

The Historical Review/La Revue Historique

Vol 21, No 1 (2024)

The Historical Review / La Revue Historique

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



VOLUME XXI (2024)

Section de Recherches Néohelléniques
Institut de Recherches Historiques / FNRS

Section of Neohellenic Research
Institute of Historical Research / NHRF

Yanis Kordatos: A Greek Marxist Historian in the Twentieth Century

Vangelis Karamanolakis

doi: [10.12681/hr.43840](https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.43840)

Copyright © 2025



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

Karamanolakis, V. (2025). Yanis Kordatos: A Greek Marxist Historian in the Twentieth Century . *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique*, 21(1), 127–150. <https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.43840>

YANIS KORDATOS: A GREEK MARXIST HISTORIAN IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Vangelis Karamanolakis

ABSTRACT: This article focuses on the life and work of Yanis Kordatos (1891–1961), the first Marxist historian in Greece, as has been established in the relevant literature. Through references to his life and work, it attempts to explore the intersection of Marxist and national historiography in Greece, as well as the way in which an intellectual becomes associated with a particular historical perspective (Marxism), appears as its main representative and is repeatedly acknowledged or contested as an authoritative voice on the subject. In that regard, the article surveys the milestones in Kordatos' intellectual and historiographical trajectory, from the mid-1920s to the late 1950s: first, how he came to constitute a revolutionary intellectual in the 1920s, joining the nascent communist movement; then his estrangement from the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and his evolution into the leading Marxist historian of his time; finally, after the 1940s, his emergence as the pre-eminent national left-wing historian in a new era for the Greek Left, after the experiences of the National Resistance (1941–1944) and the Civil War (1946–1949).

Yanis Kordatos was born in Zagora, a village of Thessaly, in 1891, the son of a middle-class provincial family. He began his education in Zagora before continuing his studies in Volos. He later attended Greek secondary schools in Smyrna and Istanbul, both home to thriving Greek communities.¹ During this time, he was introduced to demoticism, the movement advocating for the adoption of the demotic (vernacular) language. Demoticism met with strong opposition from institutions such as the Church of Greece and the University of Athens, which sought to preserve the official archaic language.²

In 1910 he enrolled in the Law School of the University of Athens. Initially he was fascinated by the personality and ideas of Eleftherios Venizelos while always remaining a militant demoticist. However, as reflected in his personal

¹ See Dimos N. Mexis, *Ο ιστορικός Γιάννης Κορδάτος και το έργο του: Εισαγωγή, ανέκδοτη αυτοβιογραφία και αυτοκριτική* (Athens: Boukoumanis, 1975) and Dimitris Dimitropoulos, “Γιάννης Κορδάτος: Καθοριστική παρουσία στη νεότερη ιστοριογραφία,” in *Πρόσωπα του 20ού αιώνα: Έλληνες που σημάδεψαν τον 20ό αιώνα*, ed. Vassilis Panagiotopoulos (Athens: Ta Nea/Livani, 2000), 251–56.

² See Peter Mackridges, *Language and National Identity in Greece, 1766–1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

correspondence, he began distancing himself from Venizelism as early as 1916 and gradually shifted towards communist ideas, especially after the October Revolution. He soon joined the Socialist Workers' Party of Greece (SEKE) and began writing in its daily newspaper, *Ριζοσπάστης*. He played an active role in the renaming of the party to SEKE (K) – the “K” standing for “Communist” – and in its accession to the Communist Third International (Comintern) by adopting the latter's principles.³ He also supported, as a party official, the acceptance of the 21 conditions decided by the second Comintern congress as a prerequisite for the accession of new parties to it and was involved in the party's final renaming as the Communist Party of Greece (KKE).⁴ He was charged with the management of *Ριζοσπάστης* and held several party posts, including a brief tenure as party secretary (February–October 1922). In December 1924 he resigned from the management of *Ριζοσπάστης* and withdrew from party activities, in disagreement with the KKE's stance on a united and independent Macedonia, a position in line with the relevant resolutions of the Balkan Communist Federation.⁵

From 1919 to 1924, Kordatos emerged as one of the most important cadres and intellectuals of the newly formed party – a revolutionary intellectual, firmly committed to the cause of changing the world through the revolution of the working class.⁶ He thus joined forces with an army of intellectuals who were striving, in different corners of the globe, to change the world and defend the Soviet Union, the only example of a communist state at the time. These were men, and to a lesser extent women, who rose within the socialist and communist movements from the aftermath of the bourgeois revolutions of 1848 up to the end of World War II (1945), and made it their aim to overthrow the ruling order through their ideas and actions. These intellectuals not only formulated new views and theories but were also actively involved in the creation of socialist and communist parties.

