

The Historical Review/La Revue Historique

Vol 11 (2014)

Studying the Greek Military Dictatorship of 1967-1974

The *H*istorical Review
La Revue *H*istorique



VOLUME XI (2014)

Section de Recherches Néohelléniques
Institut de Recherches Historiques / FNRS

Section of Neohellenic Research
Institute of Historical Research / NIHRF

The Philiki Etaireia Revisited: In Search of Contexts, National and International

Nassia Yakovaki

doi: [10.12681/hr.334](https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.334)

To cite this article:

Yakovaki, N. (2014). The Philiki Etaireia Revisited: In Search of Contexts, National and International. *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique*, 11, 171–187. <https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.334>

THE PHILIKI ETAIREIA REVISITED:
IN SEARCH OF CONTEXTS, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL¹

Nassia Yakovaki

ABSTRACT: It is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that studies on the Philiki Etaireia (1814-1821), a field of historical research that has evolved in a rather marginal, if not erratic way, are lately at a standstill; at the same time, however, the Age of Revolution – and, more to the point, the until recently understudied post-Napoleonic decades – is the object of a remarkable renewal of interest among historians internationally. This essay tries to place the life and deeds of the Philiki Etaireia once more on the agenda of social and political history of the period, not only of the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire, but also of post-Napoleonic Europe, by revisiting the case of this (much acclaimed in the Greek national narrative) secret society and bringing forward possible new contexts for better understanding its emergence and development.

“Η Εταιρεία συνίσταται από καθ’αυτό Γραικούς φιλοπάτριδας και ονομάζεται Εταιρεία των Φιλικών. Ο σκοπός αυτών είναι η καλυτέρευσις του ίδιου έθνους και, αν ο θεός το συγχωρήση, η ελευθερία των.”

[The society consists of Greeks, friends of their motherland, and it is called the Society of Friends. Their goal is the betterment of their own nation and, if God permits it, their liberty.]²

Is it possible that the modest mission statement in the quotation above marks nothing less than the beginnings of modern political mobilization in what was often, at the time, referred to as European Turkey (and its hinterland)? It embraces voluntary action, common action, organized action with a minimal and realistic goal and a cautiously presented major aspiration.

¹ This paper was presented at the international conference “Balkan Worlds: Ottoman Past and Balkan Nationalism”, University of Macedonia, Thessaloniki, 4-7 October 2012, and it was intended as a working paper offering ideas and possible guidelines for the renewal of research on the Philiki Etaireia. It is published here in its initial form, but annotated and referenced taking into account the bibliography published until the autumn of 2014.

² The catechism is from the Rhigas Palamidis Collection in the General Archives of Greece, Athens, as published by E. G. Protopsaltis, *Η Φιλική Εταιρεία. Αναμνηστικόν τεύχος επι τη 150ετηριδι* [The Society of Friends: Commemorative issue for the 150th anniversary], Athens: Academy of Athens, 1964, p. 242. See also in that volume, p. 252, a variant of the same part in another catechism (again from General Archives of Greece, ms. 58).

Let me shift our attention from the wording to *the very act* that these words constitute. They are part of an oath, which sealed the process of initiation into a secret society, the Philiki Etaireia, an oath that completes the Society's catechism. A traditional practice, to take vows, was in this case put to novel uses by creating new and unprecedented bonds among private individuals: political bonds.

The story of this famous secret society, in broad terms, is quite well-known, and there is general agreement among professional historians as far as the basic narrative of its development:³ established in Odessa by three infamous but visionary petty merchants or clerks in the summer of 1814, with organizational patterns drawn from Freemasonry rituals, growing rather slowly until 1818, when it reorganized itself, the Etaireia moved to Constantinople and for more than three consecutive years had spectacular development in recruitment, expanding its activity in and beyond the Ottoman Empire (the Danubian Principalities, the Ionian Islands, Italy and, of course, Russia), solving successfully internal crises, as well as the most thorny problem of a prestigious or trustworthy leadership under the Russian high officer, an ex-Phanariot prince in exile, Alexander Ypsilantis. Eventually, the Society came to organize, in a variation of the initial plan, the insurrections in the Principalities and the Peloponnese which initiated the Greek Revolution in 1821, provoking the Greek War of Independence and the foundation of an independent nation-state a decade later. In short, this secret society was behind the only successful revolution of what, *pace* Hobsbawm, is called the first wave of revolutions in the Restoration era.⁴ For the argument elaborated in this paper, what is at stake is not the question, although not irrelevant, of the emergence (or the particularities) of Modern Greek nationalism, as this belongs rather to the preconditions under which the very existence of this society became possible.

If the two lines from the oath cited above correctly incarnate this decisive turning point, namely the beginnings of modern political activity among the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire, it is not just because of the concise

³ Cf., for example, the standard general history in English, R. Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 31-33, and the latest synthesis in Greek, K. Kostis, "Τα κακομαθημένα παιδιά της ιστορίας". *Η διαμόρφωση του νεοελληνικού κράτους, 18-21ος αι.* [The spoiled children of history: The formation of the Modern Greek State, eighteenth-twentieth centuries], Athens: Polis, 2013, pp. 115-127.

⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution*, London 1988 (1962), pp. 138-140, 145-147. See, however, the 1820s revisited from a Latin American perspective as "the Bolivarian decade", in Matthew Brown and Gabriel Paquette (eds), *Connections after Colonialism, Europe and Latin America in the 1820s*, Tuscaloosa, AL: Alabama University Press, 2013, especially pp. 250-274.

definition of its potential membership, ethno-cultural and political at the same time,⁵ or the moderate tone with which its subversive goals were stated. The vocabulary of a Greek patriotism had already been in the making since at least the early years of the nineteenth century, whereas radical political ideas were circulating with due caution, needless to say, in manuscript and printed form, or even as lyrics in songs, already for almost two decades before the establishment of the Philiki Etaireia.⁶ In other words, processes of politicization were by then, one might argue with conviction, already well under way; although it should also be noted that the concept has not been systematically discussed in Greek historiography. The innovation that the Philiki Etaireia realized among the Greeks, I would like to suggest, was exactly the passage from the open dissemination of ideas to secret and autonomous political action,⁷ action however directed to political mobilization.

