



Summary :

The foundation of the Greek Philological Association of Constantinople in 1861 was of great importance for the Greek Orthodox populations in Constantinople as well as the entire Ottoman Empire. It was the predominant scientific-educational organization of the literate Greek Orthodox community of Constantinople, with enormous social prestige, due to its manifold scientific activities, such as book editing, magazine issuing, seminar organization and the creation of a library, and its large-scale educational policy, as it sponsored schools as well as competitions with educational content.

Date

1861-1922

Geographical Location

Constantinople (Istanbul)

1. The foundation of the Greek Philological Association in Constantinople

The creation of the Greek Philological Association in [Constantinople](#) in March 1861 proved to be of great importance for the cultural, educational and political matters of the Greek Orthodox people in Constantinople as well as in the Ottoman territory in general. It is not sure whether the small group of those who founded the Society had imagined its course. Besides, the circumstances of its creation remain uncertain. According to Iroklis Vasiadis, one of the main inspirators of the Society, its creation aimed at “the attraction of the energies of the Greek provinces in the Ottoman Empire and the expedient collaboration of all the social classes in them, such as scholars, merchants, clergy, people in order to purify the Greek character from the defacing filth of the long-standing slavery and ignorance, so that the genuine features of the Greek spirit, that is, its liberal, patriotic, studious, ingenious characteristics, would shine again in the lands of the East [...], unparalleled models that the Greek nation bequeathed to mankind”.¹ Vasiadis argued that the Society was simply a continuation of the “Educational Phrontistirion” which had been established a little bit earlier with the aim of disseminating literacy to “the Orthodox people of the Ottoman state and mostly to women”, but it stopped functioning. The same rhetorical style prevails in the short presentation of the Association’s history by Odysseas Ialermos, who asserts that “those who directed the intellectual movement, without losing their courage from that failure [the Phrontistirion’s closure], hastened to fulfill its high purposes in another way”.²

The epic starting point to which the foundation of the Greek Philological Association was linked by Vasiadis and Ialermos, is recorded in a period of intense political upheaval in the Ottoman Empire, with the [Bulgarian schism](#), the “Great Eastern Crisis” and the Berlin Conference being its interdependent parts. In this context, the placement of the Greek Philological Association in Constantinople in the role of the prime exponent of the Greek-Orthodox is inscribed in the narrative articulated by its representatives. However, it is not certain that this image corresponded to the climate of the period and the intentions of its founders. If we believe Alexandros Zoiros paşa, one of the founding members, the original intentions of the seven initial founders was the creation of a place to discuss “various issues, of higher level than those of the usual discussions”, that is something like the salons littéraires that existed in Europe for discussions of literary content. The discussions between the initial founders –I. Vasiadis, A. Zoiros, X. Zografos, A. Palaiologos, I. Zografos, K. Kalliadis, Th. Zografos- got extended with the participation of some friends, resulting in the creation of the Association with the explicit agreement that it would avoid discussions on political and religious issues.³ The founding members of the Association were thirty three, the thirty two of whom were laymen and only one was a clergyman.

Whatever version may be chosen concerning the establishment of the Association, it is certain that the institution gained quickly great recognition, since it manage to mobilize resources and energies in supporting Greek Orthodox education in the Ottoman Empire. It served as a model on which the creation of [societies](#) with respective orientation was based, such as the Epirotic Society and the Thracian Society. Finally, the [Journal of the Greek Philological Association in Constantinople](#), published by the Society in forty volumes during the period 1863-1912, constitutes a rich and indispensable source for various issues until today.



2. Periods of the history of the Greek Philological Association

2.1. 1861-1880

If the history of the Association is divided into phases, the period between its foundation and the beginning of the 1880's is indisputably successful. This period is marked by the transition from the scientific and literary interests of its members, the public lectures, publications, competitions, the organisation of a library etc. to the formation of a large-scale educational policy which involved the collection of information on the educational situation of the provinces in particular, as well as the financing of schools. This transition was reflected in the change of the statute of the Greek Philological Association of Constantinople in 1871, the first article of which stated that the main goal of the foundation was "the cultivation of literature in general and its dissemination to the East". The statute specified those activities that would serve this goal: public lectures, publication of a journal, organisation of a library, literary competitions, as well as financing the "needy" schools and establishing new ones. For this purpose, the Association mobilized the wealthy Greek Orthodox of Constantinople, mainly those who had increased their property at that time i.e. bankers like [Christakis Zografos](#), [George Zarifis](#), Andreas Syngros etc, and it collected large sums of money. It is estimated that during the period of 1872-1877 the Greek Philological Association spent about 5.500 Ottoman lira to [schools of Asia Minor](#), Thrace and Macedonia, that is a substantial sum for the needs of elementary schools, such as those usually funded by the Association.⁴ In the following years there was a difficulty in financing schools, until this stopped in the 1880s.

