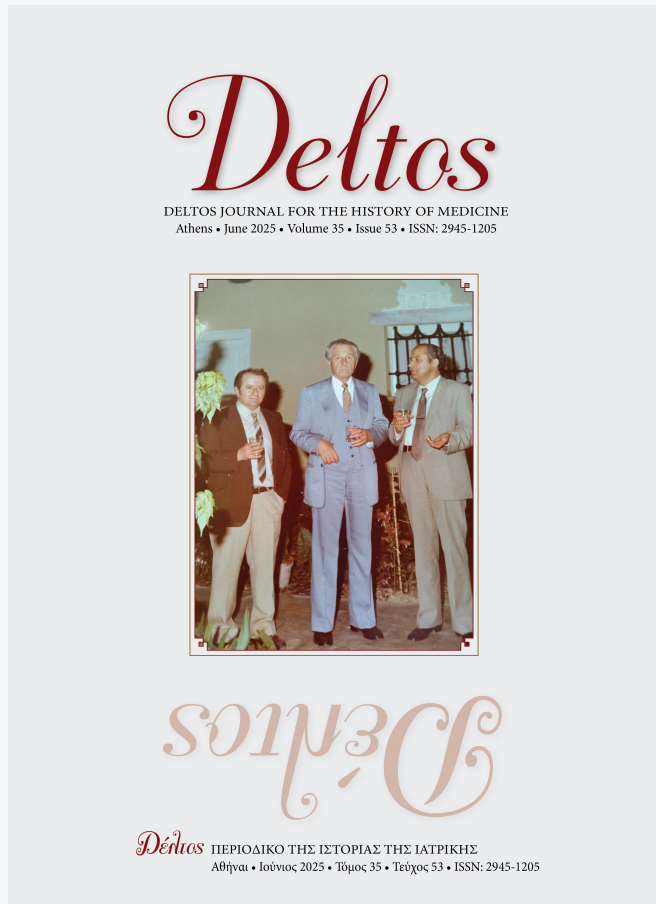


DELTOS

Vol 35, No 53 (2025)

**The social advancement of 19th century Greek National Benefactors: The example of Apostolos Arsakis and Constantine Bellios, related to the field of Medicine***Efi Poulakou-Rebelakou, Maria Mandyla-Koussouni, Athanasios Diamandopoulos*doi: [10.12681/dj.42277](https://doi.org/10.12681/dj.42277)

Copyright © 2025, Efi Poulakou-Rebelakou, Maria Mandyla-Koussouni, Athanasios Diamandopoulos

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).**To cite this article:**

Poulakou-Rebelakou, E., Mandyla-Koussouni, M., & Diamandopoulos, A. (2025). The social advancement of 19th century Greek National Benefactors: The example of Apostolos Arsakis and Constantine Bellios, related to the field of Medicine. *DELTOS*, 35(53), 89–101. <https://doi.org/10.12681/dj.42277>

The social advancement of 19th century Greek National Benefactors: The example of Apostolos Arsakis and Constantine Bellios, related to the field of Medicine

Efi Poulakou-Rebelakou¹, Maria Mandyla-Koussouni², Athanasios Diamandopoulos³

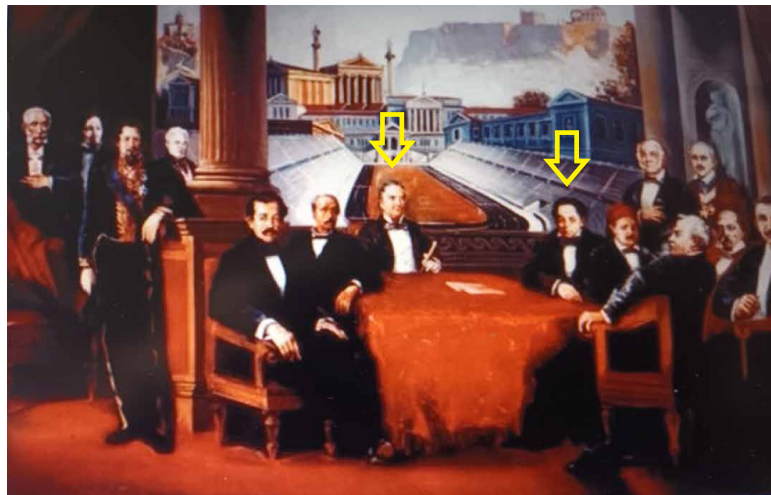


Figure 1. “The Meeting of the Leaders” by Josef Kote, (c.1998). Oil on Linen, Athens, Private collection. Apostolos Arsakis is seated centrally, holding a cigar. Bellios is sitting next to him to his left. www.thessalonikiart-sandculture.gr

Abstract

The study of the history of medicine has expanded considerably to encompass its connections, among others, with literature, the visual arts, poetry, bioethics and sociology. The branch of the latter that analyses medical organisations and *institutions* and examines how social and cultural factors shape health and medicine, is termed medical sociology.¹ However, although as early as 1894 Charles McIntire defined medical sociology as ‘the science of the social phenomena of the physicians themselves as a class apart and separate’² the collective social advancement of medical practitioners and donors to health institutions has been scarcely investigated. We therefore undertook the present pilot study.

Our research, initiated with a painting depicting a group of predominantly nineteenth-century Greek benefactors, aims to present the lives and works of two prominent figures among them: Baron Konstantinos Bellios and Apostolos Arsakis (known in Romania as Apostol Arsache), both closely associated with medicine and medical institutions. In addition to the biographies of these two eminent benefactors, the study explores in depth the social trajectories of these once impoverished, uneducated Vlach boys who rose to become wealthy, educated, aristocratic Greek national benefactors.