⁵ The prerequisites for membership, although inclusive in character (there is, right from the start, space for the illiterate, with the only restriction that for them there can be no upgrading to the higher grades; the all-male character of the Etaireia was not stated, but should not pass unnoticed), were based on “nationality”, as vague as that may have been at that time, with the further qualification – which I take as political – among the Greeks of those who are “friends of the motherland” (*φίλοι της πατρίδος* or *φιλοπάτριδες*). It should also be made clear that the words *Γραικοί* and *Έλληνες* alternate in the catechisms, which suggests their equal status in the vocabulary of the Society. A systematic analysis of the vocabulary of these texts should be considered a long overdue desideratum; such an undertaking, however, if it is to be reliable, presupposes a rather delicate technical (philological) task: the reconstitution of the extant corpus of the most widely circulated documents of the Etaireia, namely the oaths and catechisms.

⁶ From an extensive bibliography on these issues, essential references are: V. Panayotopoulos, “Η εμφάνιση της σύγχρονης πολιτικής σκέψης στη νεότερη Ελλάδα” [The emergence of contemporary political thinking in Modern Greece], *Τα Ιστορικά* 10 (1989), pp. 3-12; Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Η Γαλλική Επανάσταση και η Νοτιοανατολική Ευρώπη* [The French Revolution and South-East Europe], Athens 2000. See also D. P. Sotiropoulos, “Ελληνική Νομαρχία, ήτοι Λόγος περί του ριζοσπαστικού Διαφωτισμού. Η γέννηση της νεοελληνικής πολιτικής σκέψης στις απαρχές του 19ου αιώνα” [*The Hellenic Nomarchy, or Discourse on radical Enlightenment: The birth of modern political thought in the beginning of the nineteenth century*], in P. Pizaniias (ed.), *Η Ελληνική Επανάσταση. Ένα ευρωπαϊκό γεγονός* [The Greek Revolution: A European affair], Athens 2009, pp. 104-118; and Nicholas Eliopoulos, “Liberty in the Hellenic Nomarchy of 1806”, *The Historical Review / La Revue Historique* VI (2009), pp.165-186.

⁷ See Emmanuel Xanthos’ words from his memoirs, “[...] so they could act on their own since they had been long and in vain hoping for the philanthropy of Christian kings”, *Απομνημονεύματα περί τής Φιλικής Έταιρείας* [Memoirs on the Philiki Etaireia], Athens 1845, p. 3.

Along with this key concept, and putting aside for another occasion the intriguing and not sufficiently explored more specific question of the impressive outcome of this mobilization, as witnessed especially in the years 1820-1821, it is important to identify, from the outset, a new and unanticipated dimension implied in this dynamic towards autonomous political action. Its core relies on a novel albeit complex invention: the creation of a new – social and political – identity, that of the “member” of a political association among Ottoman Christian subjects. The political bonds created via an “archaic form” (such as an oath) represent a moment of transition.⁸ It is an innovative way to be affiliated with the others, a new and all-demanding loyalty, to an imaginary but for that reason even more powerful “mistress”,⁹ the motherland; a loyalty, that in its turn, puts into question all previous, centuries-old loyalties, to one’s own family and local community, to one’s own Church and to all manner of public authority.

This is perhaps the most silent but also the most drastic transformation that the Philiki Etaireia brought forth among the Greeks. More than the explosive finale of the Etaireia, that is, the 1821 Greek Revolution against tyranny itself, this modest, underground political development was the major and more valuable political product that its activity had generated: a new social species. The first success of the Etaireia was a powerful term, which has not attracted attention, with two linguistic variants in Greek, the micro-history of which remains unexplored, that gradually entered the everyday speech of those involved: the “Etairist”, *Εταιριστής* or *Εταιρίστας*.¹⁰

Before creating revolutionaries, before taking up arms, if not immediately from 1814 but at least more clearly from 1816 up to the last months of 1820, this secret society had created the “Etairists”, a new and covert species in the garden

⁸ Eric Hobsbawm’s “Ritual in Social Movements” in his *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movements in the 19th and 20th centuries*, London 1965 (1959), pp. 150-174, remains the great classic.

⁹ Love for the motherland, always referred to as *έρως/εραστής της πατρίδος*; Protopsaltis, *Η Φιλική Εταιρεία*, p. 245; cf. “[...] whatever worldly ties I might have had count for nothing compared to the Society [of Friends], *ibid.*, p. 247; “[...] hail thou sacred and wretched homeland [...] I dedicate myself wholly to thee, since henceforth thou shall be the reason and the aim of my meditations, thy name will drive my actions and thine own happiness the reward for my endeavours.”, *ibid.*

¹⁰ See, for example, Xanthos, *Απομνημονεύματα*, *passim*, and Athanasios Xodilos, *Η Εταιρεία των Φιλικών και τα πρώτα συμβάντα του έτους 1821* [The Society of Friends and the first events of the year 1821], ed. Leandros Vranousis and N. Kamarianos, Athens: Academy of Athens, 1964, *passim*. It is interesting to note that the name did not survive in the studies concerning the Etaireia; instead, the members of the Society are from quite early on customarily described as the *Φιλικοί* [Philikoi].

of a South-East Europe in transformation.¹¹ How did this become possible? What were the conditions within which political mobilization in modern terms was generated in the Ottoman Empire and the diaspora of its Christian subjects? Even more to the point of this essay, as the title already underscores, which are the contexts within which this development took shape?

