



Summary :

The organised philanthropic activity in Constantinople's Greek-Orthodox community dates to the period between the second half of the 18th century to the Balkan wars. The education of indigent children, the organisation of hospitals according to European models, the care for the abandoned children and the provision of job to the poor comprised the basic feature of that bid. These practices signalled a change in the perception of poverty within a context marked by the attempt to westernize the structures of Ottoman society and by the emergence of Balkan nationalisms.

Date

18th-20th century

Geographical Location

Constantinople (Istanbul)

1. The historical context

Philanthropy in the Greek-Orthodox communities of [Constantinople](#) and generally of the Ottoman Empire during the late Ottoman period cannot be seen independently of the demand for the Empire's modernization intertwined as it is with the control of public space. In this period, the Ottoman government, the leaderships of the religious communities of the Empire as well as the Balkan nationalisms displayed emblematically the demand for the transition in a west-type society.

During the period 1839-1876, the [reforms](#) known as [Tanzimat](#) dealt with the aggregate westernization in the structures of the Ottoman society.¹ Forging the Ottoman patriotism in all the social strata constituted one of the greatest bets of the period; that meant not only legitimizing the Ottoman power, but also defending actively the Empire's integrity and promoting economic and political reconstruction.² This undertaking emanated from "Ottomanism", which had been the official ideology of the Ottoman state mainly since 1856 –that is after the "Hatt-i Hümayun" (Imperial Decree), the decree that laid down full equality of all Sultan's subjects irrespective of their ethno-religious origins- up to the collapse of the Empire in 1923. Within the frame of "Ottomanism", all the Sultan's subjects were treated as equal members of a "nation", the Ottoman one, no matter which their religion, language or origins were. In most of the cases, this mobilisation for the reconstruction and modernisation of the Empire turned against westernization, since the economic and cultural presence of the West in the Ottoman territory was usually perceived to be as important a danger as the European political invasion.³

In parallel, one of the main aspects of Tanzimat, the modernisation of state structure, was set to work through the institutionalization of [millets](#), that is the Orthodox, Jewes and Armenian religious communities, with homogeneous regulations concerning their function. This aimed at the effective control of the population by the central authority as well as at the elimination of centrifugal tendencies. At the same time, it curtailed the clerics' authority within communities, while it reinforced the laymen's presence in the political scene.⁴

The Ottoman patriotism presupposed the consolidation of social cohesion, which, of course, was not its particularity. To some degree, social cohesion was linked to the internal cohesion of the various millets. Philanthropy and education implemented in the frame of religious communities constituted the basic means for achieving it. The elites, who came to the fore of local communities and the millets in general during that period, were building their status on planning and financing these functions, as they constituted groups that had either scientific knowledge (teachers, doctors, engineers etc) or wealth (bankers, wholesale merchants).⁵ Through specific activities, the elites promoted the bourgeois values as a social ideal: work and time discipline, education, social ascension and decency.

2. Philanthropy within the Greek Orthodox community of Constantinople

2.1. Hospitals



The first Greek-Orthodox hospitals appeared in the second half of 18th century. These hospitals functioned as places of confinement for different categories of people, from plague infected and mentally deranged to homeless children, beggars and convicts. Thus, they functioned as asylums and prisons. In the middle of the 19th century, the physicians attempted to lift the penal character of these hospitals and transform them into infirmaries and places of social rehabilitation. Moreover, they elaborated theoretically the practice of confinement highlighting the notion of respectable life as the basis of social reform. During the 19th century up to the first years of the 20th, there were initiatives towards this new direction: the National Charity Establishments (*Ethnika Philanthropika Katastimata*), as the hospitals were called from 1860-1862 onwards, were divided into hospital, mental hospital, house for the aged and orphanage, while donations were made for the modernization of these departments, i.e. their development according to the European scientific standards.