Key Words: *Apostolos Arsakis, Konstantinos Bellios, Physician-politician, Romania, National benefactor, Austria-Hungary, National identity*

¹National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

²Historical Demography, School of History, Ionian University, Corfu, Greece

³Louros Foundation for the History of Medicine

Introduction

An historical picture

Our research started with a painting depicting a gathering of predominantly nineteenth-century Greek benefactors. Executed in 1998 by the Connecticut-based Albanian artist Josef Kote (Joseph Kottas - born 1964 in Vlorë, Avlona in Greek),³ the work, entitled *The Meeting of the Leaders*, depicts illustrious patrons of the modern Greek state and was commissioned for the Hellenic Cultural Union in Thessaloniki during the period in which Kote resided in Greece. Among those represented are Georgios Averoff, Georgios Sinas, Konstantinos Zappas, Apostolos Arsakis and Konstantinos Bellios; the last two are closely associated with medicine and medical institutions (Fig. 1).

Most of the figures in the painting hail from the region depicted in figure 2.⁴

It was inhabited by a mixture of Greeks, Ottomans, Albanians and mainly Aromanioi. However, during the period when these boys - for they were mere boys when they departed from their homeland, religious affiliation was the principal marker of identity. The Aromanioi, also known as Vlachs, were dispersed across several provinces that would later form independent states such as Greece, Albania, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania. In time, they distinguished themselves by the direction of their national sympathies, either towards Greek, Albanian or Romanian identities. This inclination towards a Greek identity evolved into an ardent and unquestionable self-identification as Greeks, underpinned by strong elements of Christianity and

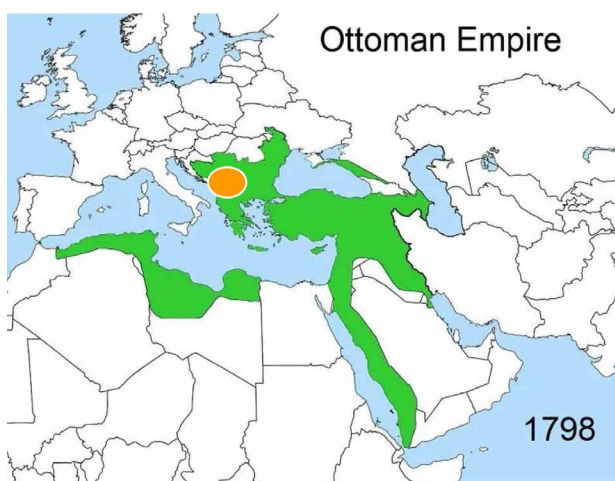


Figure 2. The Ottoman Empire around the time the young benefactors left their homeland. Later it was divided into National States. The orange spot depicts roughly the area they originated from.

Enlightenment ideals. The latter two elements played a pivotal role in Greece, where the reverence for classical civilisation served as a catalyst for national pride - a pride that had been nearly extinguished in its place of origin - and the ideal of the nation-state became synonymous with the aspiration for liberation from Ottoman rule and the “Europeanisation” of the country, without severing its cultural roots. In accordance with Historicist principles, such ideas found direct expression in the visual art of the epoch; historical compositions and patriotic scenes illustrating recent events assumed ever-greater prominence⁵. Having provided this historical context, we now proceed to the biographies and activities of Konstantinos Bellios and Apostolos Arsakis.

Konstantinos Bellios (1772-1838)

His Aromanian ancestors left southern Albania and settled in Vlasti, in the Kozani Prefecture of Greece. Konstantinos was born in Linotopi, in the Kastoria region, on 7 March 1779, but spent his childhood in Vlasti. His parents were Demetrios Bellios and Despoina. Demetrios later moved to Constantinople, and his two sons, Stephanos and Konstantinos, followed him there to continue their studies. In 1812, Konstantinos and Stephanos accompanied Ioannis Karatzas, the newly appointed hospodar (ruler) of Wallachia, to his province. Ioannis was the son of George Karatzas, personal physician to Sultan Mahmud II, and grandson of Georgios Skarlatos Karatzas, who was also a distinguished doctor (Fig. 3a, b).

The brothers settled in the Wallachian capital Bucharest, where Stefanos rose to the position of Logothetes (Minister) of Justice. Konstantinos Bellios received a thorough education at the Greek Gymnasium of Bucharest and embarked on a career in commerce and finance. At the age of twenty, he translated *Robinson Crusoe* into Greek from the German edition (*Του νέου Ρόμπινσον σμυβάντα*). Eventually, he relocated to Vienna, where, on 24 February 1817, Emperor Francis I of Austria ennobled him with the title of Baron von Bellios. Following the establishment of the independent Kingdom of Greece, Bellios expended much of his fortune on charitable donations and benevolent works, “to assist and be of use to my homeland at a time when it is beginning to rise again”. One of his most significant contributions was to the foundation of the Elpis Hospital in Athens, the first civic hospital established in Greece after the Independence⁶.

The hospital was constructed between 1836 and 1842, based on designs by the architects Stauffert, Schaubert, and Hansen. Among the earliest donors were King Ludwig I of Bavaria (1786-1868), father of



Figure 3. a: Karatzas family coat of arms, athensfirstcemeteryinenglish.blogspot.com › 2018 Athens First Cemetery in English: Ioannis Karatzas - Blogger, b: Prince Ioannis Karatzas of Moldovlachia (1754–1844). Oil on canvas, 60,5 x 50,5 cm, Italian manner portrait, 19th cent. National Gallery Museum, Inv. Number II.6047.

King Otto of Greece, who contributed 65 phoenixes (equivalent to 6.45 drachmas); the diplomat and politician Alexandros Mavrokordatos (1791-1865); Sophie de Marbois-Lebrun, Duchess of Placentia (1785-1854); I. Kontogiannakis (1817-1888), Honorary Consul General of Greece in Russia; and Rallou Mourouzi (1788-1860), wife of the Phanariot Prince Konstantinos Mourouzis (1786-1821). The Hospital comprised two clinics: an internal-medicine clinic, headed by Ioannis Olympios (1802-1869), and a surgical clinic, headed

by Professor Ioannis Vouros (1808-1885)^a.

The building was initially constructed as a mezzanine structure, with only the central section completed. In 1856 two additional wings were added during a subsequent construction phase (Fig. 4).