It is beyond the ambitions of this paper to provide definitive answers to these questions. They are rather raised in order to serve as a short and, I hope, stimulating introduction to what is the main goal of this paper: not so much to advance our knowledge, but to kindle discussion of these elusive but intriguing issues that are broached only tentatively here. They form part of an investigation that seeks to put the study of the Philiki Etaireia back onto the agenda of social and political history of the period, not only of the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire, but also of post-Napoleonic Europe.

This is no easy task, for the historiography of the subject, as we shall see presently, is part of the problem. At this point I need first to explain in a more personal way how the Philiki Etaireia appeared on my research agenda. My involvement in this research topic is recent, and I am not a specialist on the Greek War of Independence. My motivation came from a rather unexpected angle: from research aiming at exploring instead what was public, transparent and openly circulating among the Greeks in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. This ongoing research on the rise of a Greek public sphere,¹²

¹¹ A significant moment in this process of the “diffusion” of Etaireists, a step forward towards broader mobilization, is linked with the appointment of the so-called *Απόστολοι*, another term whose exact meaning remains insufficiently discussed; the apparent connection with the Christian apostles should be seen as misleading, whereas the *commisiseurs* of the French Revolution should also be considered, as Panayotopoulos has already hinted; V. Panayotopoulos, “Φιλική Εταιρεία. Οργανωτικές προϋποθέσεις της εθνικής επανάστασης” [The Society of Friends: Organizational preconditions for the Greek Revolution], in *id.* (ed.), *Ιστορία του Νέου Ελληνισμού* [The history of modern Hellenism], Vol. III, Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 2003, p. 23.

¹² The latest results of this ongoing research are: Nassia Yakovaki, “Ο Λόγιος Ερμής ως τόπος διαμόρφωσης του ελληνικού κοινού” [*Logios Hermes* and the Greek public], in *Λόγος και χρόνος στη Νεοελληνική Γραμματεία. Τιμητικός τόμος στον Αλέξη Πολίτη* [Discourse and time in Modern Greek literature: Festschrift in honour of Alexis Politis], Heraklion: Crete University Press, 2015 (forthcoming), pp. 207-238; “Οι μεταμορφώσεις του Παπατρέχα και η διαμόρφωση της ελληνικής κοινής γνώμης στη δεκαετία του 1810” [The metamorphoses of *Papatrechas* and the formation of Greek public opinion in the 1810s], in *Νεοελληνική λογοτεχνία και κριτική από τον Διαφωτισμό έως σήμερα. Πρακτικά ΙΓ΄ Διεθνούς Επιστημονικής*

which cuts across manifestations and activities, usually brought under the label of “Modern Greek Enlightenment”, had tempted me to cross the boundary and “put my finger” on the Philiki Etaireia, that is, towards the parallel space created in the 1810s, which is neither public nor private: the space of secrecy.

It might then be useful to make the following elementary and strictly descriptive observation: the seven years of the Etaireia’s clandestine life, from 1814 to 1821, coincide with a larger period usually categorized in Greek historiography as the flourishing years, the peak of the Modern Greek Enlightenment.¹³ Yet these parallel developments, the openly operating educated élites and the secret revolutionary practices, have until now been treated in historical scholarship as more or less separate and unconnected phenomena and investigated in almost complete isolation – the result partly of a type of history of ideas not sufficiently contextualized by social and political history.¹⁴ To mention just one example of the most easily discernible missing links for us in this connection, one should point to the figure of Anthimos Gazis, better known either as the first editor of the literary journal *Ερμής ο Λόγιος* and as a prominent *λόγιος* with an extensive publishing activity from 1799, or as an active participant in the Philomousos Etaireia than as a member of the Philiki Etaireia from 1816. Exceptional as this case may be, it is indicative of a reluctance to make sense of this coexistence of differently classified phenomena.

An interesting question thus arises: how did this new species, the Etairists, connect with the thriving Greek public life of the decade of 1810? Or, to make this question more provocative: how political already was Greek public life? There lies perhaps a key for unlocking a crucial door in the secret life of the

Συνάντησης. Μνήμη Παναγιώτη Μουλλά [Modern Greek literature and criticism from the Enlightenment to today: Proceedings of the 13th International Scientific Conference, in memory of Panayotis Moulas, Department of Medieval and Modern Greek Studies, School of Philology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Athens: Savvalas, 2013, pp. 163-176.

¹³ For the designation of this period, see Philippos Iliou, “Το ελληνικό βιβλίο στα χρόνια της ακμής του νεοελληνικού Διαφωτισμού” [The Greek book at the peak of the Greek Enlightenment], *Ελληνική βιβλιογραφία του 19ου αιώνα, 1801-1818* [Greek bibliography of the nineteenth century, 1801-1818], Athens: ELIA, 1997, pp. xxv-lxv.

¹⁴ Two very welcome exceptions to such segregation are: Yannis Kokkonas, *Ο πολίτης Πέτρος Σκυλίτζης Ομηρίδης, 1784-1872* [Citizen Petros Skylitzis Omirides, 1784-1872], Athens: Society for the Study of Modern Hellenism, 2003; Dean Kostantaras, *Infamy and Revolt: The Rise of the National Problem in Early Modern Greek Thought*, Boulder, CO, and New York: Columbia University Press and East European Monographs, 2006, esp. Chap. 4: “Culture and Revolution” (see also his ongoing research on the Philiki Etaireia: “Christian Elites of the Peloponnese and the Ottoman State, 1715-1821”, *European History Quarterly* 43 [2013], pp. 628-656).

