporary emigra- tion for work (tar- get emigration)	Some of the young people work in Komotini for 3 months as construction workers. Since 1961, 100 people have gone to West Ger- many. In all, 300 people are working outside the village.	Since 1960, emigration to West Germany has be- gan. 10 families are stay- ing in West Germany.	All the emigrants for work are Turks. 6 house- holds are staying in Ath- ens for factory work; 12 villagers in West Germany, and 1 in Australia (as an eternal migrant).	Since 1970, many vil- lagers have come to work as sailors for undeter- mined periods ranging from 1 month to 10 years. 15 families are staying in West Germany, and 10 are ex-migrants returned from there.
Emigration to Turkey			10 families between 1955 and 1970, and 2 between 1970 and 1980.	Some 40 to 50 families have left the village for Turkey since 1945.

Land holding	Average cultivated area for one household: 400 acres (in calculation, emigrants' lands are considered to be cultivated by the present population).	Average cultivated area for one household: 700 acres (in calculation, no emigrants are considered).	Cultivated area per household with the four Turkish families interviewed varies from 200 acres to 1,100 acres, of which the average is 612.5 acres. Every peasant and farmer in the village farms on his own land. There is no Greek household head who has less than 1,000 acres of land cultivated. who has less than 1,000 acres of land cultivated.	Average cultivated area per household: 50 acres (calculation is based only on the 6 families interviewed). Half of the village families have no land at all. There is none who is worthy to be regarded as a landowner.
Main crops	Wheat, cotton, peppermint (newly introduced), maize and beets (newly introduced)	Wheat, cotton, beets, tomato, peppermint, watermelon and pepper	Wheat, cotton, beets and barely for feed	Tobacco
Agricultural calendar	Jan. Planting of cotton Feb. Planting of cotton and maize Mar. Planting of cotton and maize Apr. Harvesting of wheat and peppermint May. Harvesting of wheat and peppermint Jun. Harvesting of wheat and peppermint Jul. Harvesting of peppermint Aug. Harvesting of beets	Planting of potato, watermelon and melon Planting of barley and pumpkin Planting of tomato and pepper Planting of cotton Planting of maize Harvesting of wheat Harvesting of tomato and beets	Planting of cotton, beets and maize Planting of tomato Harvesting of sesame	Planting of tobacco

Sept.	Harvesting of cotton, beets and maize	Harvesting of maize	Harvesting of tobacco
Oct.	Harvesting of cotton, beets and maize	Harvesting of maize and cotton	Harvesting of tobacco
Nov.	Harvesting of cotton, beets and maize	Harvesting of maize and cotton	Harvesting of tobacco
Dec.	Harvesting of wheat and peppermint	Harvesting of maize and cotton	
Number of tractors	150 for the whole village (about 50% of the village households have tractors)	100 for the whole village (about 50% of the village households have tractors)	2 for the whole village; less than 3% of all households have tractors (the main instrument for cultivation is <i>pulluk</i> or a kind of plough drawn by cattle)
Agricultural employment	No employment relationship among the villagers is found. At harvest time, Turks from the area in the range of 15 to 20 km from the village are employed.	Turks are employed at the harvest time of cotton and tomato; most are from the outside the village.	No employment relationship in the village
Source of data	Oral information given by the clerk of the Sidiorion Community and some of the villagers of Neon Sidiorion village	Oral information given by the clerk of the Agioi Theodoroi Community and some of the villagers of Agioi Thodori village	Oral information given by some of the villagers

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