From the outset it was designated “Civic”, in order to distinguish it from the military installation erected beneath the Acropolis.⁷ It was built in a simple neo-classical style. More broadly, the neo-classical hospitals of the period, by their very appearance, underscored the authority of modern Western medical science. From 1842 onwards, similar hospital buildings were erected in Athens, Mesolongi, Chalkida, Patras, Mytilene and Volos. After 1880 a limited romantic, rustic influence can be observed.⁸

Bellios donated all his property in Attica, valued at 5,000 drachmas, to the Greek State for the hospital’s construction. His generosity, however, was not met with the anticipated gratitude. He was obliged to threaten the Mayor of Athens, Anargyros Petrakis, through public notices in the newspapers, in order to compel acceptance of the donation: “I ask the Mayor’s Office through your newspaper to appoint people within four days to take over the estates, since I wish to take other measures and other decisions after this deadline has passed!”⁹ The 1842 Elpis building was soon deemed inadequate for the hospital’s expanding needs and the Board resolved to erect a new structure. Between 1907 and 1908 the Municipality of Athens, facing financial stringency, decided to sell the first hospital building at 50 Academy Street for 1,300,000 drachmas; the sale, however, was never completed. The new Elpis Hospital was ultimately inaugurated sixty-seven years later, and the original Elpis premises were converted into the Athens Municipal Cultural Centre. Only a few relics are preserved (Fig 6).

Bellios remained in Athens for three months, from December 1836 to March 1837, during which time he kept a diary of his activities and impressions. This diary was published in 2018 by Dr Vassileios Bellios, who regards Konstantinos as a probable ancestor.¹⁰ Overall, Bellios was disheartened by the poverty of Athens, the deplorable conduct of local dignitaries, the arrogance shown towards the

^a Ioannis Vouros (1808-1885) was born on the island of Chios. In 1825 he travelled to Vienna to study medicine, and in 1832 he earned his doctorate at Halle, Germany. He then returned to Greece, where in 1836 he was appointed Professor of Special Nosology at the University of Athens (then the Othonian University). A pioneering contribution relevant to the Elpis Hospital was his treatise *About Hospitals*, printed in Paris in 1831 (Fig. 5).



Figure 4. The Elpis Hospital at 50 Academias Str. in Athens, 1920.

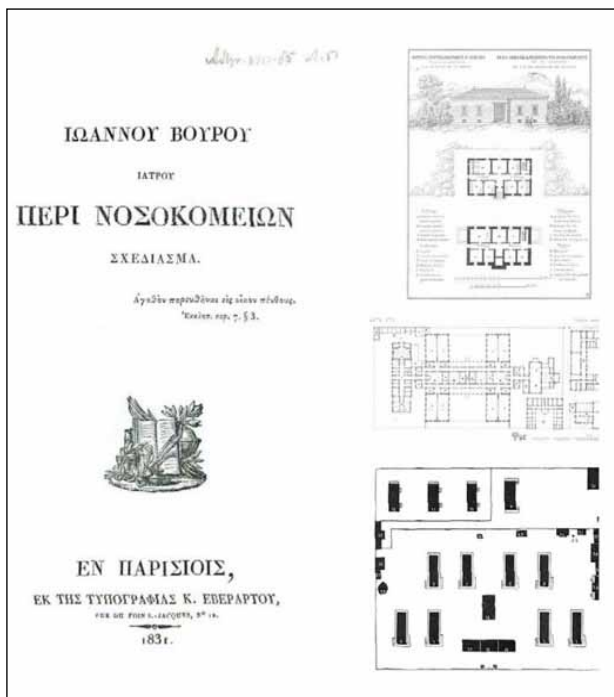


Figure 5. Front page of Ioannis Vouros's treatise "About Hospitals".

heroes and benefactors of the 1821 Revolution, and their continual petty disputes^a. In striking contrast, he was received with honour by King Otto, who invested him with the Order of the Redeemer. In return, Bellios presented the King with an eleventh-century sword and gave Queen Amalia a rare edition

^a In the Diary of 1837, Bellios reflects: "And on this occasion my soul experienced an inward sadness, seeing Master Karatzas, the ruler of Wallachia - whom not only Wallachia and the Danubian regions feared, but also many noble men and Turkish pashas - standing in line with so many Gecchides and the simplest Ministers, like a mere man through which the King and the Queen were destined to pass".



Figure 6. Three pharmaceutical jars from the initial Elpis Hospital. They are made by the Parisian porcelain factory Gosse, which operated from 1849 to 1878. This type of medicine container is relatively rare and is an obvious imitation of Chinese porcelain jars, which until then dominated international trade. The lot was offered as gift for his name day to the then Mayor of Athens and President of the Hospital Georgios Plytas, in 1966. Courtesy of Professor Marios Marselos.

of Homer. During his stay in Athens, he became acquainted with Kyriakos Pittakis, Director of the Greek Archaeological Service. Other notable acts of benefaction included providing funds for the establishment of the Archaeological Society of Athens in 1837 and the founding of the Nea Pella settlement at Atalanti for Macedonian refugees who had fled south during the Greek War of Independence. His extensive library was initially donated to the Nea Pella settlement but was later transferred to the National Library of Greece. He died in Vienna on 23 December 1838 (Fig 7).

Apostolos Arsakis

Apostolos Arsakis (Apostol Arsache in Romanian) was one of the principal benefactors of 19th-century Greece, while simultaneously rising to prominence as a leading political figure in Romania. A remarkably gifted individual, he was an eminent physician - one of the first qualified oculists in Europe and the first in the Balkans to obtain the relevant university degree - as well as a distinguished politician. A right-wing Romanian statesman, he even served as interim Prime Minister. As a national benefactor of Greece, he donated substantial sums to support the education of girls and to finance the construction of an impressive building in the centre of Athens, the Arsakeion, from which generations of young women would graduate.



Figure 7. Stamp on a book of the Bellios donation with his name and the date of the offer in the perimeter and his coat of arms in the centre.