Etairists and for better situating them in a national political context. Indeed, seen from such an angle the very presence (and persistence) of the Etairists in the years 1814 to 1820 urges for a reconsideration of the social and political dynamic of the period. Although this task, demanding in its complexity, cannot here but be put aside as a promising path for further research, I would suggest quite plainly that part of this reconsideration should be the acknowledgement that a newborn public sphere was in the making, since – more or less – the turn of nineteenth century amid the Ottoman Christian, or ex-Ottoman and by then Habsburg or Russian subjects, who turned more often than not to calling themselves Greeks, or more accurately described, among those who had access to spoken Greek in print (readers or listeners of texts alike). This newborn public sphere was established, not exclusively but primarily, and not on a strictly defined territorial ground, by the means, quite simply, of public communication; mainly through the medium of the printing press, on top of which stood the literary journals, but also backed by a long tradition of a pre-existing, expanding and intensifying correspondence network of a semi-public nature, nurtured by all kinds of private offers and collective news aiming at the “common good”. As a result – and as I have argued elsewhere – a critical public, a public debating in spoken Greek on a whole range of issues in public and in the open, was already at work, sometime within the 1810s.¹⁵ For, in my opinion, it has not been as yet observed and assessed as clearly as it should have been; all this multifaceted activity, apart from the transmission of European learning, apart from a register of Greek steps forward in education and culture, had established first and foremost an open and accessible public forum; the forum of the Greek public, *το κοινόν των Ελλήνων*. How small or weak was such a forum is less significant; what counts is that a social mechanism was put in motion. As early as 1813, while appealing for support from their subscribers, the new editors of *Ἐρμῆς ὁ Λόγιος* were also acknowledging and promoting in public what the journal had already achieved, as follows: “It has awakened among us the spirit of discussion [*το πνεύμα της συζητήσεως*], let’s not allow its fire to extinguish, quite the contrary let us try to turn it into a great flame.”¹⁶ Is it possible to understand the Etairists, that is, an initially small group of infamous merchants or clerks, and their associational experiment, without taking into consideration this broader and still understudied context of the formation of the Greek public

¹⁵ See above, note 12.

¹⁶ *Ἐρμῆς ὁ Λόγιος*, supplement (1 April 1813), p. [2]. For a more elaborate discussion of the extract, see Yakovaki, “Ο Λόγιος *Ἐρμῆς* ως τόπος διαμόρφωσης του ελληνικού κοινού”.

in this same decade? A long-standing conceptual barrier must therefore be shaken, namely that the secret societies are a category apart, and that they (notwithstanding their particularities and regardless of their mystical or irrational aspects) partake as well, as it has in the meantime been accepted for the study of eighteenth-century Freemasonry, in the broader (and thriving at the time) category of voluntary associations.¹⁷

In fact, the historical research on the Philiki Etaireia has to a large extent been victim of its own success: its study was practically overshadowed by its most explosive child, the twin insurrections of 1821, which inaugurated the Greek Revolution. Perhaps this positioning of the Philiki Etaireia as an “ante-chamber”, so to speak, of the Greek Revolution explains, at least in part, why research on the Philiki Etaireia has been dissociated from the rest of Greek public life in and beyond the Ottoman Empire prior to 1821.

By highlighting the process of the emergence of a Greek public, a first possible answer to the question raised above, concerning the contexts within which a new type of political bond and of a social and political identity took shape, has thus been suggested. At this point, however, and before turning to a second answer concerning the contexts in question, a brief sketch of the historiography on the Philiki Etaireia seems necessary, because it may shed some light from another angle as to why scholarly debate on the Philiki Etaireia has been sparse, thus reinforcing the plea for finding a more visible place for it in current historical studies.

¹⁷ On the topic of the secret societies, the classic reference used to be the sober study of J. M. Roberts, *The Mythology of the Secret Societies*, London: Watkins Publishing, 2008 (1972), but on the need to revisit the topic see also the working paper of Jaap Kloosterman, “Secret Societies”, in *European History Online* (EGO), published 2013-06-19 by the Leibniz Institute of European History (IEG), Mainz (accessible online: <http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/european-networks/secret-societies>). The change of perspective may be most clearly seen in the case of the Decembrists and the post-1989 revival of the relevant studies both in Russia and in Europe (see for instance the review essay of Patrick O’Meara, “Recent Russian Historiography on the Decembrists: From ‘Liberation Movement’ to ‘Public Opinion’”, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 4 (2013), pp. 805-822, but also Julie Grandhayé, *Les Décembristes. Une génération republicaine en Russie autocratique*, Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2011. For the recent trends in historical studies of Freemasonry, see Iliá Chatzipanagioti-Sangmeister, *Ο τεκτονισμός στην ελληνική κοινωνία και γραμματεία του 18ου αιώνα. Οι γερμανόφωνες μαρτυρίες* [Freemasonry in Greek society and literature of the eighteenth century: The German-speaking testimonies], Athens: Periplous 2010, *passim*.

As well known, the Philiki Etairia, though always a sensitive and controversial issue since its early days, has not passed unnoticed in the aftermath of independence. Its incorporation in the national pantheon should not be taken for granted. However, it became quite early on a distinctive ingredient of the national narrative, a precious jewel in the crown in the official history of Greek patriotism, although not without reservations, precautions and disagreements¹⁸ and, needless to say, with the obvious price that such an inclusion involved:¹⁹ the subversive, obscure and notorious secret society was tamed to fit in the new legitimate framework of an independent kingdom striving to adjust itself to the harsh and delicate international environment defined by the Great Powers' Europe in the Age of Nationalism, which was also the age of the so-called Eastern Question.

Yet, thanks to these early efforts to secure a place for the Etairia in the history of the Greek Revolution, invaluable primary material, part of the Society's archive, was saved through publication, supplemented by a number of equally invaluable memoirs from the Etairists themselves that were produced at the time. Ioannis Philimon's first synthesis, especially in its second revised form of 1859, retains its prominent position in the literature in question and it is still mandatory reading.²⁰ This is not the place to discuss in depth the historiography of the Etairia, a historiography marked by discontinuities and quite often the product of non-professional historians,²¹ but it should be noted that since

¹⁸ The most overt rigid disapproval and deep contempt towards it may be found in Spyridon Trikoupi, *Ιστορία τῆς ἐλληνικῆς Ἐπαναστάσεως* [The history of the Greek Revolution], Athens ³1888, p. 5. Yet, Trikoupi's assessment of the Philiki Etairia is worth a more appreciative reading, because his disdain reflects attitudes of the 1820s when he was still a student in Paris, and he had first-hand experience of the Etairists in the revolutionary years in the Peloponnese, thus it should not be discarded as just a biased view due to his Anglophile politics.