2.2. Fraternities and Societies

During 1860s, the first deeds of parish charity or educational fraternities occurred disseminating the principals, which had been elaborated by the medical discourse, through philanthropic activity. After the 1870, these fraternities got under the auspices of the parish and community authorities that just had been institutionalized, and emerged as the main vehicle of philanthropic activity. The primary duty of these fraternities consisted of the establishment and maintenance of parish schools, the financing of school attendance for poor students and, of course, the promotion of education to the families that did not accept it as a necessity. Within the framework of the communities we also ran into the ladies' charity fraternities, which organized workshops for the provision of labour to poor women as a means of protecting them from prostitution and helping them to get familiar with the ideal of work discipline. Moreover, the department for the abandoned children was established, which collected them, nursed them and gave them to adoption. Other fraternities took care of indigent pregnant and women in child-bed. These institutions engaged in disseminating the values of learning, social ascension, work discipline, decency, family etc among the poor. Hence, these values were widely promoted and became a social ideal to be adopted by all the social strata.

2.3. Social and political functions of philanthropy

In that way, as groups from all walks of life were involving in this particular process, they encountered the multiple challenges from the establishment of **Bulgarian Exarchate** (1870) to the disintegration of **guilds** and the increase of the imports of European products in the Empire. These occurrences disturbed the pre-existing balance of political and economic power. Except for creating new indigent strata, these occurrences resulted in shaking the self-representation of these groups, which in their turn tried to reinforce the status of millet, which was at danger, and through that, they tried to reinforce their own status too. On one hand, they try to make the Greek-Orthodox population of the Empire rally around the **Patriarchate** and the Greek **millet leadership**. On the other hand, they tried to form new categories of economically active populations –manual labourers or intellectuals -, who would contribute to the elevation of millet and, simultaneously, to the economic reconstruction of the Empire. Moreover, they promoted the mobilization of big masses for the defence of the Empire against the Balkan nationalisms and the political and cultural influence of the West. In this way, the recognition of the primacy of the millet and of these particular groups was pursued in the course of the Ottoman state's reinvention.

The issue of the integration in the Ottoman structures raised a question relating to the position of the national component within that process. The Greek-Orthodox populations were culturally heterogeneous. The millet cohesion required the binding of Greek-Orthodox populations to Patriarchate and to the Greek leadership of the millet. The dissemination of Greek culture was a vital factor for the success of this effort. In the context of the rising Balkan nationalisms, mainly after the events which had led to the establishment of the Bulgarian Hexarchate, this homogenization was perceived to signify the dominance of a distinctive Greek identity. The parish and community authorities undertook its promotion within the Empire through philanthropic and educational activities. It is obvious that this understanding of Greek identity was not incompatible with the Ottoman one –on the contrary, Ottoman identity is actually its precondition. The Patriarchate and the millet leadership, as well as the parish and community authorities, constituted administrative structures of Ottoman power. Thus, the national component was not necessarily identified with the irredentism promoted by the Greek state. However, some construed it from this standpoint, given the fact that the Greek state intended to get legitimized as the “national authority”.



As a result, social integration was equivalent to the integration in the millet and constituted the prevailing tendency. This goal did not allow for phenomena of social exclusion, as it had happened in the West (e.g. workhouses). Although philanthropic discourse was articulated as part of a Eurocentric vision –the demand for the westernization of society-, the reference to bourgeois values, such as decency, does not correlate with strict bourgeois principles, such as market economy and competition. On the contrary, it appears as a negation of these prospects underlining the cohesion of Orthodoxy.

However, focusing on the national component is not enough for an approach of this phenomenon. The groups, who planned and funded the philanthropic activity, conceptualized themselves within the whirl of transformations that sealed the 19th and the first decades of the 20th century. The national movements in Balkan and all over Europe, as well as the European labour and socialist movement, were perceived as imminent dangers. The more so since the labour and socialist movement were making their appearance in the Ottoman Empire and the so-called “alien ethno-phyletisms” were articulating social assertions.⁶ Within this framework, some traditional balances overturned.

These balances were disturbed also by the broadening –strictly speaking, the broadening attempt- of the politically active population, urbanization, the new fields that opened the way for female action, and the expanding market economy in the Empire. These factors shook former hierarchies and led to the redistribution of wealth and power among social and religious groups and to the intensive rivalry among them for the control of urban space, state apparatus, and sectors of economy from the banking system to the textile and clothing industry.⁷ An approach that would attribute the binding of the Greek-Orthodox to the millet leadership solely to the dissemination of the Greek culture without taking into account these specific parameters would be one-sided. Philanthropic activity among the Greek-Orthodox was a response to the socioeconomic developments that correlated with the emerging nationalisms. The dissemination of the bourgeois values restored the balances, while establishing a new order.