Life and studies

Apostolos Arsakis was born in Hotahova (modern Hotovë), a village near Përmet in the Ottoman Empire (now Albania), although the exact date of his birth remains uncertain (circa 1792). As there were no prospects for material advancement or education in the barren region of Northern Epirus for the non-Muslim populations, the Arsakis family decided to migrate to more prosperous and freer lands, such as Wallachia, one of the two Danubian Principalities. Wallachia and Moldavia were under the suzerainty of the Sultan but not directly subjected to Ottoman rule, as were most of the other Balkan territories. The ruling class of Wallachia at the time was largely composed of Phanariots - Greeks from Constantinople residing near the Patriarchate at Phanari. Apostolos' uncle, Gheorghe Arsakis, was the first to migrate to Bucharest, where he achieved considerable success. As his economic status improved, he invited his brother Kyriakos' family to join him in Wallachia in 1800. Gheorghe and Kyriakos became prosperous merchants, and Apostolos received an excellent education from private tutors. Until that point, he had not spoken Greek; nevertheless, he mastered the language perfectly through his studies. It was Uncle Gheorghe who first recognised the extraordinary intellectual talents of his nephew and proposed that the family send him to Vienna to continue his education and support his further studies.¹¹

Apostolos arrived in Vienna in 1804 and primarily studied philosophy. His teacher was the renowned Neophytos Doukas, a prominent figure of the Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment. Doukas, who had arrived in Vienna in 1803 as the priest of the city's Orthodox Church, had a profound influence on the young Arsakis. Under Doukas' tutelage, Apostolos studied the entire corpus of ancient Greek literature and learned Ancient Greek.

On 17 May 1810, he commenced medical studies at the University of Halle, Germany. Two years later, on 11 March 1812, he was awarded his doctorate in Medicine and Surgery. Meanwhile, in 1811, while Arsakis was still a student, Napoleon Buonaparte visited Halle. He had recently fathered a child with Marie-Louise, Princess of Habsburg - the infant known as L'Aiglon (The Eaglet). Arsakis composed an idyl (following the tradition of Theocritus' Idylls), which he dedicated to the Emperor of France in the hope of securing his support for the liberation of Greece. The poem reflects his fervent patriotic sentiment:

«Ω! πατρίδα! πατρίδα! Ω! δύστυχη γη τής Ελλάδος!
Μητέρα τής ελευθερίας και πατρίδα τόσων ημιθέ-
ων, είσαι δούλη, συ, που πριν ήσουν ελεύθερη και
καλότυχη.

Εδώ κάποτε οι αθάνατοι, αφού άφησαν τον θαυ-
μαστό Όλυμπο, περπατούσαν ευχαριστημένοι και
συναναστρέφονταν τα παιδιά σου.

Όλα άλλαξαν και τελείωσες και συ, χρυσή εποχή»

*(Oh, my poor country! Mother of freedom and land of many semi-gods, you are now enslaved, you, who had been so fortunate. Here, someday, once the immortals left the admirable Olympus were walking with pleasure, socializing with your children. Everything changed and the golden era finished.)**

**Translation by Athanasios Diamandopoulos.*

Arsakis subsequently travelled to Italy, where he wrote his doctoral thesis in Latin, entitled *Piscium cerebro et medulla spinali* ("On the Brain and Spinal Cord of Fishes"). This work was highly praised by his professor, the eminent anatomist Johann Friedrich Meckel, and was considered a significant contribution at the time. Ichthyology, the study of fish, was considered a particularly challenging specialty, and thus Arsakis was regarded as a pioneer.

For a period, Arsakis seemed to entertain ambitions of pursuing an academic career at his alma mater, the University of Halle. However, he ultimately altered his plans and moved to Vienna in 1813. There, he attended the ophthalmology lectures of Georg Beer - renowned for the Beer operation for cataract removal and the invention of the Beer tool - who required his students to complete a year's practical work as oculists at Vienna Hospital. Arsakis remained in Vienna for a full year, during which time he composed all his written works in Greek. Subsequently, he continued writing in French and Romanian, addressing mainly social and political subjects.¹²

In 1813, Arsakis authored a treatise titled *Έκθεσις συνοπτική τής Ιατρικής Ιστορίας* (Concise Report of

the History of Medicine) in Ancient Greek. It was published in *Hermes o Logios*, the Greek journal edited by Anthimos Gazis in Vienna. This work presented the evolution of medical science across Ancient Greece, Egypt, Israel, Persia, Assyria, and China. However, the publication was abruptly discontinued at issues 14-15 of 1813. Disillusioned by the conflicts among the representatives of the Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment, Arsakis returned to his family in Bucharest in 1814. There, Ioannis-George Karatzas, the Greek ruler of Wallachia, appointed him as his personal physician and private secretary. Arsakis was later held in high esteem by Karatzas' successor, Alexander Soutsos. Arsakis was then appointed Chief Physician of Wallachia and became a member of the scientific staff at Colțea Hospital, as well as a participant in several philanthropic committees. Colțea Hospital, established in 1704, continued to operate after renovations in 1888. For eight years, Arsakis practised medicine in Bucharest with notable success. He contributed significantly to combating the plague epidemic of 1828-1829 and the cholera epidemic of 1831. At the same time, he served as personal secretary to Gregory IV Ghika, the Phanariot Greek (of Vlach descent) ruler of Wallachia, and managed the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs. This marked the turning point in Arsakis' life: he gradually abandoned his medical career to embark upon a distinguished political path.

Family life

Arsakis' family life was far from peaceful. His first wife, Eleni Darvari, was the daughter of the Macedonian physician Constantin Darvaris, a scion of the prominent Darvari boyar family. Through this marriage, Arsakis achieved not only financial but also significant social advancement, entering the ranks of the Romanian aristocracy.¹² Eleni died in 1832 and was buried outside the church constructed in 1834 by her family, mainly through the efforts of her brother, Michael. The original church was entirely demolished between 1933 and 1934 and replaced with the current structure, whose interior was painted with Athonite-style frescoes by the artist Iosif Keber. Today, it remains a recognised historical monument.¹³ After Eleni's death, Arsakis remarried, to Anastasia, and lived harmoniously with her. However, he suffered the loss of his second wife as well. In her memory, he requested that the church of the Arsakeion be dedicated to Saint Anastasia. Arsakis' son, George Arsakis (1815-1835), studied philosophy in Vienna, where he fell in love with a Jewish woman and intended to marry her. Apostolos, firmly opposing this union, persisted in his opposition to the extent that the young couple ultimately took

their own lives^{aa,14,15a,b}. This tragic event profoundly shocked Arsakis and brought about a lasting change in his character. He commissioned the construction of a Church of Christ the Saviour, painted by Gheorghe Tattarescu. In its murals, one scene depicted the young couple, and another Apostolos himself, accompanied by the Angel of Reconciliation - an allegorical representation of his too-late consent to their marriage.