¹⁹ A *locus communis* is the emphatic dissociation of the Philiki Etairia from other secret societies and their revolutionary activities of the time, especially the Carbonari. This position, politically instrumental during the War of Independence, was reproduced and further elaborated in the work of the first historiographer of the Society, Ioannis Philimon.

²⁰ I. Philimon, *Δοκίμιον ἱστορικὸν περὶ τῆς Φιλικῆς Ἐταιρείας* [Historical essay on the Philiki Etairia], Nafplio 1834, and *Δοκίμιον ἱστορικὸν περὶ τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Ἐπαναστάσεως* [Historical essay on the Greek Revolution], 4 vols, Athens 1859-1861. These two books have appeared in numerous editions, especially in the postwar period, so that one is left with the impression that Philimon's books are always in print.

²¹ A distinguished place among them should be reserved for Takis Kandiloros, *Η Φιλική Ἐταιρεία, 1814-1821* [The Society of Friends, 1814-1821], Athens 1926, and, more recently,

those early efforts significant progress has slowly been made: the accumulated available primary material in Greek has been significantly augmented until quite recently;²² new and competing interpretations, Marxist or nationalist/conservative,²³ have joined in; whereas, especially in the postwar period, innovative and skilful academic contributions, both in archival findings and analytical approaches, in Greece and abroad (in particular, Romania, Bulgaria and most importantly the Soviet Union, but also the United States), have been produced, clarifying controversial issues (one of them being the relationship between the Society and Russian imperial policy) and enriching the ways in which the Society has been seen and discussed.²⁴

for Eleftherios Moraitinis-Patriarcheas (ed. and transl.), *Απομνημονεύματα του πρίγκηπος Νικολάου Υψηλάντη* [Memoirs of Prince Nikolaos Ypsilantis], Athens: Kedros, 1986; *Νικόλαος Γαλάτης. Ο Φιλικός. Ιστορική μονογραφία* [Nikolaos Galatis: The Philikos: Historical monograph], Athens: Kedros, 2002; *Αλέξανδρος Υψηλάντης. Ιστορικές σημειώσεις* [Alexander Ypsilantis: Historical notes], Athens: Kedros, 2002.

²² The most important among these are S. Sakellariou, *Φιλική Εταιρεία* [The Society of Friends], Odessa 1909 (for the Odessa – and Izmail – branch in the last period of its activity); V. Mexas, *Οι Φιλικοί* [The Philikoi], Athens 1937 (for the most valuable catalogue of members); I. A. Meletopoulos (ed.), *Η Φιλική Εταιρεία. Αρχείο Π. Σέκερη* [The Society of Friends: The P. Sekeris archive], Athens: Historical and Ethnological Society of Greece, 1967; and *Αρχείο Εμμανουήλ Ξάνθου* [The Emmanuel Xanthos archive], ed. Trisevgeni Tsimbani-Dalla, 3 vols, Athens: Historical and Ethnological Society of Greece, 1997-2002; a supplement to this publication was produced by the same editor: *27 επιστολές της Σεβαστής προς τον Εμμανουήλ Ξάνθο. Και δύο επιστολές από τον Εμμανουήλ Ξάνθο προς τη Σεβαστή* [27 letters from Sevasti to Emmanuel Xanthos: And two letters from Emmanuel Xanthos to Sevasti], Athens: Historical and Ethnological Society of Greece, 2014.

²³ The effect of Giannis Kordatos' book, *Η κοινωνική σημασία της Ελληνικής Επανάστασης του 1821* [The social significance of the Greek Revolution of 1821], Athens 1924, on the study of 1821, including the Philiki Etaireia, cannot be overestimated. (See V. Panayotopoulos, "Η αριστερή ιστοριογραφία για την Ελληνική Επανάσταση" [The historiography of the left on the Greek Revolution], in Paschalis M. Kitromilides and Triantafyllos E. Sklaventis (eds), *Ιστοριογραφία της νεότερης και σύγχρονης Ελλάδας* [Historiography of modern and contemporary Greece], Athens: INR / NHRF, 2004, pp. 568-576. To a certain extent, Kandiloros' monograph (*Η Φιλική Εταιρεία, 1814-1821*), valuable for the documentary enrichment of the study of the Society at the time, was also an explicit response from a highly nationalist point of view (see pp. 19 and 21-22). Yet, the long-term impact of Kordatos "Marxist approach", based on the class analysis of Greek society, was the reorientation of the study towards the contested question of the connection of the Society with the bourgeoisie or the middle classes.

