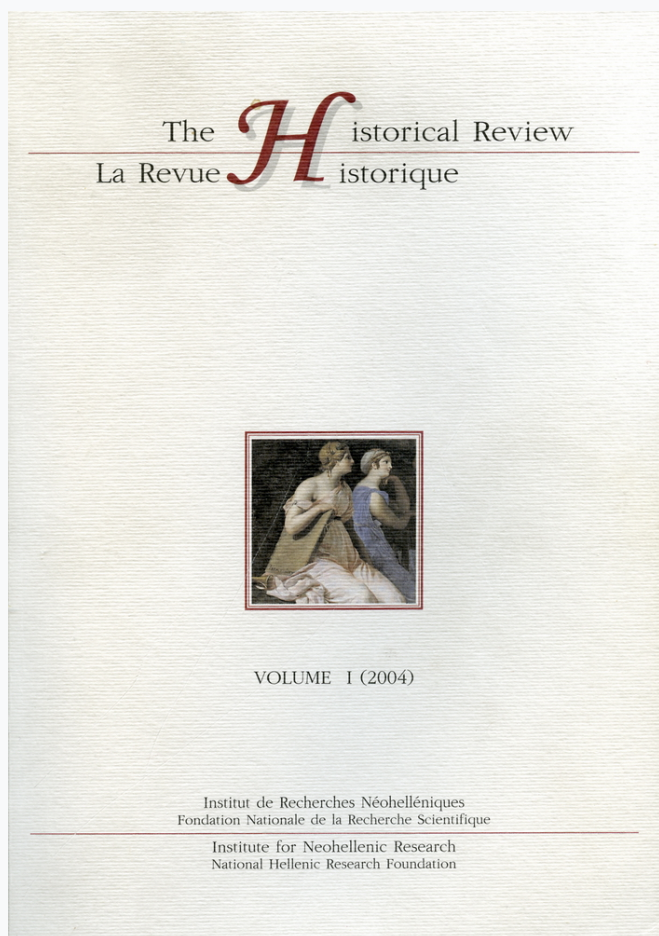


## The Historical Review/La Revue Historique

Vol 1 (2004)

Vol 1, No (2004)



### A Founder on Founding: Jefferson's Advice to Koraes

*Ioannis D. Evrigenis*

doi: [10.12681/hr.175](https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.175)

#### To cite this article:

Evrigenis, I. D. (2005). A Founder on Founding: Jefferson's Advice to Koraes. *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique*, 1, 157–181. <https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.175>

A FOUNDER ON FOUNDING:  
JEFFERSON'S ADVICE TO KORAE<sup>1</sup>

*Ioannis D. Evrigenis*

---

ABSTRACT: In 1823, shortly after the outbreak of the Greek Revolution, and in the context of a general attempt to gather support for the Greek cause, Adamantios Koras wrote to Thomas Jefferson, whom he had met once in Paris, to request his advice on the founding of a Greek state. Although brief, the exchange between the two men provides a rare, if not unique, record of a founder's advice to an aspiring emulator. Koras' role in Greek political and intellectual life, coupled with Jefferson's fame, have made the correspondence between the two men a source of some interest among Greek scholars, but Jefferson's advice has never been studied in the context of his broader political theory. This paper traces the history of the acquaintance of the two men and of their subsequent correspondence, and places Jefferson's recommendations in the context of his political thought. Written as it was with the benefit of a long life in politics and more than forty-five years of experience from the American founding, Jefferson's advice to Koras provides a singular opportunity to assess his political ideas over time.

---

In 1823, Adamantios Koras,<sup>2</sup> a seventy-five-year-old expatriated Greek living in Paris, wrote to the then eighty-year-old Thomas Jefferson to request some advice on statecraft for Greece. At that time, the Greek revolutionary forces had managed to sustain a two-and-a-half year struggle against the Ottoman Empire, and there were some indications that the uprising might succeed in freeing a part of Greece from Ottoman rule, thereby giving rise to a Greek state for the first time in over three hundred and fifty years.

The correspondence between Koras and Jefferson consists of one letter from Koras, a response from Jefferson, and two more letters from Koras.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Professor Paschalis M. Kitromilides for his helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper, as well as Professor Victor Gourevitch for correcting my translations of Koras' letters from the French. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, Athens, Greece.

<sup>2</sup> Κορραΐης. Having lived and written in France, Koras spelled his name "Coray". In the secondary literature it is spelled "Koras", "Korais", "Coras", and "Coray". Throughout this paper he is referred to as "Koras", which is a conventional transliteration of his name into English, as well as the way in which he is listed in most bibliographies and library catalogues.

<sup>3</sup> Adamantios Koras to Thomas Jefferson, 10 July, (1823); Thomas Jefferson to Adamantios Koras, 31 October, (1823); Adamantios Koras to Thomas Jefferson, 28 December, (1823); Adamantios Koras to Thomas Jefferson, 30 January, (1825). The Koras-Jefferson

Although brief, it warrants particular attention for a number of reasons. First, even though Jefferson is primarily known as the author of the *Declaration of Independence*, and is the author of several important documents on politics, education, and Virginia, much of what is known about his thought comes from his correspondence. A prolific letter writer and excellent correspondent, Jefferson wrote and received thousands of letters,<sup>4</sup> and some of those are the

---

correspondence has been reproduced in the following (Jefferson's letter is reproduced in a number of collections of his writings and correspondence; these have been omitted):

Kontogiannis, Pantelis M., ed., *Ἐπιστολαὶ ἀνέκδοτοι Κοραΐ, καὶ πρὸς Κοραΐν* [Unpublished Letters by Korais and to Korais], *Χιακὰ Χρονικά*, Vol. 5, Athens: Typ. tis V. Aulis A. Raphtani, 1923, pp. 148-151, 153-162, 163-164, 164-166. This edition reproduces faithfully all four letters in their original languages.

Michailidis-Nouaros, Georgios, «Ἡ Ἀλληλογραφία τοῦ Τζέφερσον πρὸς τὸν Κοραΐ», [Jefferson's Correspondence with Korais], *Ἑλληνισμός* 23 (January-February 1932), pp. 102-105. This reproduction is cited by Stephen George Chaconas in *Adamantios Korais: A Study in Greek Nationalism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1942, hereafter referred to as "Chaconas, 1942a", p. 132, note 56, and again in "The Jefferson-Korais Correspondence", *The Journal of Modern History* 14, no. 1 (March 1942), p. 65, note 4, where Chaconas writes: "I have not seen this study because the periodical *Hellenism* is not available, as far as I know, in the United States"; this is still the case, and there is no record of this periodical in the main libraries in Greece.

Chaconas, Stephen G., "The Jefferson-Korais Correspondence", *The Journal of Modern History* 14, no. 1 (March 1942), pp. 64-70, hereafter referred to as "Chaconas, 1942b". Before the publication of his book on Korais, Chaconas published the three letters by Korais in the original French, in this article. This reproduction is riddled with typographical and editorial errors.

Chaconas, Stephen G., "The Jefferson-Korais Correspondence", *The Journal of Modern History* 14, no. 4 (December 1942), pp. 593-596, hereafter referred to as "Chaconas, 1942c". This is a reproduction of Chaconas' first attempt, in the March issue, with some of the errors corrected.

Korais, Adamantios, *Ἀπαντα τὰ Πρωτότυπα Ἔργα, 1774-1833* [Complete Original Works: Letters, 1774-1833], ed. G. Valetas, Athens: Dorikos, 1964-1965, Vol. B2, pp. 348-349, 372-376, 383-384, 416-417, hereafter cited as "Valetas". This edition reproduces all four letters in their respective original languages.

Korais, Adamantios, *Ἀλληλογραφία* [Correspondence], ed. Constantinos Th. Dimaras {et.al.}, Athens: Paradosi, N. Zobola, 1983, Vol. V, pp. 39-44, 87-92, 103-104, 183-184. This edition reproduces the letters in their respective original languages, with a few minor typographical errors.