Political career

In 1859, Alexandru Ioan Cuza (1820-1873) was elected Prince Regnant of the newly united Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia.¹⁶ Apostolos Arsakis, at that time, served as deputy chief of the Conservative Party of Wallachia. He had first been elected as a deputy to the Parliament of Wallachia in 1857.¹⁷ Between 1857 and 1859, he worked actively towards the unification of Wallachia and Moldavia, a pivotal step in the formation of Romania. Many European nations, like Italy and Germany, gained their political unity in the second half of the 19th century, the so-called "Century of the Nations." Romania began this process at about the same time.¹⁸ The birth of the united Romanian state bears his imprint. In the cabinet of 1862, Arsakis was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs - the first to hold this position in the newly formed Romania - serving from 22 January until 24 June 1862, when he was succeeded by Alexandru Cantacuzino. Following Catargiu's assassination on 2 June 1862, Arsakis briefly served as interim Prime Minister of Romania from 8 to 23 June 1862.¹⁹ However, fearing that he might meet a similar fate, he quickly resigned. He was succeeded by Nicolae Crețulescu. Between 1862 and 1865, Arsakis remained a deputy in Parliament, but in 1866 he retired from political life and withdrew to his mansion.

National benefactor

Arsakis decided to contribute to the advancement of Greece - a country he always considered his own,

a A repetition of such a tragic event, albeit on a grander scale, occurred on 3 January 1889 at the imperial hunting lodge of Mayerling. Crown Prince Rudolf of Austria-Hungary and his mistress, Baroness Mary Freiin von Vetsera, committed suicide, largely due to Emperor Franz Joseph's opposition to their extramarital relationship, compounded by Rudolf's unstable personality.¹⁴ A similar, though more minor, repetition took place nearly eighty years after the suicide of Arsakis' son, in Tbilisi, Georgia - then part of the Russian Empire - when Costas, the eldest son of the newly ennobled clergyman Georgios Haritithis, a talented painter, ended his own life. His father (who was also the great-grandfather of the third author of this article) had opposed his planned marriage to his mistress, an Armenian and communist woman.^{15a,b} This was an era in which, when confronted with a painful conflict between the demands of parental authority and the dictates of romantic passion, a dramatic escape through suicide was not uncommon.

as he declared during the 1838 census - recently liberated from Ottoman sovereignty. In 1850, he offered a substantial sum for the establishment of a female educational institution in the Greek capital, donating 6,000 golden drachmas towards this endeavour. His friends in Athens had informed him about the existence of the Philekpaideftiki Etaireia (Greek Society for Promoting Education and Learning)²⁰ (Fig 8).

They also apprised him of the Society's dire financial situation: by 1846, it had exhausted its funds in its attempts to realise the construction of a new educational facility. It came as a great surprise to the Greek public when, in 1850, Arsakis announced that he would not only cover the remaining costs for the entire building but would also reimburse the expenses already incurred for purchasing the land in the centre of Athens. In this context, Arsakis appeared as a *deus ex machina* for the cause of girls' education in the nascent Greek State. His contribution embodied the ideals of the so-called "Balkan Enlightenment",²¹ influencing both Greece and Romania, the country where he had resided from his youth until his death. The impressive building completed thanks to Arsakis' generosity still stands today in the centre of Athens²² (Fig 9).

For the construction of the building, soldiers transported "unnecessary stones" from the Acropolis. Although this practice, approved by King Otto, is today regarded as unethical from an archaeological perspective, it underscores the importance then attached to the establishment of this girls' school and the societal role it was intended to fulfil. The institution was named Arsakeion in honour of its benefactor. "At the end of one of the wings was the students' hospital, a ward of considerable dimensions with a number of beds, as well as a convalescent room, a modest library, a small pharmacy, a kitchen, and other necessary facilities".²³ Arsakis, while keeping informed everything about the Arsakeion, never visited Athens personally. He withdrew at his country house at Vedeia (Fig 10).

The relationship between Arsakis and the Philekpaideftiki Etaireia was not without complications. His request that the school bear his name was accepted only reluctantly and after some delay by the governing board. Eventually, his name was inscribed above the school's main entrance (Fig 11).

Similarly, a condition of the donation was that three annual scholarships would be awarded to students of his own choosing. This led to the exchange of numerous

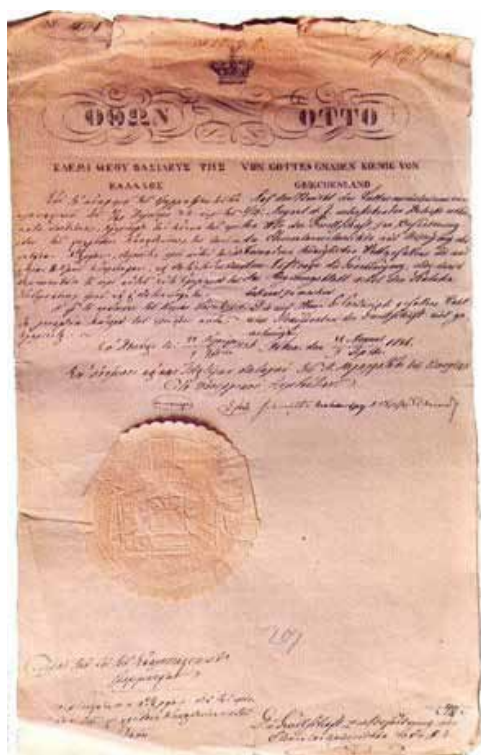


Figure 8. The Royal Decree by King Otto for the foundation of the Philekpaideftiki Etaireia, presented bilingually in Greek and German to ensure comprehension by both Greeks and the Bavarian settlers in Greece.



Figure 9. a: Bird's eye view of the Arsakeion, b: Its façade on Panepistemiou Str., Athens.