²⁴ For a presentation of the bibliography up to 1970, one could usefully consult Grigori Arsh, *Η Φιλική Εταιρεία στη Ρωσία. Ο απελευθερωτικός αγώνας του ελληνικού λαού στις αρχές του 19ου αι. και οι ελληνορωσικές σχέσεις* [The Society of Friends in Russia: The war for the liberation of the Greek people at the beginning of the nineteenth century and Greek-

On the whole, however, the study of the Etaireia has not created a coherent branch of historical scholarship, nor have its obscure and ambiguous source materials always received the appropriate critical treatment. Besides, the history of “le secret”, including the history of the secret societies, as Pierre Nora has put it in a phrase that has often been repeated, is “perhaps an impossible history”.²⁵ To be sure, it is not an easy job to reconstitute the history of a secret society. Various factors have contributed to this result, one among them being, of course, an inherent difficulty: that it is a secret society and, by their very nature, secret societies, on the one hand, do not easily offer themselves up to the historian’s curiosity (even more so when their actions led, as in our case, to a revolutionary chaos detrimental for the conservation of its records) and, on the other, because they have many myths attached to them.²⁶ It is not a paradox to say that despite the numerous studies dedicated to its history and a bibliography which starts as early as 1834, until now the principal guide to the history of the Philiki Etaireia is still Ioannis Philimon. A major obstacle for the renewal of its scholarly study is the non-availability of documentary evidence according to the standards of source criticism (their approximate evaluation according to external and internal criteria), and this refers both to the quality of the published documents and the state of the manuscript sources. A further difficulty should be noted in this connection. The main body of the Society’s documents, documents written in Greek and saved in Greece, are dispersed in various archival collections and kept in different institutions (the Historical and Ethnological Society of Greece, the General Archives of Greece, the manuscript department of the National Library). Things become even tougher, in our case, because the necessary comparison of sources, or the enrichment of the existing evidence via the state institutions and their records, involves too many countries; the records of a geographically extensive activity are scattered across at least four (and since 1991 six) different countries and in diverse archival collections or public records institutions (Greece, Romania, the ex-Soviet Union/Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and Turkey), while, in addition, research on this topic

Russian relations], Athens: Papatiriu, 2011 (1st ed. in Russian: Moscow 1970), pp. 11-38, bearing, of course, in mind both the date and the sensibilities of a Soviet historian, publishing in the USSR.

²⁵ See his article on Georg Simmel: Pierre Nora, “Simmel et le mot de passé”, *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse* 14 (1976), pp. 307-312, as cited, for example, in Frédéric Monnet, “Le secret en politique, une histoire à écrire”, *Matériaux pour l’Histoire de Notre Temps* 58 (2000), pp. 3-8.

²⁶ Especially on this as a reason why historians have tended to neglect secret societies, see Roberts, *The Mythology of the Secret Societies*, pp. 23-31.

suffered greatly from the Cold War restrictions on scholarly communication, constraints further worsened in this case by the repercussions of the Greek Civil War. It is indicative that Grigori Arsh's seminal monograph in Russian of 1970 was translated into Greek only in 2011.²⁷

To put it simply, the Philiki Etaireia, as an object of critical historical research, has been and still is even more so a marginal, erratic and, one may add, quite idiosyncratic topic of historical inquiry. It has not exactly, as yet, become an integral part of academic, professional historiography.

Yet, despite this marginality or the lack of coherence, one should but feel grateful for the work done so far. Thanks to the accessibility of a wealth of primary material, it has produced a secure, albeit difficult to handle documentary record for willing newcomers, but, even more importantly, a quite solid ground arguably exists for anyone interested in further explorations, thanks to the dedicated labour of a group of scholars belonging to different generations.

In other words, we are in a position to have a reliable general picture as regards the Society's establishment, its scope, its membership and its social composition, its rituals and organizational practices, the phases of its development, its major decisions, as well as its crucial role in organizing the twin revolutionary insurrections of 1821: the relevant chapters on the Etaireia in two general collective multi-volume histories of Greece, the *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους* [The history of the Greek nation] and the *Ιστορία του Νέου Ελληνισμού* [The history of modern Hellenism], of 1975 and 2003 respectively,²⁸ stand as proof of this modest but rigorous achievement, and, regardless of their differences in perspective, both qualify as welcome, respectable and stimulating pieces of historical analysis that elucidate a fascinating story in the modern history of the Greeks. Between these two dates, a shift of perspective might be discerned: from a sociological analysis of the Society's membership (oriented towards an investigation of the social forces behind it via quantitative methods), to a new awareness on mutations in the political culture, brought forward through an emphasis on the organizational achievement exemplified by the Society's initiatives. Still, the doctoral dissertation of the first contributor, George Frangos, remains unpublished since 1971,²⁹ whereas Vassilis Panayotopoulos'

²⁷ Arsh, *Η Φιλική Εταιρεία στη Ρωσία*. It is a pity, however, that this very important and long-awaited translation, along with the highly professional archival job of the Soviet historian, is somehow defective in editorial standards, especially as a guide to the Russian records.

²⁸ George Frangos, "Φιλική Εταιρεία" [The Society of Friends], in *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους* [The history of the Greek nation], Vol. XI, Athens: Ekdotiki Athinon, 1975, pp. 424-432; Panayotopoulos, "Φιλική Εταιρεία", pp. 9-32.

²⁹ George Frangos, *The Philiki Etaireia: A Social and Historical Analysis*, Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, New York, 1971. The only other publication, apart from the chapter

contribution of 2003, penned by a foremost Greek historian, whose first article on the topic was written back in 1964, is in fact the distilled sketch of a monograph manqué, abounding in powerful insights.³⁰

The story of the Etaireia is a fascinating story indeed. However, is the history of the Philiki Etaireia only and strictly a chapter of Modern Greek national history? Or, should one recognize in it a transnational development? The affirmative answer is self-evident, although there is no automatic answer as to how the case of the Society of Friends fits into the broader social and political horizon of post-Napoleonic Europe, even more so now when the international historiographical landscape of the Age of Revolutions has opened up or rather turned towards its global context.³¹ I will come back to this shortly.