To a great extent, wholesale merchants and [bankers](#) bore the burden of backing this bid and gained unprecedented social status. However, the cost of this enterprise was covered not only by magnates’ donations, but also by the offerings of the less eminent ones. The importance of every donation, either big or small, was spotlighted far and wide, indicating that philanthropy became in that particular framework a social ideal

1. See Lewis, B., *The emergence of Modern Turkey* (London 1979); Davison, R., *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1956-1876* (Princeton 1963). Also, Petrosian, J., «Οι ιδέες του ‘εξευρωπαϊσμού’ στην κοινωνικοπολιτική ζωή της Οθωμανικής Αυτοκρατορίας τα νεότερα χρόνια (τέλος 18^{ου}-αρχές 20^{ου} αιώνα)», in *Εκσυγχρονισμός και εκβιομηχάνιση στα Βαλκάνια* (Athens 1980), pp. 54-66; Todorova, M., «ο εξευρωπαϊσμός της ελληνικής ηγεσίας της Οθωμανικής Αυτοκρατορίας κατά την περίοδο των Μεταρρυθμίσεων», in *Εκσυγχρονισμός και εκβιομηχάνιση στα Βαλκάνια* (Athens 1980), pp. 93-109; Georgescu, V., «Η ορολογία ‘εκσυγχρονισμός’ και εξευρωπαϊσμός’ της Οθωμανικής Αυτοκρατορίας και της Νοτιοανατολικής Ευρώπης κάτω από το φως της Ρουμανικής εμπειρίας», in *Εκσυγχρονισμός και εκβιομηχάνιση στα Βαλκάνια* (Athens 1980), pp. 110-136.

2. See Ziya Karal, E., “Non-Muslim Representatives in the First Constitutional Assembly, 1876-1877”, in Braude, B. - Lewis, B. (eds.) *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire. The functioning of a plural society*, vol. 2 (New York – London 1982), pp. 387-400.

3. See Quataert, D., *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881-1908. Reactions to European Economic Penetration* (New York 1983); Exertzoglou, H., “The cultural uses of consumption: Negotiating class, gender and nation in the Ottoman urban centres during the 19th century”, *Journal of Middle East Studies* 35 (2003), pp. 89-94. For the presence of the West in the late Ottoman Empire, see Σκοπετέα, Έ., *Η Δύση της Ανατολής* (Athens 1993), pp.17-52.

4. See Davison, R., *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1876* (Princeton 1963); Davison, R., “The millets as agents of change in the Nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire”, in Braude, B., - Lewis, B. (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire. The functioning of a plural society*, vol. 2 (New York – London 1982), pp. 319-337; Benbassa, E., *Une diaspora sépharade en transition. Istanbul XIXe – Xxe siècles* (Paris 1993).

5. See Εξερχζόγλου, Χ., *Εθνική ταυτότητα στην Κωνσταντινούπολη τον 19^ο αιώνα. Ο Ελληνικός Φιλολογικός Σύλλογος Κωνσταντινουπόλεως (1861-*



1912) (Athens 1996), pp. 33-68; Molho, R., *Οι Εβραίοι της Θεσσαλονίκης 1856-1919. Μια ιδιαίτερη κοινότητα* (Athens 2001), pp. 53-213; Anastasiadou-Dumont, M. (ed.), *Médecins et ingénieurs ottomans à l'âge des nationalismes* (Paris – İstanbul 2003).

6. See comparably Dumont, P., «Η οθωμανική εργατική τάξη στις παραμονές της Επανάστασης των Νεότουρκων», in *Εκσυγχρονισμός και εκβιομηχάνιση στα Βαλκάνια* (Athens 1980), pp. 236-258; Quataert, D., *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881-1908. Reactions to European Economic Penetration* (New York 1983); Quataert, D., *Workers, Peasants and Economic Change in the Ottoman Empire 1730-1914* (İstanbul 1993).