Moulakis, Athanasios, «Ἡ Ἀλληλογραφία Κοραΐ-Jefferson» [The Korais-Jefferson Correspondence], in Ster. Phasoulakis, ed., *Κοραΐς καὶ Χίος, Χίος, 11-15 Μαΐου*, (1983), Acts of Congress, Athens: Homereion Pneumatikon Kentron, 1984, Vol. I, pp. 269-284. Moulakis reproduces all four letters in their respective original languages.

only sources of insight into his views on a wide range of matters. Second, Koraes' letter to Jefferson seems to be the only one of its kind, namely the only one requesting advice on the founding of a state. Coming as it did more than forty-five years after the start of the American Revolution, Jefferson's response is uniquely positioned—in terms of both time and subject matter—to serve as a summary of this founder's thoughts on founding, but more importantly as an assessment of the ways in which the American founding had taken shape. Third, as Jefferson himself points out towards the end of his letter, his response to Koraes contains the thoughts on politics of an octogenarian with "past fifty years of trial and trouble in the various grades of his country's service"; an octogenarian, moreover, whom we know to be one of the keenest observers of politics. Finally, as a succinct statement of his mature views on founding, Jefferson's letter provides a unique impetus for a brief examination and assessment of his political thought. For these reasons and many more related to specific content, Jefferson's letter to Koraes is an important statement of his political wisdom, which deserves a detailed examination alongside the rest of his thought. This paper examines the issues raised by Jefferson in his letter, in the order that they are presented in, compares them to other relevant passages from his writings, and attempts to assess his views in 1823 in the context of the evolution of his thought. The result, not surprisingly, reveals a man of prudence and good sense, with an eye for detail and the larger picture alike, who pursued his commitment to liberty and education until the end of his life.

### *Koraes*

Adamantios Koraes was born in Smyrna, in Asia Minor, in 1748. His father was a silk merchant, with little education, but his mother was "a woman of some

---

Diamantidis, Nicholas D., "An Elective Encounter: The Koraes-Jefferson Connection", *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 10/11 (1994/1995), pp. 587-602. This article includes Koraes' letter of 10 July 1823, translated poorly into English, as well as Jefferson's response.

Passages quoted without reference are taken from the manuscripts of the four letters, found in the *Thomas Jefferson Papers*, online, at: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/mjthtml/mjtjhome.html>, and the sources listed above. Translation from the French is my own. Unless otherwise noted, other letters of Thomas Jefferson's are also taken from the *Thomas Jefferson Papers*, online. I have retained Jefferson's spelling throughout.

<sup>4</sup> According to *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* project, at Princeton University, Jefferson wrote some 20,000 letters and received around 30,000 (<http://www.princeton.edu/~tjpapers/>).

culture”.<sup>5</sup> Koraes received his initial education in schools in Smyrna, where he learned modern Greek, as well as from Bernhard Keun, a Dutch pastor, from whom he learned Latin in exchange for teaching him Modern Greek. While still in Smyrna, Koraes also learned some English, French, Italian, and Hebrew, and thus became exposed to Western literature and scholarship. In 1772, his father sent him to Amsterdam, to act as the family’s trade agent and to continue his studies. With a letter of introduction from Keun, Koraes presented himself to Adrian Buurt, “a famous logician and theologian of Amsterdam”.<sup>6</sup> Under Buurt, Koraes studied the classics and European culture. Six years later, he returned to Smyrna to seek his parents’ permission to study medicine in France. Despite their opposition, he left for Montpellier, where he studied for six years, graduating in 1787. An attempt was made to secure Koraes a position at Oxford, but it never came into fruition. As a result, Koraes moved to Paris, in time to witness the French Revolution, which affected him greatly. From his observation of it he concluded that “the increase in, and diffusion of, education had instilled in the French the love of liberty”.<sup>7</sup> During the 1790s, Koraes worked as an editor and translator of manuscripts.<sup>8</sup>

In the late 1790s, when the French armies had begun to harass the Ottoman Empire, Koraes, like many other Greeks, found reason to entertain hopes of a French intervention on behalf of his enslaved brethren. In 1798, he initiated the publication of a series of influential pamphlets urging Greeks to rise up against their Ottoman oppressors.<sup>9</sup> After the French forces withdrew from the Middle East, and it became apparent that there would be no intervention on behalf of Greece, Koraes decided to “direct all his energies into raising the educational and cultural level of his fellow Greeks and, above all, into instilling in them an awareness of the magnificent heritage of their ancient forebears”.<sup>10</sup> According to Paschalis M. Kitromilides,

---

<sup>5</sup> Richard Clogg, “Korais and the Movement for Greek Independence”, *History Today* 33 (October 1983), p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Chaconas, 1942a, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Clogg, “Korais and the Movement for Greek Independence”, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> See Clogg, “Korais and the Movement for Greek Independence”, p. 11: Koraes worked for Robert Holmes, the Oxford don, and described his work as “my yoke of misery” which he detested ‘as much as the Turks’.

<sup>9</sup> E.g., *Ἀδελφική διδασκαλία* [Fraternal Teaching], 1798; *ᾠδὴ Πόλεμιστήριον* [Martial Song] 1800; *Σάλπισμα Πόλεμιστήριον* [Martial Bugle Call], 1801.

<sup>10</sup> Clogg, “Korais and the Movement for Greek Independence”, pp. 12-13. On the influence of the French expedition in Egypt on Koraes, see Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Ἡ Γαλλικὴ Επανάσταση καὶ ἡ Νοτιοανατολικὴ Ευρώπη* [The French Revolution and South-Eastern Europe], Athens: Diatton, 1990, p. 98.

before explicitly political and hence subversive goals could be realistically contemplated and pursued, Korais insisted, the nations should attain maturity through appropriate cultural preparation. In this view also, Korais did not diverge from the tenets of the *Idéologues* who held that the cultural and political condition of a society ran in close parallelism and had to conform with each other. Education should spread as widely as possible among the modern Greeks who should by this means familiarize themselves thoroughly with the culture of the Enlightenment and with the classics of their ancient heritage. Korais felt it as one of his primary obligations to the cause of Greek regeneration to provide his compatriots with editions of the Greek classics that would help revive among the moderns the wisdom and virtue of the ancients.<sup>11</sup>

So, with the financial aid of the Zossimas brothers, he started the *Hellenic Library*, an ambitious project aimed at the publication of important ethical, political, and historical texts from ancient Greece. The rationale of this project, drawn from the lesson of the French Revolution, was that if the Greeks were educated and taught the glorious past of their ancestors, they would awaken to a desire to emulate that glory and to gain their freedom.<sup>12</sup> From 1805 onwards, the *Hellenic Library* produced a series of editions of classical texts, with prolegomena, scholia, and sometimes translation into French by Korais.<sup>13</sup> Despite the fact that Korais continued to live in Paris during the Greek Revolution (1821-1829), he was actively involved in raising funds, soliciting support, editing and printing more editions of classical texts, and writing letters and pamphlets with advice to the political and military leaders of the

---

<sup>11</sup> Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Tradition, Enlightenment, and Revolution: Ideological Change in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Greece*, Ph.D. Diss., Department of Government, Harvard University, 18 September (1978), p. 422. See also the updated, Greek edition of this work, Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Νεοελληνικός Διαφωτισμός: Οι πολιτικές και κοινωνικές ιδέες*, Athens 1996, pp. 394-402.

<sup>12</sup> On the connection between Korais and the French Revolution, see Kitromilides, *Νεοελληνικός Διαφωτισμός*, esp. pp. 104-108.