The plea to put the Philiki Etaireia back onto the agenda of social and political history, invoked here, may indeed take numerous forms. It is beyond doubt, as already implied by our historiographical detour, that there is plenty of room for addressing a whole range of unexplored aspects concerning the Society's "internal history": our knowledge of it is still wanting, and there is perhaps a point in wishing to make its study more of a "normal", so to speak, field of historical scholarship. There is also no doubt that there is still plenty of ground to explore further the specific role played by the Etaireists from 1818 onwards, especially from the spring of 1820, in organizing a revolution, as there is also an interesting question that should be regarded as open: when does the history of the Philiki Etaireia exactly end? It is desirable, that is, for the Society to gain a more palpable place in our understanding of the big event that was the Greek Revolution. Such a task, I think, will have a beneficial impact on the ongoing studies of the 1821 insurrections. Both these directions follow paths already at work, and one may only be happy if they continue to grow; indeed, there are signs that they are.³²

in Greek (see note 28), produced from this important Ph.D. thesis is a short article in English, "The Philiki Etaireia: A Premature National Coalition", in Richard Clogg (ed.), *The Struggle for Greek Independence: Essays to Mark the 150th Anniversary of the Greek War of Independence*, London: Macmillan, 1973, pp. 87-103.

³⁰ V. Panayotopoulos, "Οι Τέκτονες και η Φιλική Εταιρεία. Εμμανουήλ Ξάνθος και Παν. Καραγιάννης" [Freemasons and the Philiki Etaireia: Emmanuel Xanthos and Pan. Karayannis], *Ο Ερανοστής* 2 (1964), pp. 138-157. See also a more recent contribution of another kind, under his general editorship: P. Mihailaris, *Οι Φιλικοί* [The Philikoi] in the 16-volume series, V. Panayotopoulos (ed.), *Οι ιδρυτές της Νεότερης Ελλάδας* [The founders of Modern Greece], Athens: Ta Nea, 2009, Vol. IV (the updated biographies include Emmanuel Xanthos, Panagiotis Anagnostopoulos, Grigorios Dikaios, Nikolaos Skoufas and Athanasios Tsakalof).

³¹ David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds), *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760-1840*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

³² Pizaniias (ed.), *Η Ελληνική Επανάσταση*, especially his introductory essay, pp. 13-77,

Important as the above directions of research may be, putting the Philiki Etaireia back onto the agenda should first of all mean better situating its “existence” in context. The emergent Greek public space in the years from 1800 to 1820 has already been brought forward, as relevant for its study in a national context, in which a special place should be reserved for inquiries on the processes of politicization. We should now turn to a different contextualisation, perhaps more important, namely the international context to which the Etaireia belongs. For, it is indeed not possible to grasp how and why the Philiki Etaireia came into being and turned itself to a “storm” (to adopt the metaphor employed by Panayotopoulos) without taking into account the international dynamic in which it evidently participated. Could we then possibly go a step further and take the story of the Etaireists out of the closet of Modern Greek history in order to enable us to better understand the broader political dynamic put into motion during and especially after the Napoleonic Wars in Europe and South America as well? Again, this is not the place for elaborate answers, but some hints towards this direction may be of some value.

In my view, what is fascinating in an enduring way about the Philiki Etaireia goes beyond its contribution, as decisive as it may have been, to the envisioning and launching of a revolution, or for that matter to the creation of a viable nation-state for the Modern Greeks. It should be seen as the flesh and blood of an early expression of a radically new development: that is, the modern trust in voluntary, and collective, political action as a new and all-embracing ideal for an individual’s life (and death), as a new and efficient means to influence or redirect the social and political conditions of the present. In other words, it is part of the invention of democratic politics as such, in its modern sense. Whatever the Etaireists may have been, they were not more dedicated to their motherland, nor more ardent patriots, nor more “Greek” than, say, for instance, Adamantios Korais; what made them different but not exceptional was their (early and adroit) response to the widespread new possibility of their era, to imagine that it is worth taking the risk to take the future in their own hands. In a sense (and for the sake of exaggeration), their initial gesture was to say “we are present and able”, rather than “we are Greeks”. From such a perspective, the national cause may be seen as the available vehicle for materializing this active (albeit secret) citizenship at a time when political ideologies were still in the making and constitutions in want.

and in the same volume Nikos Rotzokos, “Το έθνος ως πολιτικό υποκείμενο. Σχόλια για το ελληνικό εθνικό κίνημα” [The nation as political subject: Comments on the Greek national movement], pp. 223-240.

This is why the central question stated at the beginning of this essay, that is, “What were the conditions within which political mobilization in modern terms was generated in the Ottoman Empire and the diaspora of its Christian subjects?”, cannot be adequately addressed *unless* we pay attention to the international context within which this political mobilization in the south-east periphery of Europe was produced.

The communalities between the Italian Carbonari, the Spanish Comeneros, the Russian Decembrists or the French Charbonnerie, although they have for some time been customarily noted, remained for long rather understudied.³³ They are by now more clearly acknowledged and attentively investigated.³⁴ What is perhaps changing is a renewal of interest in the political upheaval of the first post-Napoleonic decade and especially for interconnections of the first revolutionary wave of the 1820s: a new historiography, less ethnocentric or romantic, less Marxist or reductionist, but more transnational, perhaps more “European”, or rather more “global”, in its perspective is building up the horizon of what has been aptly described in the title of a recent study as “the Liberal International”.³⁵ Do the Etairists, and their subversive world, not have a place in this company? If not, should they?

³³ See, for instance, Panayotopoulos, “Φιλική Εταιρεία”, and Frangos, “Φιλική Εταιρεία”. Especially regarding the mutual relationship between the Etairists and the so-called Decembrists, the Soviet-era literature still remains essential; see Nikolai Todorov, *Η Βαλκανική διάσταση της Επανάστασης του 1821* [The Balkan dimension of the 1821 Revolution], Athens: Gutenberg, 1982, pp. 96-100; L. Bolisakov, *Νέα στοιχεία για τη Φιλική Εταιρεία από τον Δεκεμβριστή Πάβελ Ιβάνοβιτς Πέστελ* [New evidence on the Philiki Etairia by Decembrist Pavel Ivanovich Pestel], ed. Ellie Alexiou, Athens 1972; I. Iovva, *Οι Δεκεμβριστές του νότου και το ελληνικό εθνικοαπελευθερωτικό κίνημα* [The Decembrists of the south and the Greek national liberation movement], Athens: Synchroni Epochi, 1986 (original edition in Russian, 1963). See also herein E. Sifneos, “Preparing the Greek Revolution in Odessa in the 1820s: Tastes, Markets and Political Liberalism”, pp. 139-170.

