

PREPARATORY DOCUMENTS

Greece, North Macedonia, Bulgaria - Kavala 2022

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K. Featherstone, D. Papadimitriou, A. Mamarelis, G. Niarchos, *The Last Ottomans: The Muslim Minority of Greece 1940-1949*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Chapter 4. Belomorie, p. 91

4.1 Introduction

With the invasion complete, the occupation of Western Thrace created new challenges to the local society. How would the authorities deal with the various socio-ethnic groups? What favour/discrimination would be shown and how would the communities respond? How would the new policies affect the demographic mix of the area and the relations between the various components? What might be the longer-term consequences? Initially, though, the question was how would the Muslim community respond to the invaders: as friends or foes?

This chapter addresses the realities of life in Western Thrace under the occupation. It highlights the contrasting responses of the local Muslims to the Germans and to the Bulgarians. It examines the extent to which the misery of the Bulgarian rule was shared by the Greek Orthodox and Muslim populations. The occupation meant a system of severe rationing, but it also tolerated soldiers looting farms and terrorising the locals. More particularly, the Chapter explores the strategy and impact of the enforced cultural assimilation – ‘Bulgarisation’ – of the region. With the influx of Bulgarian officials and professionals, the demographic balance was changed. Moreover, something close to one-in-ten Muslims from Western Thrace escaped the deprivations of the occupation by fleeing to Turkey. For those that remained, the fate of the various minority groups proved to be different: between the mountainous Pomaks and the lowland Turks, for example, and even more starkly between the collaborationist Armenians and the annihilated Jews. These experiences would leave their mark on the region. Yet, ultimately, the impact of the occupation would be more a matter of Western Thrace being shaken to its foundations rather than being prompted into widespread resistance or inter-communal strife.

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Bulgarian rule in the new *Belomorie* came to show some differentiation. The Orthodox Greeks were identified as the main barrier to the consolidation of the new regime owing to the large presence of the Greek element in the area since the 1920s and the dominance of the local Orthodox Church. At the same time, the Muslim population was the target of separate treatment.