2.2. 1880-1922

The next phase of the the Greek Philological Association in Constantinople is linked to the restriction of its educational activity. Despite preserving its literary features and specifying its work through committees, such as the biological, the educational, the archaeological and the philological ones, it was no longer possible for the Association to finance the schools. This situation remained, with minor variations, until the period of the [Young Turks](#). During this time, the concern about education had been maintained but it was channelled elsewhere. Firstly, the Association undertook the organization and sponsoring of competitions with direct educational content. This activity was not unfamiliar to the Association, since it had previously dealt with the organization of the competition on geography –sponsored by Christakis Zografos and the archimandrite Eugenios for the description of the provinces of Thrace, Macedonia, Epirus and Thessaly- as well as the Negrepontian competition -sponsored by the [banker](#) Menelaos Negrepontis for "the dissemination of the Greek education"-, the competition sponsored by the Commercial School of [Chalki](#) granting five awards to students, and the competition sponsored by N. Symvoulidis for the description of Pontos.

From the 1880's, this experience was enriched with the Karapaneios and Zografeios competitions. The first one aimed at awarding nineteen textbooks for the elementary education with a sum of 10.000 offered by Konstantinos Karapanos, brother-in-law of Christakis Zografos, and the second one aimed at awarding ten essays on "[living monuments](#)" i.e. essays presenting "the Greek dialects, the customs and traditions of the Greek people". For this competition, Christakis Zografos offered 100 Ottoman lira annually. The new element in these competitions was that they were not organized only once, but the Society evaluated textbooks and essays every year. These tasks were undertaken by the educational and philological committee respectively.

Moreover, the educational interest of the Association was attracted by public lectures about educational issues as well as by the organization of educational conferences on specialized, but also crucial issues of the Greek Orthodox education, such as teaching ancient Greek, teaching Greek to non-Greek-speaking "Greeks", teaching gymnastics, philosophy etc. These sessions were organized in 1908-1909, that is during the Young Turks change-over which altered considerably the political correlations in the Ottoman Empire. During the Great European War, the Association's operation almost stopped. It had a short revival during 1919-1922, that is when it expressed openly the irredentist Greek ambitions paying the respective price: it got identified with the defeated Greece, its operation was prohibited and its library and archive was seized.

3. An assessment of the Greek Philological Association's work

3.1. The Greek Philological Association's educational role



According to this short retrospection on the history of the Greek Philological Association of Constantinople, it seems that at last the Association didn't manage to "become the leader of the educational energy of all the Greeks in Turkey and the core of all the desires and actions for it", despite the prestige it had obtained and the central position it had ensured concerning the educational issues during the 1870's. However, this failure cannot obscure the fact that the Greek Philological Association provided the space within which the main ideological and political tendencies of the time intersected, as well as being an institution with strong social prestige and recognition among the prosperous and literate strata of the Greek Orthodox community in Constantinople, and beyond. Its involvement with education had not been neutral either evaluatively or ideologically. The front opened by the Society against "ignorance" was based on the bourgeois values it had adopted. The distinction between "education" and "ignorance" served as a taxonomic scheme of reading the state of the Greek Orthodox communities and rating them according to their schools. In their reports, the members of the Society's educational committee recorded picturesquely their impressions about the conditions in the provinces, without being able to evaluate things closely. What must not escape attention is that eventually the Greek Orthodox communities were evaluated on the basis of a value system that was their own –and it is probable that the information about these communities were related to the values of the Society's informants, usually teachers working there or -more rarely- clergymen. Therefore, the educational campaign of the Greek Philological Association of Constantinople constituted a civilizing project founded on the values that its members had already accepted for themselves.

3.2. The Greek Philological Association's "civilizing project"

The Association's civilizing project was founded equally on the need to "restore" the education within the "Greek populations" of the Empire, which was inextricably linked with the cultivation of the Greek national identity. The cultivation of Greek identity and the fight against "ignorance" were both parts of the same cultural project. In the context of the political conditions in the Ottoman Empire, this project had direct political connotations, precisely because the relation between education and national identity politicized the first one on the second one's terms. Indeed, the priority given by the Association to education and the financing of schools indicates that most of the money spent was directed to the schools of Macedonia and secondarily to the schools of Asia Minor. It was not just the need to combat "ignorance" that led to these choices, but also the need to counter the Bulgarian nationalism and the missionary schools which were considered then to be the greatest threats to "Hellenism". As a result, the Greek Philological Association of Constantinople was associated with the political controversies in the Empire through a choice that seemed to be both necessary and legitimate. The creation of schools in Macedonia was related directly to the cultivation of national identity in the non Greek-speaking Orthodox populations who, precisely because of their Slavic idiom, were claimed by the Bulgarian movement. In this context, the school and the choice of the school, just like the choice of the priest, could indicate identification with either the Bulgarian or the Greek movement, i.e. they had strong symbolical character. Of course, it was not always certain that the choices of the local populations corresponded to the expectations that the members of the Association had for them, since frequently they were influenced by local circumstances and antagonisms in ways not always comprehensible to the Association. The general suspicion of the rural populations toward schools and their reaction for the long hours which their children were deprived of agricultural work must also be taken into account. As a result, there was often volatility in the number of the students, teaching difficulties for children who learned a language that was different from that they spoke in home etc. Similar problems appeared in the schools of Asia Minor aiming at the [hellenization](#) of the Turcophone Christians, while they had to compete against the missionary schools which usually offered a more modern education.