³⁴ For the first fascinating narrative of the activities, including the Philiki Etairia, which led to the 1820s revolts in Spain, Naples, Greece and Russia as parallel and comparable revolutionary experiences in Europe’s periphery, see Richard Stites, *Four Horsemen: Riding to Liberty in Post-Napoleonic Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

³⁵ Maurizio Isabella, *Risorgimento in Exile: Italian Émigrés and the Liberal International in the Post-Napoleonic Era*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. For the broader terms of the historiographical turn about this period, see above notes 4 and 31, but see also Michael Broers, Peter Hicks and Agustín Guimerá Ravina (eds), *The Napoleonic Empire and the New European Political Culture*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. For the significance of the Spanish experience, see especially Irène Castells, “Le libéralisme insurrectionnel espagnol (1814-1830)”, *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française* 336 (2004), pp. 221-233. For the Carbonari, see Giampietro Berti and Franco Della Peruta (eds), *La nascita della nazione*.

The objection is ready and apparently stems from a very deeply inscribed bias (in spite of, one might say, Edward Said and Maria Todorova):³⁶ “All right, but the Philiki Etaireia, from Odessa, to Constantinople and to the Morea via the dominions of the Hospodars, is not quite the same; it is a Balkan story, a semi-Oriental story”, or in a variation of the same – albeit disguised – theme, “well, this is a special case, the case of the Greeks with their ancient fantasies and claims, or who could resist?” – such a reaction may also be part of a rather diffused and especially Greek scornful attitude towards its “underdeveloped, both rural and Ottoman, past”. There might be shades of truth in this arrogant stand, yet to turn to our specific historical setting, namely at the crossroads, or more precisely at that dawn of a new era that the Vienna settlement inaugurated, as Schroeder’s magisterial analysis has instructed us, one should be aware that far more was now feasible for everyone than before 1789.³⁷ (If one is to take into account the recent reinterpretations of the Congress of Vienna, it might be of particular concern for both the emerging spirit of Vienna and the Philiki Etaireia that the latter was conceived sometime between Napoleon’s defeat or the end of the wars, as confirmed by the Treaty of Paris, and the preparations for the Congress in Vienna; something should have been in the air.)³⁸

To conclude, perhaps at the point where another essay starts, let me just clarify my argument with two final remarks:

First, the new condition that had emerged at this crossroads was the condition of – what I would call – the internationalization of politics. I will only hint at the fact that it was just then that the very term “international” as a realm of governance was coined by Bentham.³⁹ This condition was the matrix behind the

La Carboneria. Intrecci veneti, nazionali e internazionali, Rovigo: Minelliana, 2004; John A. Davis, *Naples and Napoleon: Southern Italy and the European Revolutions, 1780-1860*, Oxford 2006. For the Decembrists, apart for Mark Raeff’s essential *The Decembrist Movement*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966, and for recent literature, see above note 17.

³⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York 1979; Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

³⁷ Paul Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, especially his “An Appraisal” [of Vienna], pp. 575-582.

³⁸ For an impressive new interpretation of the Congress of Vienna as part of post-Napoleonic political culture, see Brian E. Vick, *The Congress of Vienna: Power and Politics after Napoleon*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014. For a reappraisal of the period 1813-1814, cf. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics*, pp. 477-516.

³⁹ Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea*, London: Penguin, 2012, pp. 19-33. See also David Armitage, “Globalising Jeremy Bentham”, in his *Foundations of Modern International Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 172-187.

audacity of the clerks in Odessa who turned themselves into Etairists and made them comrades, in the same capacity and the same cause, with the son of an ex-Hospodar, a high officer of the tsar's imperial and Europe's most victorious army. By the condition of the internationalization of politics, I refer to the complex result of the international experience (and the mutations of the political culture) to which they were all, rulers and subjects, exposed through the impact of *all three*: the French 1789, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars and the resurgence or rather the transformation of a new international order – plus a newcomer, as a distinct actor on the European scene, namely public opinion.

Second, this was exactly so in the case of the Etairists, organizing themselves in backwater outskirts of a European periphery and an Ottoman capital, not because the Greeks of the diaspora, lucky and risky merchants as the stereotype goes, were privileged with an advanced liaison with European mentalities, which, of course, they were, but also for another reason: because the Ottoman Empire itself, at this crossroads, was becoming, more decisively than ever after Vienna, an integral partner of Europe, a partner in the new order of stability and legitimacy, a partner in the ultimate lesson drawn from the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, namely peace. It is for that matter no accident that another familiar and perennial term was also coined then: namely, the Eastern Question, whose birth certificate reads “Verona 1822”.⁴⁰

In this sense, the Etairists provided the most unexpected evidence or support for what Hanioglu has aptly termed as the Ottoman statesmen's entry-ticket to Europe and modernity, the “common fear of a destabilization as a result of the Ottoman collapse”.⁴¹ The Ottoman Christian subjects transformed into Etairists were indeed organizing themselves against a Restoration power – part of the European equilibrium: the Ottoman status quo. Was this confrontation thus in the making only a confrontation between Greek nationalism and the Ottoman otherness? Or, was it a cleavage in a common process of a painful and heroic entrance into a modern – international – world?

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

⁴⁰ See in this connection an intriguing article by Leslie Rogne Schumacher, “The Eastern Question as a Europe Question: Viewing the Ascent of ‘Europe’ through the lens of Ottoman Decline”, *Journal of European Studies* 44 (2014), pp. 64-80.

⁴¹ M. Sükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, pp. 207-208.