<sup>13</sup> See Kitromilides, *Tradition, Enlightenment and Revolution*, pp. 422-424. These editions were recognized for their quality and gave Korais a reputation as a classical scholar. Clogg, "Korais and the Movement for Greek Independence", p. 11, claims that through his work as editor, Korais "was able to continue with his classical studies, acquiring a wide acquaintance among European classicists and consolidating his reputation as one of the foremost Hellenists of his day. Even the great Richard Porson, who was by no means lavish in praise for his contemporaries, thought highly of Korais' work".

Revolution. In the context of this vast array of activity, Koraes wrote to Thomas Jefferson, requesting the American statesman's advice on behalf of Greece.<sup>14</sup>

Jefferson and Koraes seem to have met during the former's stay in Paris, between 1784 and September 1789. Nothing is known about their encounter, other than that both men attribute their acquaintance to Mr Paradise, a man who had been born in Greece, and was married to Lucy Ludwell Paradise, a Virginian, and that it took place at Jefferson's residence.<sup>15</sup> Jefferson had met Paradise in London, where the latter lived, and then again in Paris, where he moved. According to Malone, Paradise "delighted [Jefferson] by offering to instruct him in the pronunciation of the modern Greeks – thus giving him a clue to the pronunciation of the ancient language which he had been wondering about since his school days".<sup>16</sup> The timing makes it all but certain that it was Greece's past rather than her future that brought Jefferson and Koraes together. Jefferson left Paris 32 years before the start of the Greek

---

<sup>14</sup> According to Kitromilides, *Tradition, Enlightenment and Revolution*, p. 446: "Promotion of the Greek cause in international philhellenic circles had been a central concern in Koraes' life. To this end he had made very effective use of his scholarly connections and the respect he enjoyed as an accomplished classicist in nurturing interest in the Greek revival and soliciting support for the Greek strivings for freedom".

<sup>15</sup> Koraes begins his letter of 10 July 1823 by reminding Jefferson that he had had the pleasure of dining at the latter's residence, at Chaillot. This residence was the Hôtel de Langeac, which overlooked the Grille de Chaillot. According to Edward Dumbauld, in "Where Did Jefferson Live in Paris?", *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine*, 2nd ser., 23, no. 1 (January 1943), pp. 64-68, Jefferson moved there on 17 October 1785 and used it as his residence until his departure from France (p. 65).

<sup>16</sup> Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and His Time*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951, Vol. II, p. 61. Malone adds that Jefferson "did not have time to avail himself of this offer while in England, but after he went to Paris he asked for written instructions". There is a substantial correspondence between Jefferson and the Paradises (some eighty letters concerning the latter's affairs, between 1785 and 1792, in the Thomas Jefferson Papers), mainly regarding financial matters, as Lucy's Virginia estate was "heavily encumbered". According to William Howard Adams, in *The Paris Years of Thomas Jefferson*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997, p. 201, while visiting London in 1786, Jefferson "dined with the Paradises and even attended a ball in their company at the French embassy, no doubt all part of Lucy's plan to enlist his help with their creditors"; see also Malone, *Jefferson and His Time*, Vol. II, pp. 61-62, 209. John Paradise was also a member of the company with which Jefferson celebrated his last Fourth of July anniversary in Paris, in 1789; Paradise, along with Mazzei, assisted Joel Barlow in the composition of a tribute to Jefferson, which Paradise delivered on the night of the celebration. Jefferson wrote to him, on the next day, to thank him (Adams, *The Paris Years of Thomas Jefferson*, pp. 96-97; Malone, *Jefferson and His Time*, Vol. II, pp. 212-213).

Revolution of 1821. Thus, although there was pre-revolutionary activity going on at the time, and it is likely that Korais was involved in it and discussed the future of Greece, it is safe to assume that he was known primarily as a Greek man of letters –hence the connection with Paradise– rather than as a Greek revolutionary, at that stage.<sup>17</sup> At least thirty-four years after this encounter, then, Korais wrote to Jefferson to request advice and support on behalf of his rebelling compatriots.<sup>18</sup>

### *The Classics*

Scholars have been debating the liberal or republican character of the American Revolution for some time now. An interesting aspect of that debate regards the ideological origins of their thought, in an effort to determine whether it is indebted primarily to the republican tradition that has its roots, through the Renaissance, in Rome, and ultimately back in Greece, or whether the ideological movement that caused the Revolution was spurred by British Liberal thought. In the context of this question, the pedigree of the numerous classical references encountered in American Revolutionary thought is of the utmost importance; it is clear that the founders made use of the classics, but the question is: where did they learn to do so? Did they acquire this knowledge through their schooling, in the long tradition that valued Greek and Roman letters and considered them an important part of school curricula, or was their classical ammunition mere “window dressing”, as Mullett has argued, prepared for them by the British Liberals?<sup>19</sup>

In the lengthiest and most recent attempt to establish the connection between the founders and the classics, Carl J. Richard quotes John Page and

---

<sup>17</sup> See Kitromilides, *Νεοελληνικός Διαφωτισμός*, p. 419.

<sup>18</sup> Korais to Jefferson, 10 July 1823. Korais requested advice to the Greeks in the form of a letter from an illustrious American to an anonymous Greek, published in a prominent American newspaper, as well as a small group of trade negotiators who could also provide advice and assistance to Greek revolutionaries, in Greece.

<sup>19</sup> Bernard Bailyn, in *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 24, is the most prominent proponent of this view, first argued by Charles F. Mullett. Bailyn argues that the founders’

elaborate display of classical authors is deceptive. Often the learning behind it was superficial; often the citations appear to have been dragged in as ‘window dressing with which to ornament a page or a speech and to increase the weight of an argument’, for classical quotation, as Dr. Johnson said, was ‘the *parole* of literary men all over the world’.

Despite his agreement with Mullett’s position, Bailyn does acknowledge that Jefferson “was a careful reader of the classics” (*ibid.*, p. 25).



others, who describe Jefferson's study habits at William and Mary, where "he studied fifteen hours per day and carried his Greek grammar everywhere he went".<sup>20</sup> In addition to the testimony regarding his schooling, Richard cites Jefferson's disappointment at the possibility that Greek and Latin may go into disuse in Europe, and points to Jefferson's plans for the curriculum of the University of Virginia, wherein he proclaims that the classical languages are "the foundation preparatory for all the sciences", "the portico of entry to the university", and the "foundation common to all the sciences". In fact, Jefferson was so concerned with the level of instruction of Greek and Latin, that he "approved Thomas Cooper's proposal to exclude from the university any student who could not read classical authors 'with facility, convert a page of English into Latin at sight, and demonstrate a thorough knowledge of Euclid'".<sup>21</sup> There is much evidence, then, that the classics affected Jefferson in many ways. Like most of his contemporaries of similar education and means, he was familiar with ancient Greek and Roman literature, admired classical architecture, and quoted from the classical texts often. On its own, however, this evidence does not address the charge that the classics were either a sign of the times, or mere "window dressing".

Jefferson had many occasions to develop his views on the merits of a classical education, and there is substantial evidence that he practiced what he preached. Richard cites Jefferson's literary commonplace book, wherein "[f]orty percent of [the] passages, compiled between 1758 and 1773, were copied from classical works".<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, "[e]ven a cursory examination of Jefferson's thought and library reveals that here was no social dilettante but a serious scholar".<sup>23</sup> His library contained numerous classical works, which he read and quoted often. Indeed, Richard argues that "they profoundly influenced his writing style".<sup>24</sup> It is no surprise, then, that Jefferson begins his response<sup>25</sup> by

---

<sup>20</sup> Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26. Richard, *op. cit.*, p. 27, cites some instances of Jefferson's active interest in classical books, as well as testimony from his family members regarding his love of the classics.

<sup>23</sup> Charles B. Sanford, *Thomas Jefferson and His Library: A Study of His Literary Interests and of the Religious Attitudes Revealed by Relevant Titles in His Library*, Hamden: Archon Books, 1977. See also James Gilreath, Douglas L. Wilson, eds., *Thomas Jefferson's Library: A Catalog with the Entries in His Own Order*, Washington: Library of Congress, 1989, as well as Thomas Fitzhugh, ed., *Letters of Thomas Jefferson Concerning Philology and the Classics*, Charlottesville: The University of Virginia, 1919.