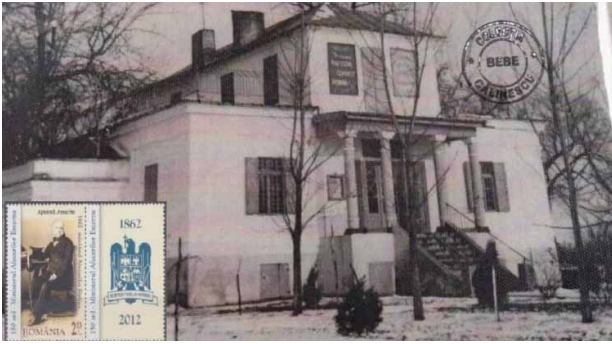


Figure 10. Apostolos Arsakis' country house at Vedeia, Romania. On the left - commemorative postal stamps issued on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the founding of Romania's Foreign Office, depicting Arsakis, who played a vital role in its creation. From a bilingual Romanian-Greek edition of the bilingual publishing house Omonia.



Figure 11. The Arsakeion name inscribed prominently on the lintel above the School's main entrance.

argumentative and often bitter letters, with Arsakis - like Bellios before him - threatening to revoke the donation. It was only due to the strong intervention of Queen Amalia that the disputes were ultimately resolved.²⁴

On 16 July 1874, “the handsome Greek” died at a very advanced age. On the eve of his death, he wrote a letter to his friend Nikolaos Hatzopoulos in Athens: “My lamp is extinguishing, my friend Nikolaos, not only because of the lack of oil, but also because no one can provide it”.²⁵ The announcement of his death caused great emotion in Greece. The students and teachers of the Arsakeion mourned for four days. Newspapers all over the world reported on his life and praised his philanthropic work. Yet Arsakis, ever faithful to the guiding principle of the Greek-speaking diaspora of Romania - “to love Greece, but from afar”²⁶ - never set foot in the country he so generously supported. To this day, at every graduation ceremony at the Arsakeion, the students sing the Hymn to Arsakis.

Discussion

We begin with an examination of Kottas' painting and subsequently will elaborate on three elements pertinent to the benefactors' social advancement: first, the clothing worn by the figures; second, the architectural style of the background buildings; and third, the language “spoken” by the benefactors.

1. Clothing

In *The Meeting of the Leaders*, red curtains are pulled back to reveal fifteen men gathered to discuss the fate of Greece. Each one looks regal and stately in his own way, with dapper suits and full beards; some are even adorned with medals and military dress. The deep red of the curtains connects each element of the foreground, as it colours both the carpet underneath their feet and the tablecloth which rests in the centre of the composition.^{3a}

This attire stands in stark contrast to the traditional clothing worn by the Vlachs in their native Epirus (Fig 14).

Thus, they “became” and appeared European, and they proudly displayed their titles in their formal documents and wills. Hence, we read with patriotic admiration of *Baron Simon Sina*, *Baron Konstantinos Bellios*, and *Baron Michael Tositsas*, all of whom are depicted in the painting^b, citations 27,28,29

Interestingly, a similar pattern of social advancement characterised the lives of the next generations

a Although Kottas' painting was acclaimed by Lamerie as his most structured work, it can scarcely be considered original. We have identified a closely related composition, Theodor Aman's 1861 canvas *Proclamation of the Union of the Principalities of Romania* (Fig. 12a & Fig. 12b). Arsakis - who attended the event - is indicated by an inserted arrow. His participation is documented by the published list of participants Fig. 13. We do not contend, however, that this constitutes artistic plagiarism. Aman's painting conveys the message that the creation of the Romanian state occurred under the auspices of the higher Orthodox clergy, thereby reinforcing the notion of Romania as “Byzance après Byzance”. By contrast, Kottas presents the rebirth of modern Greece clothed in an unequivocally classical guise.

b Reflecting on the ennoblement of individuals outside the old landed gentry - a practice adopted by the Habsburgs, Romanovs, Hanoverians, Bourbons, Sultans and both Napoleonic regimes from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century - it is evident that the arrangement was reciprocal. A notable illustration is the knighthood bestowed upon Henry Solomon Wellcome, the son of a farmer in rural America who became one of the foremost benefactors of the history of medicine²⁷. Yet such recently created honours never matched the lustre of their hereditary antecedents: they conferred no substantive power and served principally as tokens of meritocracy rather than of true aristocracy. Members of the ancien régime seldom regarded their bearers as social equals²⁸. Notably in Romania, where Arsakis and partially Bellios lived, the old Boyar families reluctantly accepted in their class bankers, scientists and political figures who, due to a changing financial and geopolitical environment, were elevated to the status of nobles²⁹.



Figure 14. Vlachs seen in their traditional clothing in northern Greece in the early 20th century.



Figure 15. Farewell reception from the Greek shipowners in honour of the minister of Commercial Navy, Nicolaos Avraam, after the conclusion of the baying agreement for 100 Liberty ships. 19 Jan. 1947, New York, From: Harlaftis G., Aristotelis Onassis. The true story, p. 81.

tive juxtaposition of ancient glory and [its] resurrection by a modern descendant creates a compound fable of national resurrection in which the historical existence of neither ancient society nor its putative modern successor possesses full meaning by itself.^{31,32} Consequently, in the distant background of Kottas' painting, the Acropolis and its monuments are rendered only faintly.

The benefactors were not merely offering gifts to the Greek nation; they sought to contribute in a manner that would secure the adoption of Western European values and medical practises. The extent of their success is evident in the striking transformation of Athens from a small Ottoman town into an elegant European capital (Fig 16a-d).



A



B



C



D

Figure 16. Above: The Athens Neoclassical Trilogy on Panepistimiou Str. (a: The National Library, b: The National University, c: The National Academy), opposite the Arsakeion. Below: "The Bazaar of Athens", in Edward Dodwell, Views in Greece from Drawings, London, 1821 (Digital Library of the University of Heidelberg), painted just 35 years before the erection of the neoclassical Arsakeion.