7. Εξερχζόγλου, Χ., *Προσαρμοστικότητα και πολιτική των ομογενειακών κεφαλαίων. Έλληνες τραπεζίτες στην Κωνσταντινούπολη. Το κατάστημα Ζαρίφης Ζαφειρόπουλος, 1871-1881* (Athens 1989); Quataert, D., *Workers, Peasants and Economic Change 1730-1914* (İstanbul 1993); Quataert, D., *Ottoman Manufacturing in the Age of Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge 1993).

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Glossary :

	Bulgarian issue
	The Bulgarian struggle for ecclesiastical autonomy. Since the 1850's the Bulgarians claimed the establishment of an autonomous church (exarchate) which would retain typical relationship with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The latter opposed to this movement as its role had been undermined. After long lasting negotiations and the failure of any attempt for reconciliation, an Ottoman firman promulgated in 1870 established the Bulgarian exarchate, although the Patriarchate declared the Exarchate schismatic. Naturally, the main character of the struggle of the Bulgarians for ecclesiastical independence was not religious. It was bounded to the Bulgarian nationalism emerged at that time and had clear political dimension (Bulgarian political independence).
	tanzimat
	The 19th-century reforms in the Ottoman Empire, which were inaugurated in 1839 with the edict of Hatt-i Şerif and came to an end with the Constitution of 1876. The reforms, which were considered an effort for the modernization and liberalization of the state, concerned every aspect of the political, social and economic life in the Empire. Of particular importance were the ones that equated legally Muslim and non-Muslim subjects.

Chronological Table

- 1753: Establishment of Constantinople's first Greek Plague Hospital in Yedi Kule by the grocers' guild.
- 1762: Establishment of the Naval Hospital of Galata by the Official of the Porte Georgios Stavrakoglou.
- 1780: Establishment of Plague Hospital of Stavrodromi.
- 1794: Common Fund for Hospitals and Prisons under the supervision of five guilds.
- 1830s: Work for the construction of new hospital in Balukli.
- 1827: Establishment of the Ottoman Military Medical School.
- 1837: Establishment of pest house in Constantinople.
- 1856: Establishment of the Imperial Medical Society.
- 1860s: Charity Fraternities' first regulations.
- 1861: Establishment of Ladies' Charitable Society in Stavrodromi.
- 1860-1862: Preparation of the "general rules", which institutionalized the Orthodox millet recognizing it as an entity with cohesive organization and function. The hospitals are renamed into "National Charity Establishments" and get under the supervision of the



Permanent National Mixed Council.

1862: Publication of A. Paspatis' book *Memorandum for the Greek Hospital of the Seven Castles* [Eptapyrgion], a reference work for the notions of hygiene during that period.

1864: Preparation of the Rules of the National Hospital of the Greek-Orthodox in Constantinople. The National Charity Establishments are divided into the main hospital, home for the aged and mental hospital.

1866: Establishment of the under masonic influence Philergos Society with multiethnic composition aiming at the propagation of the ideal of work to the poor irrespective of their ethnic origins.

1870: Preparation of the Organization of the National Orphanage of the Orthodox in Constantinople, as a distinctive part of the Charity Establishments.

1870: Establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate.

1976: Preparation of the first regulations of an Orthodox community in Constantinople, those of the Greek Orthodox Community in Stavrodromi, followed by the regulations of the communities of Mega Revma (Arnavutköy), Chalcedon (Kadıköy) and, later, Kontoskali. According to those regulations, the communities assume the institutional responsibility for education and philanthropy.

1870s and onwards: Preparation of most of the regulations of the charitable societies, which got under the supervision of community and parish authorities.

1876: A sewing workshop is established by Ladies' Charitable Society in Stavrodromi. Similar initiatives are taken in other communities too.

1887: Establishment of the Medical Commission for the Abandoned Infants of the Church of the Presentation of Virgin Mary in Pera.

1902: Preparation of the Fundamental Regulation, according to which the Patriarchate and the Permanent National Mixed Council specified officially that philanthropy and education were the main duties of the community and parish authorities.