<sup>24</sup> See Richard, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-30.

<sup>25</sup> Jefferson to Koraes, 31 October 1823.

thanking Koraes for having sent him copies of his editions of Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*, as well as for Onesander's *Strategikos*.<sup>26</sup> Jefferson tells Koraes that he had read the latter's edition of Plutarch's *Lives*,<sup>27</sup> but more importantly, that he found Koraes' scholia "valuable" and of much profit, and that "with the aid of a few words from a modern Greek dictionary", he could have read Koraes' address to the rising Greeks. Although limited, these introductory remarks are interesting because they exceed the requirements of politeness and provide yet further evidence for the fact that Jefferson's knowledge of and interest in the classics was genuine and enduring. In fact, in two letters to Edward Everett, his other correspondent on Greek matters ancient and modern, Jefferson makes such comments on Everett's translation of Buttmann's *Greek Grammar* and on the Greek ablative, as only a knowledgeable specialist could.<sup>28</sup>

### Education

Jefferson was well aware of his debt to his father for the education that he afforded him, as well as of the ways in which that education served him.<sup>29</sup> The importance of that education for his thought and expression, coupled with his

<sup>26</sup> Ὀνησάνδρου Στρατηγικός καὶ Τυρταίου τὸ πρῶτον ἐλεγείον, μετὰ τῆς Γαλλικῆς ἑκατέρου μεταφράσεως [Onesander's *Strategikos*, with Tyrtaeus's First Elegy, Alongside the French Translation], ed. and tr. Adamantios Koraes, Paris: F. Didot et Fils, 1822; Ἀριστοτέλους Πολιτικῶν τὰ Σωζόμενα [Aristotle's *Politics* Extant], ed. Adamantios Koraes, Paris: I. M. Eberhart at Didot et Fils, 1821; Ἠθικὰ Νικομάχεια [Nicomachean Ethics], ed. Adamantios Koraes, Paris: I. M. Eberhart at Didot et Fils, 1822. We know that Jefferson received the *Ethics* and *Politics* with Koraes' letter of 10 July 1823.

<sup>27</sup> Πλουτάρχου Βίοι Παράλληλοι οἷς προσετέθησαν σημειώσεις καὶ τῶν αὐτοσχεδίων στοχασμῶν περὶ τῆς ἐλληνικῆς παιδείας καὶ γλώσσης [Plutarch's *Lives*, to which Have Been Added Notes and Improvised Reflections on the Consequences of the Greek Education and Language], ed. Adamantios Koraes, 6 vols., Paris: I. M. Eberhart, 1809.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Edward Everett, 24 February 1823, regarding Philipp Buttmann, *Greek Grammar*, tr. Edward Everett, Boston: O. Everett, 1822; Thomas Jefferson to Edward Everett, 24 March 1824, regarding a Greek reader published by Everett. It is unclear which book Jefferson is referring to, and the Jefferson collection does not include Everett's letter that came with the volume. For another lengthy letter on Grammar in general and Greek grammar in particular, see Thomas Jefferson to John Waldo, 16 August 1813.

Edward Everett was a Representative to the United States Congress from Massachusetts, a graduate of and professor at Harvard University, scholar, editor of the *North American Review*, Secretary of the Boston Philhellenic Society, and President of Harvard University, from 1846 to 1849. In 1863, Everett delivered the speech at Gettysburg that preceded Lincoln's famous "Gettysburg Address".

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Thomas Jefferson to Joseph Priestley, 27 January 1800.

enjoyment of reading, shaped his politics in profound ways. Thus, throughout his correspondence and his political writings, one sees a determination to educate his nation in order to make it stronger. In his *Report of the Commissioners for the University of Virginia*,<sup>30</sup> Jefferson proposes a sensible program of education for future Virginians, one that recognizes the need for established knowledge and science, but also appreciates its surroundings, and anticipates the future. Thus, he points out the necessity of training students in the Spanish language, but does not neglect to include a healthy dose of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.<sup>31</sup>

While in Paris, he wrote to George Wythe, urging him: "Preach, my dear Sir, a crusade against ignorance; establish and improve the law for educating the common people".<sup>32</sup> History was an important part of the education that Jefferson had in mind. Well aware of the value of the exploits of the heroes past, a means known to political thinkers from Plato to Rousseau, Jefferson was clear from early on that

the most effectual means of preventing [tyranny] would be to illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people at large, and more especially to give them knowledge of those facts which history exhibiteth, that possessed thereby of the experience of other ages and countries, they may be enabled to know ambition under all its shapes, and prompted to exert their natural powers to defeat its purposes.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Report of the Commissioners for the University of Virginia*, in Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975, pp. 332-346, hereafter referred to as *RUV*, followed by the page number.

<sup>31</sup> "[T]hese languages being the foundation of all the sciences" (*RUV*, p. 339).

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Jefferson to George Wythe, 13 August 1786. See also Thomas Jefferson, *A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge* in Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950, Vol. II, pp. 526-533; Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 20 December 1787: "I hope that the education of the common people will be attended to; convinced that on their good sense we may rely with the most security for the preservation of a due degree of liberty".

Frank L. Mott, in *Jefferson and the Press*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1943, p. 54, cites an example of Jefferson's remarkable commitment to his principles and to the value of education. While Jefferson was President of the United States, he received a letter from John Norvell, a seventeen-year-old student from Kentucky requesting advice regarding "the best books on social and political philosophy" and the manner in which a newspaper should be run. According to Mott, Norvell was unknown to Jefferson and recommended by no one, and yet Jefferson responded to him with a letter of over one thousand words.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Richard, *The Founders and the Classics*, p. 85. See, for example, Plato,

In many ways, Korais' editions of classical texts exemplified Jefferson's educational ideal. Korais had collected some important ancient Greek texts, edited them, and published them, in some cases with translations into Modern Greek or French. In his prolegomena to these editions, one finds patriotic addresses to the Greeks, at first prompting them to rebel against the Ottoman Empire<sup>34</sup> and later urging to continue their struggle for freedom.<sup>35</sup> In all of his addresses, Korais explains his choice of text and subject matter, the ways in which those relate to the Greek predicament, and the lessons that his compatriots can draw from their forefathers. It is no surprise, then, that Jefferson commends Korais for having begun "at the right end towards preparing" the Greeks, a service for which they will owe Korais "lasting honors". Greek revolutionaries, more than anyone else, had reason to turn their gaze to the examples of their forbears, since "nothing is more likely to forward [their] object than the study of the fine models of science left them by their ancestors; to whom we also are all indebted for the lights which originally led ourselves out of Gothic darkness".

#### *Non-Interference*

Jefferson tells Korais that no one sympathizes more strongly with the Greek cause than the Americans. Having themselves risen against tyranny but a few years before, they are acutely aware of the demands of such a struggle. However, he is quick to add that they can do little beyond wish them the best, as any other course of action would violate "the fundamental principle of [their] government, never to entangle [them] with the broils of Europe", thus responding to one of Korais' requests in the negative.

One week before replying to Korais, Jefferson had written to the President of the United States, James Monroe, in response to a series of letters from the latter on what came to be known as the "Monroe Doctrine".<sup>36</sup> Approached by British Prime Minister Canning regarding the possibility of European

---

Λάχης [Laches], 179c1-5; Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XIV; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, 2§7, 3§5.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Korais' prolegomena to his introduction to Plutarch's *Bíoi paráλληλοι*, entitled «'Ακολούθια τῶν Αὐτοσχεδρίων Στοιχασμῶν περὶ τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Παιδείας καὶ Γλώσσης» [Continuation of Improvised Reflections regarding Hellenic Education and Language], pp. α'-ξα'.