Eventually, the Greek Philological Association's project was limited to a lump sum funding of schools without being able to intervene systematically. Besides, it wasn't responsible for that, nor could it be. However, it seems that many of the problems encountered in the 1870's remained at the forefront for several years later judging from the fact that the teaching of Greek language and handicraft were two of the central issues dealt with by the educational sessions that the Greek Philological Association organised in 1908-1909.

3.3. The dispute between "Logios" and "Kerdoos" Hermes

Paradoxically, the Philological Association's educational project encountered problems for reasons related to the internal correlations within the Greek Orthodox elite of Constantinople. The involvement of the [Patriarchate of Constantinople](#) in educational matters and the shift of most of the Association's sponsors toward the Brotherhood "Agapate allilous" founded by Joachim III deprived Greek



Philological Association of the necessary funds. That was a crucial development, since it signalled a significant reduction of its revenues and led to the rupture in relations between scholars and wealthy men, that is between “Logios and Kerdoos Hermes”, as it was described at that time. It is uncertain what caused this development, because an open conflict was not expressed within Philological Association. Probably, the nationalist ideological profile of most of its leaders, like Vasiadis and Ialemos, didn’t correspond to the ecumenic politics of Joachim III. Nevertheless, the divergence between nationalism and ecumenism was active long ago, without questioning directly the Association’s operation. Indeed, these two political agendas should be understood through their reciprocal relationship and not through their rivalry. Anyway, the Philological Association’s educational project could equally serve the political platform for the cultural autonomy of the Greek Orthodox populations promoted by the supporters of “[Greco-Ottomanism](#)”, and the irredentist policy of the Greek nationalism. Simultaneously, the Society used a moderate discourse avoiding elements that could offend the Ottoman integrity. It is also likely that the funding toward the Association ceased, because it was not considered as corresponding to the role of educational centre that it had invented for itself. Indeed, that was the accusation addressed by Joachim in his letter to the ambassador A. Kountouriotis, advocating the centralization of education with the Patriarchate at the core.

Finally, it is likely that in this case the personal disputes and antipathies arising in the 1870’s were instrumental, at least as Iroklis Vasiadis asserted in his letter to Stefanos Skouloudis.⁵ In any case, the creation of the Brotherhood and the more direct involvement of the Patriarchate signalled the termination of Philological Association’s involvement in raising and managing funds for schools.

3.4. The Greek Philological Association’s social profile

The Greek Philological Association’s failure to consolidate its position as “the leader of the educational energies of all the Greeks” cannot overshadow the prestige that it achieved and preserved even after 1880 among the literate Greek Orthodox community of Constantinople. Its audience proved to be quite complex, at least judging from the professional status of its members, who represented the commercial and banking world, the Ottoman state, the education and local scholarship, but were also doctors, lawyers, architects etc. In order to strengthen its scientific profile, the Association elected many academics from abroad as honorary members and it maintained open communication with scholars and people with scientific interests who belonged to the other religious communities of the imperial capital.

The Greek Philological Association’s scientific and secular orientation was fundamental to the prestige it gained during the long period of its function as an organization of the literate community which could talk about things as being in a position of strength due to the social capital ensured by literacy. Due the complex and dynamic relations between the Greek-Orthodox community and the Ottoman state, a relation at was at the same time privileged and hierarchical, the Association had been institutionally an exponent of a discourse based on the bourgeois values and Ottoman legitimacy that many members accepted for pragmatic reasons. Precisely this complex situation allowed the Greek Philological Association of Constantinople to avoid the fate of a closed group destined to serve the interests of the upper stratum of bankers and neo-Phanariots of Constantinople and thus it remained socially open. Its social profile stems more from the framework of values on which its scientific activity was based, i.e. literacy, decency, faith in progress and culture, forming simultaneously the viewpoint from which the Greek Philological Association construed the modern world. Eventually the Association was a product of its era, in the formation of which the Association at the same time contributed. From this aspect, it cannot be dissociated from these processes in which the new bourgeois strata of Greek Orthodox emerged dynamically during the period of [Ottoman reforms](#) and onwards. However, it cannot be regarded as a mere reflection of this process, but as a component of its dynamics.