3. Language

The benefactors depicted in Kottas' painting were predominantly Vlachs. In their places of birth, the

spoken languages constituted a mixture of a local Greek dialect, Albanian, some Turkish, but primarily Vlachika (Aromanian), the mother tongue of most of the Vlach benefactors during their youth. The Aromanian language belongs to the eastern branch of the descendants of Latin and was formed in the first centuries AD following the Roman conquest of the Balkans.³³ In Greek usage, the term “Vlach” (Vlăheshte) prevailed, although the terms “Aromanian” and “Koutsovlachika” are also employed in scholarly discourse. It is one of the four Romance languages of the Balkans, with a significant proportion of vocabulary derived from Greek. The oldest known example of Vlach writing is the inscription on an icon of the Virgin Mary by the priest-monk Nektarios Terpos, dating to 1731, discovered in 1950. It originates from the Monastery of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary at Ardenitsa³⁴ (Fig 17a).

The first grammar book of the Aromanian language was published in 1813 in Vienna (Fig 17b).

However, once these Vlach boys emigrated abroad and advanced in their education, they adopted for their verbal and written communications with other Greeks an elegant, albeit somewhat artificial, form of Greek known as Katharevousa (“purified” Greek). In their dealings with non-Greeks in their new countries they spoke chiefly French, the customary language of Europe’s élite. In Romania, by contrast, any hint of Vlach descent was deemed a source of humiliation. General Radu R. Rosetti noted that his father had attended secondary school in Toulouse and cherished French culture; he added that, when the brothers quarrelled, one would disdainfully call him “salle valaque” (“belonging to the Vlach department”).³⁵

Conclusions

The Greek benefactors depicted in Kottas’ painting traversed a complex path before being fully identified as Greeks in the modern sense of the word. Similarly arduous was their journey from impoverished, illiterate Vlach boys to prominent, wealthy, and influential members of the societies to which they emigrated. Acting as distinct minorities, and possessing a *homo oeconomicus* mentality, they achieved high status, thereby transforming their cultural behaviour and identity into that of benefactors. From a sociological perspective, unlike the traditional philanthropist who provides individual assistance to the needy, the benefactor seeks to reorganise society through the establishment of institutions.³⁶ Hence, social advancement was reciprocal: through their donations the benefactors enhanced their own status, while society as a whole gained access to modern concepts of education and



A



B

Figure 17. a: The Virgin Mary’s icon from Ardenitsa, b: A Makedon (Arman) Grammar Book, Viena 1813.

healthcare. As has been observed, “*Beneficence is not an obligation; it is an act of personal realisation, historical consciousness, and social awareness*”.³⁷

The two individuals on whom this study has focused - Apostolos Arsakis and Konstantinos Bellios - maintained strong connections with the field of medicine, either through their professional careers or through

their donations to hospitals. Although they donated substantial sums to the Greek State for the establishment of healthcare and educational institutions, their acts of generosity were initially met with some reluctance. Both benefactors adored Greece; however, neither chose to live there. Bellios stayed in the country for only three months, while Arsakis, never visited it at all.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Η κοινωνική ανέλιξη των Ελλήνων Εθνικών Ευεργετών του 19ου αιώνα. Το παράδειγμα του Αποστόλου Αρσάκη και του Κωνσταντίνου Μπέλλιου

Έφη Πουλάκου-Ρεμπελάκου, Μαρία Μάνδηλα-Κουσσουλή, Αθανάσιος Διαμαντόπουλος

Αν και ήδη από το 1894 ο Charles McIntire περιέγραψε την ιατρική κοινωνιολογία ως την επιστήμη των κοινωνικών φαινομένων ατομικά των ίδιων των γιατρών αλλά και συνολικά ως μιας ξεχωριστής τάξης, η κοινωνική πρόοδος των ιατρών και των δωρητών των Ιδρυμάτων Υγείας ως ομάδας έχει μελετηθεί ελάχιστα. Έτσι, αναλάβαμε την παρούσα πιλοτική μελέτη. Η έρευνά μας, ξεκίνησε με έναν πίνακα που απεικονίζει μια ομάδα Ελλήνων ευεργετών κυρίως του δέκατου ένατου αιώνα και στοχεύει να παρουσιάσει τη ζωή και το έργο δύο εξ αυτών, του βαρώνου Κωνσταντίνου Μπέλλιου και του Αποστόλου Αρσάκη. Και οι δύο ήταν στενά συνδεδεμένοι με την ιατρική και τα ιατρικά ιδρύματα. Εκτός από τις βιογραφίες των δύο αυτών επιφανών ευεργετών, η μελέτη εξετάζει εκτενώς την κοινωνική διαδρομή που πραγματοποίησαν οι δύο αυτοί φτωχοί και αμόρφωτοι Βλάχοι για να εξελιχθούν σε πλούσιους, μορφωμένους, αριστοκράτες Έλληνες εθνικούς ευεργέτες.

Λέξεις Κλειδιά: *Απόστολος Αρσάκης, Κωνσταντίνος Μπέλιος, Ρουμανία, Εθνικός ευεργέτης, Αυστροουγγαρία*