<sup>35</sup> See Korais' prolegomena to his edition of Aristotle's *Πολιτικά*, pp. α'-ρμβ'.

<sup>36</sup> The Monroe-Jefferson exchange regarding this issue took place between 1823 and 1824. See Stanislaus Murray Hamilton, ed., *The Writings of James Monroe*, 7 vols., New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1902, Vols. VI, VII.

expansionism in South America, Monroe contacted Jefferson and Madison to request their opinion on whether the United States should enter into an alliance with Britain. On 17 October 1823, Monroe wrote to Jefferson to ask:

1st Shall we entangle ourselves, at all, in European politics, and wars, on the side of any power, against other, presuming that a concert, by agreement, of the kind proposed, may lead to that result? 2d If a case can exist, in which a sound maxim may, and ought to be departed from, is not the present instance, precisely that case? 3d Has not the epoch arriv'd when G. Britain must take her stand, either on the side of the monarchs of Europe, or of the U States, and in consequence, either in favor of Despotism or of liberty and may it not be presum'd that, aware of that necessity, her government has seiz'd on the present occurrence, as that, which it deems, the most suitable, to announce and mark the commenc'ment of that career.<sup>37</sup>

Monroe's own view was that the United States should accept the British proposal and make it clear to the rest of Europe that any interference in Latin America would be viewed as a *casus belli*. Jefferson had made his views on this matter known from early on. In a letter to Elbridge Gerry, dated 26 January 1799, he had proclaimed that he was for

free commerce with all nations; political connection with none; and little or no diplomatic establishment. And I am not for linking ourselves by new treaties with the quarrels of Europe; entering that field of slaughter to preserve their balance, or joining in the confederacy of kings to war against the principles of liberty.

Twenty-four years later, in responding to Monroe and to Koraes, Jefferson is as firm as ever. He tells the President that "[o]ur first and fundamental maxim should be, never to entangle ourselves in the broils of Europe".<sup>38</sup> However, Jefferson adds quickly that an alliance with Britain would serve the interests of the United States, since it would bring the only power that could threaten America over to the cause of freedom. Should war result from this alliance,

---

<sup>37</sup> James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson, 17 October 1823, in *Writings of James Monroe*, Vol. VI, p. 324.

<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, the phrase that Jefferson uses in his letter to Monroe is almost identical with the one that he uses a week later, in his letter to Koraes:

"Our first and fundamental maxim should be, never to entangle ourselves in the broils of Europe" (to Monroe, 24 October 1823).

"The fundamental principle of our government, never to entangle us with the broils of Europe" (to Koraes, 31 October 1823).

Jefferson tells Monroe that it would be America's war and not Britain's, and thus one that the United States could pursue without any qualms. Greece, on the other hand, is too embedded within the European political system to warrant any American involvement, despite the fact that her cause is "holy".<sup>39</sup>

### *Government Ancient and Modern*

The world owes Greece an eternal favor for having presented "examples of what man should be", Jefferson writes to Korais, although the systems of government of the ancient Greeks are not to be emulated, because "the circumstances of the world are too much changed for that". To prove his point, Jefferson uses the examples of Athens and Sparta. Where Athens is concerned, Jefferson objects to the fact that "the people of one city [were] making laws for the whole country subjected to them", but it is unclear how that in itself makes the Athenian regime any more objectionable than that of the slave-based state of Virginia. The case is even stronger with his Spartan example, since there he takes exception to the rule of "military monks over the laboring class of people reduced to abject slavery".<sup>40</sup> Jefferson pronounces both of these "not the doctrines of the present age".

Jefferson's problematic examples point to a larger issue, one that has occupied a prominent place not only in studies of Jefferson, but also in assessments of the early American republic. The tension between the principles

---

<sup>39</sup> Andrew S. Horton, in "Jefferson and Korais: The American Revolution and the Greek Constitution", *Comparative Literature Studies* XIII, 4 (December 1976), pp. 323-329, claims on p. 325 that

although neutrality was the stated American policy, few were unaware of the government's 'unofficial' support of various negotiators. Concerned with the need to secure American trade with Turkey, for instance, Adams had begun secret negotiations with that nation in April 1823, only a few months before Korais' letter (the Secretary of State wanted, among other things, to protect the lucrative opium trade American shipowners conducted between Turkey and China.

Despite this claim, Horton concludes immediately that "[i]t is conceivable, therefore, that the United States could easily have sent commercial agents to Greece had strong enough cause been shown to do so". Given Horton's initial claim, his conclusion is at least surprising, since if American interests in trade with the Ottoman Empire were indeed sufficient to provoke the interest of the Secretary of State, it would be absurd to expect that the United States' government would jeopardize them by sending commercial representatives to Greece, which had just rebelled against the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>40</sup> On this point see Paul A. Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994, Vol. I, p. 141, esp. p. 308 note 139. Rahe cites Montesquieu (*Spirit of the Laws*, I.5.2), as well as Rawson, and claims that "in eighteenth-century France, Jefferson's opinion was widely held".

that led to the American Revolution and the actual politics that continued largely undisturbed until at least the Civil War comes out vividly throughout Jefferson's writings, and this instance is as succinct a statement of that tension as any. Having thus condemned the backward systems of government of the ancients, Jefferson proceeds to draw Koraes' attention to the fact that "the equal rights of man, and the happiness of every individual are now acknowledged to be the only legitimate objects of government".

Jefferson's contribution to the furthering of the cause of equal rights had been momentous, not least as exemplified in the *Declaration of Independence*.<sup>41</sup> In the years that followed the Revolution, he pursued equal rights even further, and campaigned actively for the inclusion of a bill of rights into the Constitution of the United States.<sup>42</sup> Despite his apparent strong conviction regarding equal rights, there is ample evidence that the issue of slavery was one that troubled Jefferson throughout his life. Although he seems to have favored the abolition of slavery, his views on slaves and their condition are fraught with hesitation and self-contradiction, all signs of the magnitude of the issue and the impossible position into which the young republic had found itself.<sup>43</sup> In the last letter from his hand, just ten days before he died, Jefferson writes that

All eyes are opened, *or opening* [emphasis added], to the rights of man. The general spread of the light of science has already laid open to every view the palpable truth, that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, even though he was optimistic to the last, Jefferson was at least troubled by the shadow that slavery cast on what had undoubtedly been a series of historic advancements in the cause of human freedom. Ironically, his statement to Koraes regarding Athens and Sparta seems an aptly laconic way to express his uneasiness.

---

<sup>41</sup> "We hold these truths to be self evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with CERTAIN inalienable rights". Thomas Jefferson, *The Declaration of Independence* in *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, p. 235.

<sup>42</sup> In a letter to James Madison, on 20 December 1787, Jefferson lists what he likes and dislikes about the proposed constitution of the United States. First amongst his dislikes, he lists "the omission of a bill of rights". A year-and-a-half later, Jefferson writes to Madison that he is "much pleased with the prospect that a declaration of rights will be added" (Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 15 March 1789). See also Thomas Jefferson, *Draft Constitution for Virginia* in *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, pp. 248-250.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Banneker, 30 August 1791, and Thomas Jefferson to Henri Grégoire, 25 February 1809.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Roger C. Weightman, 24 June 1826.

Freedom may have been limited, but it was also clear that modern times had brought along certain advances in government that were undeniably good. The most important of these, Jefferson tells Koraes, is “government by the people acting, not in person, but by representatives, chosen by themselves”. Richard notes that Jefferson’s views on representation were not always the same. At the time of the Revolution, Jefferson had expressed his concern that elected officials be sufficiently removed from their electors as to be able to conduct the business of government free from the people, whose choices are not “distinguished for [their] wisdom”.<sup>45</sup> However, perhaps spurred by the successful operation of the American system of government, in 1816 Jefferson declared that “[t]he introduction of this new principle of representative democracy has rendered useless almost everything written before on the structure of government”.<sup>46</sup> In fact, the strength of representative government is evident even in the case of England, despite the fact that there it is “impeded [...] by other branches, aristocratical and hereditary”.

