An unpublished letter of Korais

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AN UNPUBLISHED LETTER OF KORAIS

IN SEARCH OF RELEVANT material for an exhibition of letters and documents related to the Balkans and Greece one particular item attracted my attention. In the catalogue of the Diederichs collection in the University Library of Amsterdam I came upon a letter attributed to one K. M. Koimas. Being shown the original I was surprised to notice that the letter proved to be an autograph of Adamantios Korais. I came to this conclusion by comparing the handwriting with other letters and because Koimas stated categorically that the letter was an "idiograph" of Korais. Meanwhile it had become clear to me that and why the collector and librarians had wrongly attributed the letter to Koimas. They had mistaken the epsilon for an iota. The unknown Koimas was in fact the well-known scholar Koumas.

On February 22nd, 1823 the letter was forwarded by Korais to the "Frères Ralli, negocians Grecs" in Vienna. From Korais using the singular in his letter I conclude he was probably addressing Theodoros Rallis. This unpublished letter is all about the subscription of Korais planned editions of Plutarch's "Ethics" and "Politics".

1. H. M. Diederichs was a 19th century liberal newspaper owner and a passionate collector. After his death his son donated the collection to the Munici­pality of Amsterdam in 1878. Later it was transferred to the library of Amsterdam University.

2. Under nr. 136 Al at the Handschriftenafdeling van de Zaal Kostbare Werken in the Library of the University of Amsterdam.

3. It is unknown when and how Koumas got possession of the Korais letter.

4. As far as I know from the published correspondence Korais wrote his first letter to Th. Rallis on December 9th, 1820 and his second on February 20th, 1821. See 'Αλληλογραφία, ed. O.M.E.Δ., v. 4, 1817-1822, Athens 1982, nr. 883 και 890.

5. Korais separated from the "Ethics" five chapters which were purely political.
He urged Rallis and the other members of the Greek community in Vienna to put their names on the subscription list. He pointed out that two Russian officials in Paris had already ordered 40 and 20 copies respectively. Furthermore he requested Rallis to make 200 or 300 reprints of the announcement of this forthcoming publications and “sow them all over Germany”. If the printing could not be done in Vienna, the Leipzig printers would do as an alternative.

In the letter under discussion he also stated that he had recently sent the same announcement to Pantoleon Vlastos, also in Vienna and Pantaleimon Maurogordatos in Triest. At the very same day he wrote a reminder about the same subject to Jacobus Rotas. From both letters we may deduce that he felt miserable, mentally and physically, because of the events in Greece, particularly those at Chios and by the stupendous amount of work related to his publications.

6. The Russian officials were Prince Labadoff and Count Orloff. See 'Ἀλληλογραφία, v. 5, 1823-1826, Athens 1983, nr. 968.
7. Korais wrote many letters to members of the Vlastos family, who originated from Chios like himself. In this case it was certainly Pantoleon Vlastos.
8. I deduced this surname and Christian name from other letters in the 'Ἀλληλογραφία. In the published correspondence letters to Maurogordatos are absent.
9. The learned merchant with whom Korais corresponded frequently. See 'Ἀλληλογραφία, ... nr. 968.
10. The phrase Πολλών λόγων ἔγγαστρωμένος εἶμαι refers most probably to the dialogue Περί των Ελληνικών συμφερόντων printed as a preface in the publication of Plutarch’s “Politics”.

[Θεόδωρος Ράλλης] 22 Φεβρ. 1823

Φίλε συμπατριώτα,

Πατρίδος, τῆς ὁσιωτάτης συμπατριώτης τῆς τελευταίας ἡμέρας τῆς ζωῆς μου. Εδώ κλείσμεν[ή] βλέπεις προκήρυξιν, τήν ὁσιωτάτην ἐπενόησαν οἱ δύο μου φίλοι, ὁ μεταφραστής καὶ ὁ τυπογράφος, εἰπὼν ὧν ἑαυτῆν μετράν παρηγορ[εῖ]ν, δι’ όσου τῶν συμπατριώτων ἑστήκασθαι ἡ σκληρὴ τῆς ὥρας τῆς ζωῆς, καὶ αὐτὰ τὰ πρὸς τὴν ἀναγκαίαν ἐκ

Προ ολίγων ημερῶν τὴν ἐστειλά καὶ αὐτῶν πρὸς τὸν Βλαστόν καὶ εἰς
Τεργέστην προς τον Π. Μανρογ(οροάτον). Τώρα τὴν κοινοποιώ εις όλους σας, διά ν' αφοριστήσετε προτον να τέμεμετε προς τὸν τυπογράφον τὰ ὄνομα τὰ καθείς κἀν δι' ἐν σῶμα τῶν Ἡθικῶν καὶ ἐν τῶν Πολιτικῶν. 'Επειδὴ μέλλην νὰ τυπώσω τὰ ὄνομα τῶν συνδρομητῶν, ἀτοπον εἶναι νὰ μὴ φανῶσι τὰ ἱδαμα σας. Εὖδο συνάγονται καθημέραν ὑπογραφαι. Διὰ 40 σῶματα ἐπέφησαν ἡγῆ ἕνας ἀπὸ τοὺς ἐπισήμους ἐδῶ εὐφημισμένους Ρόσσους, καὶ ἄλλος διὰ 20. Λεύτερον νὰ τὴν κοινοποιήσετε καὶ πρὸς τοὺς ἀλλογενεῖς φίλους σας. Τοῦτο διὰ νὰ γενὴ γρύψο, δεσμφεσε νὰ τυπώσετε ἀπαράλλακτα 200 ἢ 300 παρόμοια, νὰ τὰ σπείρετε εἰς ὅλην τὴν Διεργασίαν. Ἀν αὐτὸς δὲν συνεχήσεται ὁ τύπος, εἰκολον εἶναι νὰ βαλθὴ τὸν χώρο τῆς Λειψίας, καὶ νὰ τυπώσων εἰς αὐτὴν τὴν Λειψίαν.

Facsimile of Korais's letter.
Πολλών λόγων εγγαστρομένος είμαι, ἀλλ' ἡ ἀδυναμία μου δὲν μὲ συνχωρεῖ νὰ τοὺς γεννήσω. Τὸ ἐλαιὸν τοῦ λόγχου τῆς ζωῆς μου ἐφύρασε καὶ ἄλλο νέον νὰ χύσω εἰς αὐτὸν δὲν ἔχω. Ἐὰν ἡ ζωή σου νὰ ἴναι καὶ μακρὰ καὶ εὐτυχὴς! Ἑγὼ τὰς προσταγάς. Ὁ Κ.

In the handwriting of K. M. Koumas: ἰδιόγραφος τοῦ Κοραή, Κ. Μ. Κούμας.
In other handwriting: Κ.Μ. Koimas and Koimas.
On the frontside the addressees: “Messieurs, Messieurs Frères Ralli, négo- cians Grecs, à Vienne en Autriche”, different calculations and different stamps of the French postal service.

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