REFERENCES

1. Medical Sociology: Definition, History, Scope, Perspectives [Internet]. Sociology Group; 2019 Sep 10 [cited 2025 Jun 25]. Available from: <https://www.sociologygroup.com/meaning-branches-sociology/>
2. Hollingshead AB. Medical Sociology: a brief review. *Milbank Mem Fund Q Health Soc.* 1973 Autumn;51(4):531–42.
3. Laramie E. *Chasing a Vision*. JK Studio Publications; 2018 Jan. Idaho, United States
4. Zafeiriou-Paroutoglou M, Zafeiriou A. Northern Epirus National Benefactors and Their Contribution to the Church and the Nation [thesis]. Thessaloniki: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki; 2020. Greek. doi:10.26262/heal.auth.ir325369.
5. Serbian art - The Royal Family of Serbia [Internet]. RoyalFamily.org [cited 2025 Jun 25]. Available from: <https://www.royalfamily.org/about-serbia/serbian-art>
6. Ralli I, Tsiamis C, Kantzanou M, Piagkou M, Mylonas A, Poulakou-Rebelakou E. Hospitals of Athens founded during the 1870–1920 period: historical data. *Hellenic Arch Oral Maxillofac Surg.* 2019;1:25–36.
7. Michaleas SN, Psaltopoulou T, Halvatsiotis P, et al. Unveiling the unknown history of the first civil hospital of Athens, “Elpis”. *Cureus.* 2024 Oct;16(10):e72526. doi:10.7759/cureus.72526.
8. Anagnostopoulou G. Public health buildings in Athens, 1833–1923 [doctoral thesis]. Athens: National Technical University of Athens; 2013.
9. Time Machine. The historic “Elpis” hospital where leading Greek doctors worked [Internet]. 2021 Jan 15 [cited 2025 Jun 25]. Greek. [URL unavailable]
10. Bellios VD. *The Diary of the Baron and Great Benefactor Constantine D. Bellios (1836–1837)*. Athens: Association for the Dissemination of Useful Books; 2018. Greek.
11. Michalopoulos D. Apostolos Arsakis: a statesmanship filled with trials, and the education of women. *Bulgarian J Sci Educ.* 2008;2(2):267–79.
12. Lazar E. Personalities of Greek scholars in 19th century Romania. In: *The Greek Thought, Acta of Conference, Greek Academy. Vol B.* Athens; p.276–86.
13. Lovin Romania. Dârvari Skete [Internet]. [cited 2025 Jun 25]. Available from: <https://www.lovinromania.com/places/bucharest-municipality/darvari-skete>
14. Palmer A. *Twilight of the Habsburgs: The Life and Times of Emperor Francis Joseph*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press; 1995. p.246–53.
15. Haris Th. *The Priest Haritof and His Social Offer in Caucasus and Greece*. [Private edition]; 1982. p.108. Greek. Also cited: Haritithis family oral tradition.
16. Britannica. Alexandru Ioan Cuza | Unification of Romania, Moldavia [Internet]. [cited 2025 Jun 11]. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Alexandru-Ioan-Cuza>
17. WikiPhantis. Apostolos Arsakis [Internet]. [cited 2025 Jun 25]. Available from: <https://www.wikiphantis.com/en/arsakis>

- 25]. Available from: https://wiki.phantis.com/index.php/Apostolos_Arsakis
18. Naxidou E, Konstantinova Y, editors. *Christian Networks in the Ottoman Empire: A Transnational History*. Budapest: Central European University Press; 2024. doi:10.7829/jj.17610845.
 19. HellenicaWorld. Apostolos Arsakis [Internet]. [cited 2025 Jun 25]. Available from: <https://www.hellenicaworld.com/en/ApostolosArsakis>
 20. Babiniotis G. Apostolos Arsakis, Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment and Education. In: *150 Years of Education: Greek Society for Promoting Education and Learning 1836–1996*. Athens; 1996. p.21–25.
 21. Baran D. The first Romanian versions of the Hippocratic Aphorisms and Oath. In: Ziropiannis P, Vogiatzakis E, editors. *Proceedings of the 16th Congress of the Society for the Dissemination of the Hippocratic Spirit*. Athens; 2020. p.102–16.
 22. Arsakeio.gr. The Arsakeion Mansion [Internet]. [cited 2025 Jun 25]. Available from: <https://www.arsakeio.gr>
 23. Arsakeio.gr. Arsakeio: Important landmarks of its history [Internet]. [cited 2025 Jun 25]. Available from: <https://www.arsakeio.gr>
 24. Arsakeio.gr. The initial conflicts and reconciliation [Internet]. [cited 2025 Jun 25]. Available from: <https://www.arsakeio.gr>
 25. Metapedia. Apostolos Arsakis [Internet]. [cited 2025 Jun 25]. Greek. Available from: https://el.metapedia.org/wiki/Apostolos_Arsakis
 26. Himara.gr. Apostolos Arsakis: “Love Greece from afar” [Internet]. [cited 2025 Jun 25]. Greek. Available from: <https://www.himara.gr/istoria/apostolos-arsakis-na-agapate-tin-ellada-apo-makria>
 27. Wenyon CM. Obituary: Henry Solomon Wellcome, 1853–1936. *R Soc Biol Mem*. 1938 Jan 1; doi:10.1098/rsbm.1938.0003.
 28. Margreiter K. The notion of nobility and the impact of ennoblement on early modern Central Europe. *Cent Eur Hist*. 2019;52(3):382–404. doi:10.1017/S0008938919000729.
 29. Popescu M. Interculturalism in the political aristocracy memoirs of Romania during 1881–191. *Cluj Univ J Interdiscip Soc Sci Humanit*. 2024;2(1):25.
 30. Harlaftis G. *Aristotelis Onassis: The True Story*. Athens: Onassis Foundation/Kathimerini; 2025. Translated by Diamandopoulos A. p.86.
 31. Silberman NA. Promised lands and chosen peoples: the politics and poetics of archaeological narrative. In: Kohl PL, Fawcett C, editors. *Nationalism, Politics and the Practice of Archaeology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1995. p.249–62.
 32. Athanassopoulos EF. An “Ancient” landscape: European ideals, archaeology, and nation building in early modern Greece. *J Mod Greek Stud*. 2002;20:273–305.
 33. Teacher Finder. Interesting facts about the Aromanian language [Internet]. 2025 Feb 5 [cited 2025 Jun 25]. Available from: <https://weareteacherfinder.com/blog/interesting-facts-about-the-aromanian-language/>
 34. Vlahoi.net. Aromanian language [Internet]. [cited 2025 Jun 25]. Available from: <https://www.vlahoi.net/vlahiki-glossa>
 35. Popescu M. Interculturalism in the political aristocracy memoirs of Romania during 1881–191. *Cluj Univ J Interdiscip Soc Sci Humanit*. 2024;2(1):28.
 36. Chrysina K. Beneficence as a lever of history. *MaxMag*. 2023 Nov 7.
 37. Melahrinouidi E. The institution of beneficence yesterday and today [Internet]. *Alithia.gr*. 2015 Oct 1 [cited 2025 Jun 25]. Available from: <https://www.alithia.gr>

Corresponding author:

Athanasios Diamandopoulos
18, St. Andrew str., Romanou, Patras, Greece, 26500
e-mail: 1453295@gmail.cm