Those who contribute to the common cause by “their purse or person”, then, participate in the election of all the branches of the American Government, except for the judiciary, “of whose science and qualifications they are not competent judges”. Jefferson’s view of the people’s ability to make political choices is quite interesting and consistent. Although he is aware of limitations that have to do with expertise in particular branches, as in the case of the judiciary, above, he is also convinced that resting power with the people is the safest way to guard liberty against tyranny. Thus, although he judges a house elected by the people to be “very illy qualified to legislate for the Union”, he prefers that result to allowing taxation to fall into the hands of anyone other than the people’s representatives, since if it is properly educated its good sense can be relied on “with the most security for the preservation of a due degree of liberty”.<sup>47</sup>

Jefferson’s confidence in the people is all the more interesting when seen in light of his belief in the existence of a natural aristocracy.<sup>48</sup> At first, the two positions may seem contradictory, but a closer examination reveals a well thought out understanding of fundamental principles of government, of the sort that rendered a system of checks and balances so central to American government. History and the observation of the world around him had taught Jefferson that it

---

<sup>45</sup> Richard, *The Founders and the Classics*, pp. 131-132.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Isaac H. Tiffany, 26 August 1816. For one theory regarding the origins of this type of support for representative democracy, see Richard, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 20 December 1787.

<sup>48</sup> See Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 28 October 1813.



is in the nature of human beings, once they have tasted power, to try to hold on to it.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, despite the many benefits that government by a natural aristocracy could bring to its nation, there is always need for such measures as will ensure that that aristocracy does not degenerate into a tyranny.<sup>50</sup> The safest of these measures, according to Jefferson, lies in educating the people and keeping them informed regarding public affairs, since they are “the only censors of their governors: and even their errors will tend to keep these to the true principles of their institution”.<sup>51</sup> In the words of Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., Jefferson could “justify aristocratic parts of a democratic regime with a clear democratic conscience, as well as perceptive insight, because he was willing to consider a regime as a whole”.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Jefferson’s respective beliefs in the existence of a natural aristocracy and in the need for active participation of the people in government are far from incompatible; they are essential complementary parts of a system of government that incorporates radical differences and uses them to counter one another, and thereby make for stability.<sup>53</sup>

Jefferson informs Koraes that American newspapers write of the formation of a Greek government, but without details. Jefferson considers a government necessary for the demands of the war, but warns Koraes that its tenure must end with the war, as “a permanent constitution must be the work of quiet, leisure, much enquiry, and great deliberation”.<sup>54</sup> Jefferson explains that the size of the

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 20 December 1787.

<sup>50</sup> “Hereditary bodies [...] always existing, always on the watch for their own aggrandizement, profit of every opportunity of advancing the privileges of their order, and of encroaching on the rights of the people” (Thomas Jefferson to Adamantios Koraes, 31 October 1823).

<sup>51</sup> “To punish these errors too severely”, Jefferson adds, “would be to suppress the only safeguard of the public liberty” (Thomas Jefferson to Edward Carrington, 16 January 1787). Compare to the equivalent passage in the letter to Koraes: “the people, especially when moderately instructed, are the only safe, because the only honest, depositories of the public rights [...] they will err sometimes, and accidentally, but never designedly, and with a systematic purpose of overthrowing the free principles of government”. In fact, even when it comes to judicial matters, Jefferson tells Koraes that they “call in a jury of the people to decide all controversial matters of fact, because to that investigation they are entirely competent”, thus leaving only the law of the case to the judges.

<sup>52</sup> Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., *The Spirit of Liberalism*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978, p. 70.

<sup>53</sup> For an interesting analysis of the issue of the natural aristocracy in Jefferson’s thought and politics, see Paul A. Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern*, Vol. III, pp. 159-163. See also Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., introduction to Thomas Jefferson, *Selected Writings*, ed. Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1979, pp. xxvii-xxviii.

<sup>54</sup> In his letter to George Wythe, Jefferson writes that Europeans did not believe English

United States, along with its historical division into states, led to the decision to “confederate as to foreign affairs only”. Being closer to them and knowing their citizens better, states retained their self-government in domestic matters, a decision with which Jefferson had agreed from early on.<sup>55</sup> These considerations, however, do not apply to the case of Greece, as the size of the territory that is likely to be liberated at the end of the Revolution would not surpass that of some of the smallest states. For this reason, Jefferson thinks that once liberated Greece can be ruled by a single, central government, and that it will therefore be more profitable for him to explain to Koras not the workings of the federal government, but of the governments of particular states. By 1823 many of the state constitutions were in print and probably easily obtainable in Paris, which is why Jefferson finds it unnecessary to examine them as a whole. He therefore proposes to make brief observations, concentrating “on those provisions particularly which have not fulfilled expectations, or which, being varied in different states, leave a choice to be made of that which is best”. Regarding the latter point, Jefferson echoes a long tradition of thought, from Aristotle to Montesquieu and Rousseau, which recognizes the need to know “the different circumstances, prejudices, and habits of different nations[, because] the constitution of no one would be reconcilable to any other, in every point”.<sup>56</sup> Jefferson hopes that a prudent examination of such points will yield a selection of such parts as are generally useful.

#### *Lessons from American Government*

Jefferson informs Koras that members of the various executive branches in the United States are elected for fixed terms of one to four years, with the right to run again for a second time, or after a certain period. Based on this system, of which he had always been a strong supporter,<sup>57</sup> Jefferson wonders whether the

---

news reports of a state of anarchy in Virginia, because European papers published reports of the assembly of the state being engaged in a revision of its Code of Laws, and Europeans are “sensible that such a work is that of a people who are in perfect tranquillity” (13 August 1786).

<sup>55</sup> “I am for preserving to the States the powers not yielded by them to the Union” (Thomas Jefferson to Elbridge Gerry, 26 January 1799).

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, Aristotle, *Πολιτικά*, 1296b13; Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws* III, pp. 14-19; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Of the Social Contract* III. p. viii; *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, I§1; *Constitutional Project for Corsica*, foreword.

<sup>57</sup> See Jefferson's letter, on 20 December 1787, to James Madison: “The second feature [of the proposed constitution] I dislike, and greatly dislike, is the abandonment in every instance of the necessity of rotation in office, and most particularly in the case of the President”. Also, in his letter to Elbridge Gerry (26 January 1799), Jefferson writes: “I am opposed to

Greek ethnarch should be elected or whether Greece's position in the center of Europe's "broils" requires "an office more permanent, and a leader more stable". Be the issue of his election as it may, one thing is clear: the ethnarch needs to be one. The observation of history and human nature had taught the American founders that faction was a force to be dreaded in government, and Jefferson could not but concur with the famous observations of *Federalist 10*. He writes that "if experience has ever taught a truth, it is that a plurality in the supreme Executive will for ever split into discordant factions, distract the nation, annihilate its energies, and force the nation to rally under a single head, generally an Usurper". Jefferson finds the federal arrangement "the happiest of all modes", because it allows the President to choose his Secretaries of State, Finance, War, and the Navy, and thus chart, and stay on, a steady course.

In and of themselves, Jefferson's last remarks, above, regarding the need for defenses against faction and for a steady course for the nation, might be taken as encouragement for the institution of a simple system with a single ethnarch, not too unlike a monarchy. Such a view, however, would only account for one third of the main structure of American government, and Jefferson proceeds to explain to Koraes the place, in the system of the separation of powers, of the legislative and the judiciary. He tells Koraes that legislatures, both federal and state, are divided into Houses and Senates, with a qualified veto power in the executive.<sup>58</sup> Fear of faction is again the principal impetus behind careful design, and Jefferson suggests the possibility of electing a sufficiently large body of Greek legislators as could be divided into two houses and shifted occasionally—"once a week or fortnight"—by lot. This daring proposal, perhaps suggested with Greece's considerably smaller size in mind,

would equally give the benefit of time and separate deliberation, guard against an absolute passage by acclamation, derange cabals, intrigues, and the count of noses, disarm the ascendancy which a popular demagogue might at any time obtain over either house, and render impossible all disputes between the two houses, which often form such obstacles to business.