1. Πρακτικά της Πρώτης Συνόδου του Συνεδρίου των Ελληνικών Συλλόγων (Athens 1879), pp. 102-103.

2. Ιάλεμος, Ο., «Η Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Φιλολογικού Συλλόγου και της Επιδράσεως αυτού», *Περιοδικόν του Ελληνικού Φιλολογικού Συλλόγου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως* 12 (1877-1878), p. 7.



3. Ζωηρός, Α., «Αναμνήσεις», *Ημερολόγιον των Εθνικών Φιλανθρωπικών Καταστημάτων* του έτους 1906 (Constantinople 1905), pp. 223-231.
4. Εξερτζόγλου, Χ., *Εθνική Ταυτότητα στην Κωνσταντινούπολη τον 19ο αι. Ο Ελληνικός Φιλολογικός Σύλλογος Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, 1861-1912* (Athens 1996), pp. 98-99.
5. Βασιιάδης, Γ., «Η Εκπαίδευση των Ελλήνων της Οθωμανικής Αυτοκρατορίας: Μια επιστολή του Ηροκλή Βασιιάδη», *Ιστορ* 9 (1996), pp. 47-58.

Bibliography :

	Αναγνωστοπούλου Σ. , <i>Μικρά Ασία, 19ος αι.-1919. Οι Ελληνορθόδοξες Κοιότητες. Από το Μιλλέτ των Ρωμιών στο Ελληνικό Έθνος</i> , Ελληνικά Γράμματα, Αθήνα 1997
	Εξερτζόγλου Χ. , <i>Εθνική Ταυτότητα στην Κωνσταντινούπολη τον 19ο αι. Ο Ελληνικός Φιλολογικός Σύλλογος Κωνσταντινουπόλεως 1861-1912</i> , Αθήνα 1996
	Σταματόπουλος Δ. , <i>Μεταρρύθμιση και εκκοσμίκευση. Προς μία ανασύνθεση της ιστορίας του Οικουμενικού Πατριαρχείου τον 19ο αιώνα</i> , Αλεξάνδρεια, Αθήνα 2003
	Εξερτζόγλου Χ. , "Κοινωνική ιεραρχία, ιδεολογία και εθνική ταυτότητα. Το νόημα της ίδρυσης της Φιλεκαπαιδευτικής Αδελφότητας «Αγαπάτε Αλλήλους»", <i>Τα Ιστορικά</i> , 22, 1995, 85-118
	<i>Ημερολόγιον των Εθνικών Φιλανθρωπικών Καταστημάτων του έτους 1906</i> , Κωνσταντινούπολις 1905
	Kofos E. , "Patriarch Joachim III (1878-1884) and the Irredentist Policy of the Greek State", <i>Journal of Modern Greek Studies</i> , 4:2, 1986, 107-120
	Βασιιάδης Γ. , "Η εκπαίδευση των Ελλήνων της Οθωμανικής Αυτοκρατορίας: μια επιστολή του Ηροκλή Βασιιάδη (1880)", <i>Ιστορ</i> , 9, 1996, 33-58
	Γιαννακόπουλος Γ. , "Η Βιβλιοθήκη του Ελληνικού Φιλολογικού Συλλόγου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως (1863-1922)", <i>Δελτίο Κέντρου Μικρασιατικών Σπουδών</i> , 6, 1986-1987, 287-322
	Μαμώνη Κ. , "Εισαγωγή στην Ιστορία των Συλλόγων Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, 1861-1922", <i>Μνημοσύνη</i> , 11, 1988-1990, 211-234
	Σταύρου Τ. , <i>Ο εν Κωνσταντινουπόλει Ελληνικός Φιλολογικός Σύλλογος: Το Υπουργείο Παιδείας του Αλύτρωτου Ελληνισμού</i> , Αθήνα 1967

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).
--	---



Sources

Πρακτικά της Πρώτης Συνόδου του Συνεδρίου των Ελληνικών Συλλόγων (Athens 1879).

Ιάλεμος, Ο., «Η Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Φιλολογικού Συλλόγου και της Επιδράσεως αυτού», *Περιοδικόν του Ελληνικού Φιλολογικού Συλλόγου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως* 12 (1877-1878).

Ζωηρός, Α., «Αναμνήσεις», *Ημερολόγιον των Εθνικών Φιλανθρωπικών Καταστημάτων του έτους 1906* (Constantinople 1905), pp. 223-231.