---

monarchising [the federal constitution's] features by the forms of its administration, with a view to conciliate a first transition to a President and Senate for life, and from that to a hereditary tenure of these offices, and thus to worm out the elective principle".

<sup>58</sup> See Jefferson's letter to Madison, on 20 December 1787, regarding the proposed federal constitution: "I like the negative given to the Executive with a third of either house, though I would have liked it better had the Judiciary been associated for that purpose or invested with a similar and separate power".

Jefferson's description of the American legislative power may be short and his proposal only mildly ambitious, but his assessment of the judiciary is nearly explosive. He begins by informing Koraes that the tenures of office at the various levels are different, as are the criteria for re-election. Then, Jefferson contrasts the most prevalent American practice of approving judges, based on "good behavior", through a two-thirds majority in each legislative house, to that of the English, who require a mere majority approval. Once again, the specters of faction and of hereditary, monarchical government guide prudence. Jefferson is for the establishment of limits to terms in office, with re-approval only in the case that the judge's behavior can withstand the scrutiny of the legislature. As the use of underlining shows,<sup>59</sup> this is an issue about which he has strong feelings:

At the establishment of our constitutions, the judiciary bodies were supposed to be the most helpless and harmless members of the government. Experience however soon shewed in what way they were to become the most dangerous: that the insufficiency of the means provided for their removal gave them a freehold and irresponsibility in office; that their decisions, seeming to concern individual suitors only, pass silent, and unheeded by the public at large; that these decisions nevertheless become law by precedent, sapping by little and little the foundations of the Constitution, and working its change, by construction, before any one has perceived that this invisible and helpless worm has been busily employed in consuming its substance. In truth man is not made to be trusted for life, if secured against all liability to account.

Jefferson had expressed similar views in a letter to Judge Spencer Roane, on 6 September 1819, where he argued that the Constitution had deprived the people of their control over the judiciary. Richard cites earlier instances in which Jefferson had voiced reservations regarding the degree to which specific offices were dependent upon one another and upon the people. As a plethora of passages show, however, it seems that his reservations subsided gradually, as the system of government began to prove itself in practice.<sup>60</sup>

Having thus sketched the basic contours of the American system of government, Jefferson returns to a favorite theme of his, education. This time he lists those specific measures regarding education that he considers worthy of

---

<sup>59</sup> This is the only paragraph in which Jefferson underlines.

<sup>60</sup> See Richard, *The Founders and the Classics*, p. 132, regarding Jefferson's frustration with the lack of freedom of movement while he was the governor of Virginia. For evidence to the contrary see passages cited in *Government Ancient and Modern*, above.

imitation. Principal amongst these is the fact that some states have “made it a duty of their government to provide with due care for the public education”. Jefferson then lists the various grades and the subject matters studied by each, in what could easily have been a summary of the equivalent section of his *Report of the Commissioners for the University of Virginia*.<sup>61</sup>

Another important lesson from the American experience regards the possibility of amending the constitution to accommodate errors and unforeseen circumstances, as well as the will of future generations, on whom the choices of their predecessors have no binding force.<sup>62</sup> Jefferson explains that in some states this requires a special convention of representatives elected for this very reason, a measure that he finds “too difficult”. At the opposite extreme, he cites the example of England, where “the Constitution may be altered by a single act of the legislature, which amounts to having no constitution at all”. The best solution, according to him, is that which requires an act passed by two houses, “chosen by the people, at different and successive elections”. This method may be altered to require more or fewer levels of approval, depending on the difficulty of the matter at hand, and thus constitutes “the best principle which can be adopted for constitutional amendments”.

The various states and the federal government have a series of laws, some of which are the same and some different. However, there are five fundamental principles on which all agree, “and which all cherish as vitally essential to the protection of life, liberty, property and safety of the citizen”. These are:

- 1) Freedom of religion
- 2) Freedom of person (Habeas Corpus)
- 3) Trial by jury
- 4) Rights of legislation and taxation in Representatives of the people
- 5) Freedom of the press

Jefferson had been a staunch supporter of these rights from the beginning of his participation in the shaping of the American government. From the list of grievances contained in the *Declaration of Independence* to his views regarding the need for a bill of rights, and despite the obvious problems for these of his

---

<sup>61</sup> See RUV, pp. 337-346.

<sup>62</sup> Jefferson realizes, in the concluding remarks of the *Bill Establishing Religious Freedom*, “that [...] to declare this act irrevocable would be of no effect in law” (*The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, p. 253). More importantly, see his letter to Madison (6 September 1789), where he explains his view that “the earth belongs in usufruct to the living”. See also Jefferson’s letter to John Adams (25 April 1794): “The rights of one generation will scarcely be considered hereafter as depending on the paper transactions of another”.

position on slavery, Jefferson had devoted his political career to the establishment and preservation of these fundamental rights, thereby contributing to a fundamental change in the nature of political rights for generations to come.<sup>63</sup>

Jefferson concludes his letter to Koraes thus:

I have thus, dear sir, according to your request, given you some thoughts, on the subject of national government. They are the result of the observations and reflections of an Octogenary who has past fifty years of trial and trouble in the various grades of his country's service. They are but the outlines which you will better fill up, and accomodate to the habits and circumstances of your countrymen. Should they furnish a single idea which may be useful to them, I shall fancy it a tribute rendered to the Manes<sup>64</sup> of your Homer, your Demosthenes, and the splendid constellation of Sages and Heroes, whose blood is still flowing in your veins, and whose merits are still resting, as a heavy debt, on the shoulders of the living and the future races of men. While we offer to heaven the warmest supplications for the restoration of your countrymen to the freedom and science of their ancestors, permit me to assure yourself of the cordial esteem and high respect which I bear and cherish towards yourself personally.

Th. Jefferson

### *The Rest of the Correspondence*

On 28 December 1823, Koraes wrote to Jefferson to thank him for his advice. After expressing his admiration at the length of Jefferson's letter, given the author's "respectable age", alongside his despair for its brevity, given his desire for "the lessons of such a master", Koraes informs Jefferson that he has tried to profit from his advice and to put it in the service of Greece. He also reports his double joy at having received Jefferson's letter at the same time as he heard of a Greek success in a naval battle.<sup>65</sup> With the hope, for Greece, for one day's worth of the happiness that the United States Constitution procures for Americans,

---

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, his views on religion in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* in *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, pp. 208-213. On how these views evolved see Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy*, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996, pp. 56, 65-71.

<sup>64</sup> This word is problematic, because the manuscript is not clear. In some editions of the letter it is transcribed as "Manes" and in others as "Names", but the manuscript does not allow for the latter interpretation. Another possibility is that he misspelled the word "Manner" and rendered it "Maner". In any case, Jefferson's meaning is clear.

<sup>65</sup> It is not clear which battle Koraes is referring to.

Koraes thanks Jefferson again and announces a new shipment of a Modern Greek translation of Beccaria and two classical editions to Monticello.<sup>66</sup>

Jefferson did not respond to this letter, but in a letter dated 27 March 1824, to Edward Everett, he wrote:

I have just received a letter from Coray at Paris, of the 28th Dec. in which he confirms the late naval success of the Greeks, but expresses a melancholy fear for his nation, 'which has displayed until this moment marvels of valor, but which, delivered from a yoke of Cannibals, cannot yet know neither the lessons of instruction, nor those of experience'.<sup>67</sup> I confess I have the same fear for our South-American brethren. The qualifications for self government in society are not innate. They are the result of habit and long training; and for these they will require time and probably much suffering.

Less than a year after Jefferson's remark to Everett, Koraes wrote again, for the last time. In this letter, Koraes tells Jefferson that he has enclosed a copy of his forthcoming edition of Plutarch's minor political writings,<sup>68</sup> the preface of which contains a dialogue in which Jefferson "will observe that [Koraes] did not at all neglect to profit from [his] advice". Koraes' dialogue takes place between *Philarchos* and *Phyxarchos*, two Greeks discussing a variety of political issues of the day.<sup>69</sup> Throughout its 133 pages, Koraes revisits many of the issues raised by Jefferson in his letter, such as the importance of teaching the classics in Greek schools to inspire Greek youth, the ills that accompany a lack of education, the close relationship between a lack of education and an increased currency of titles.<sup>70</sup> *Phyxarchos* notes that every man wants to rule but no one wants to be ruled, and urges *Philarchos* to turn his gaze to the newly-instituted states of South America, which are fighting for liberty. *Phyxarchos* points out that they have to fight simultaneously against oppression and its "nurse", the lack of education, which suckles slavery; "It gives birth to it, it feeds it, it prevents its

<sup>66</sup> *Περὶ Ἀμαρτημάτων καὶ Ποινῶν πολιτικῶς θεωρουμένων σύγγραμμα Κάισαρος Βεγκάριου* [Of Crimes and Punishments, politically considered by Cesare Beccaria], ed. and tr. Adamantios Koraes, Paris: Baudelot et Eberhart, 1802. It is not clear which classical texts Koraes is referring to.

<sup>67</sup> Jefferson quotes this passage in Koraes' French original.

<sup>68</sup> Plutarch, *Τὰ Πολιτικά* [Plutarch's Political Writings], ed. and corr. Adamantios Koraes, Paris: Firmin Didot et Fils, 1824.

<sup>69</sup> *Philarchos* means "the one who loves authority, power", whereas *Phyxarchos* means "the one who flees authority, power".

<sup>70</sup> *Dialogue* 20, pp. 21-22.

abolition" [emphasis added].<sup>71</sup> In addition to the general principles mentioned by Jefferson in his letter to Korais, *Phyxarchos* also makes specific reference to basic information regarding the United States, which is followed by a footnote that attributes that information to a letter of 31 October 1823, but mentions neither the author nor the recipient.

Having dispensed with the greetings and the texts, Korais states his reason for writing again. By this time the Greeks had managed to sustain their revolution for more than four years, and despite occasional setbacks, there seemed to be good reason to expect success. Having received no direct response to his 1823 request for trade representatives, he revisits the issue and urges Jefferson to act "with less caution" before it is too late. Having perceived the possibility of a Greek state, the English had begun to pave the way for the establishment of relations with Greece, hoping thus to secure the new state for their sphere of influence. Korais thus renews his request for trade negotiators, who could look after American interests in Greece, while also helping the Greeks with their advice and experience. In closing, he urges the Americans to strike a blow to the oligarchs of Europe "through the recognition of the autonomy of [his] fatherland, for which the free Greeks may, in the future, receive amongst them and treat like brothers the compatriots of Jefferson and Franklin".

Jefferson and Korais did not exchange any more letters. During 1825, Korais corresponded with Edward Everett, who had become the Secretary of the Philhellenic Committee of Boston. Everett had been the recipient of a series of *communiqués* from the revolutionary committees in and outside of Greece, which he had translated into English and disseminated in American newspapers.<sup>72</sup> In his letter of 11 September 1825, Everett recommends that Greece send an envoy to the United States, who could lobby for official recognition, and asks Korais to write to him in Modern Greek, so that he may practice his reading skills.<sup>73</sup> Korais obliged Everett on 12 November.<sup>74</sup> In his response, he thanks Everett for his work

<sup>71</sup> *Dialogue*, 56; my translation.

<sup>72</sup> Everett published a review of Korais' edition of Aristotle's *Ηθικά* and *Πολιτικά*, along with a translation of the preliminary Greek Constitution of Epidavros (1822), the Proclamation of the Senate of Calamata, and of Korais' letter to Everett, which accompanied these, in the *North American Review* (October 1823), of which he was editor. See George Ch. Soulis, "Adamantios Korais and Edward Everett" in *Mélanges offerts à Octave et Melpo Merlier à l'occasion du 25e anniversaire de leur arrivée en Grèce*, Athens: Institut Français, 1956, Vol. II, p. 405.

<sup>73</sup> Edward Everett to Adamantios Korais, Boston, 11 September 1825 (Valetas), pp. 461-462.

<sup>74</sup> Adamantios Korais to Edward Everett, Paris, 12 November 1825 (Valetas), pp. 468-470.



on behalf of the Greek cause, and informs him of his own pleas to Jefferson regarding envoys. He then provides an analysis of the situation in Greece, as he perceives it, and lists a series of impracticable measures that the United States should take to aid Greece.<sup>75</sup> Koraes ends his letter by thanking Everett once again, and by announcing the dispatch of the same editions (Beccaria and Plutarch) that were mentioned in his last letter to Jefferson.<sup>76</sup>

### Conclusion

Jefferson died on the anniversary of the adoption of the *Declaration of Independence* the following year (4 July 1826). One year after his death, Greece adopted its first Constitution. According to Horton,

this most liberal of Greece's many constitutions affirms the right of democratic sovereignty and the creation of a legislature independent of the executive but elected by the people. The Bill of Rights, closely modeled on the American document, guaranteed all of the familiar rights suggested by Jefferson as well as the illegality of slavery and nobility.<sup>77</sup>

It is an interesting coincidence that Koraes himself died on the anniversary of his country's independence (25 March 1833). Between the end of the Revolution and the time of his death, he fought many an intellectual battle on such fronts as the Constitution, the language issue, and education. As Jefferson had predicted in his letter, Koraes' role before, during, and after the Revolution earned him the title of "intellectual father" of the nation.

It is impossible to measure the extent to which Koraes' frequent interaction with and guidance of the primary actors in the Greek political scene affected the drafting of this constitution and consequently the form of the Greek government. It is even harder to attribute any such influence to Koraes' brief interaction with Jefferson. It is nevertheless the case that during their eight-year

---

<sup>75</sup> Among others, he recommends that the United States send warships to be stationed in Greece and to act as deterrents against English and other plans.

<sup>76</sup> On Everett's recollections of Koraes and their correspondence and relationship, see Soulis, "Adamantios Korais and Edward Everett", pp. 397-407.

<sup>77</sup> Horton, "Jefferson and Korais: the American Revolution and the Greek Constitution", p. 328. Although Jefferson touches on many issues in his letter, there is one element that is conspicuously absent, namely his preference for an agrarian republic. One would have expected, given his views on the matter, as expounded in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* and elsewhere, and given the state of the Greek nation, that Jefferson would have seized the opportunity to extol the merits of the life of the farmer.

struggle, Koraes and his fellow revolutionary intellectuals reached out to a wide variety of people all over the world. The responses that they received varied greatly, from open hostility to immersion in the spirit of the Revolution; many philhellenes answered the call by repeatedly sending large sums of money and materiel, and many went to Greece, fought, and died in the cause of freedom. In the context of these responses, Jefferson's deserves a special place. Although brief, it affords a rare, if not unique, example of a founder offering advice on founding. As the brief examination of his views above reveals, Jefferson's ideas are remarkable for their clarity and consistency. His understanding of things political is deceptively simple. He sees both around him and far beyond, has a grasp of history that allows him to place things in their proper context, and thereby appreciate situations, persons, and decisions in a way that renders his pronouncements simple, yet to the point. Given the fact that Jefferson did not refuse to answer John Norvell's letter, his response to Koraes is not surprising; he did not refuse his assistance and advice to those who requested them. Nevertheless, the fact that this world-renowned intellectual and politician approached his correspondents and friends with kindness and respect confirms the fact that his character was deeply rooted in the principles he held dear.

*Harvard University*