³ See Historical Department of the Central Committee of the KKE, *Δοκίμιο ιστορίας του ΚΚΕ*, vol. 1, 1918–1949, 5th ed. (Athens: Synchroni Epochi, 2008), 107–8.

⁴ See Alexandros Dagkas and George Leontiadis, *Κομιντέρν και Μακεδονικό ζήτημα: Το ελληνικό παρασκήνιο, 1924* (Athens: Trochalia, 1997), 47, 50.

⁵ The KKE's agreement on an autonomous Macedonia – part of Ottoman Macedonia had been incorporated into the Greek state during the Balkan Wars – was the reason behind the persecution of its members by the state, on the charge of seeking to seize national territories. On the Macedonian question and the stance of the Left during this period, see Dagkas and Leontiadis, *Κομιντέρν και Μακεδονικό ζήτημα*, and Giorgos P. Anastasopoulos, “Μακεδονικό ζήτημα και ΚΚΕ, 1918–1935” (PhD diss., Panteion University, 2007).

⁶ I use the concept of the “revolutionary intellectual” based on the schema of Enzo Traverso, *Revolution: An Intellectual History* (New York: Verso, 2021).

Kordatos' status as a party intellectual was cemented through his contributions to *Ριζοσπάστης* and other party publications. His articles analysed party decisions, explained their objectives, justified them, highlighted the connection between the Greek and the international communist movements, argued about ideological issues and countered opposing views from both within and outside the party. In his arguments he constantly invoked Marxist theory and method, which he sought to explain and popularise among his readership. Kordatos' articles demonstrate his ability to move across multiple fields of knowledge and creation – politics, philosophy, sociology, history, literature – not in a journalistic or cosmopolitan sense, but as an extension of his commitment to a liberating vision guided by Marxist method and theory, which could be the key to interpreting and understanding all fields of knowledge. His writings were fiercely hostile to the ideology and the political parties of the bourgeoisie, laden with sharp criticisms and relentless attempts to expose their fundamentally anti-working-class character. He was not concerned with winning approval but rather with provoking and creating rifts. And it was in this spirit that his 1924 book on the Greek Revolution became a pivotal moment in his intellectual trajectory.

A Seminal Book on the Greek Revolution

In the 1920s, the 1821 Revolution was omnipresent in public life, as Greece neared the centenary of its outbreak. Although the official 1921 celebrations had been postponed due to the Asia Minor Campaign, the revolution was extremely topical due to the numerous, mainly local, commemorations continuously reviving its memory. Publishing yet another book on 1821 was hardly unusual – so what was it about Kordatos' *Η κοινωνική σημασία της Ελληνικής Επανάστασεως του 1821* that made it such a seismic event for its time? The answer can be none other than the association of the Greek Revolution with the “materialist factor” and Marxist ideas.⁷ Starting from the class structure of Greek society, Kordatos saw the revolution as the product of the newly emerging bourgeoisie against both the Ottoman oppressors and local landowning elites. He prioritised its social dimension over its national character, evaluating its protagonists through

⁷ On the relationship of the Left with 1821, see Vassilis Panagiotopoulos, “Η αριστερή ιστοριογραφία για την Ελληνική Επανάσταση,” in *Δ' Διεθνές Συνέδριο Ιστορίας: Ιστοριογραφία της νεότερης και σύγχρονης Ελλάδας 1833–2002. Πρακτικά*, ed. Paschalis M. Kitromilides and Triantafyllos E. Sklavenitis (Athens: NHRF, 2004), 1:567–76, and Panagiotis Stathis, “Το Εικοσιένα στην αριστερή ιστοριογραφία του 20ού αιώνα,” in *Οι αναγνώσεις του 1821 και η Αριστερά*, ed. Dimitris Dimitropoulos and Vangelis Karamamolakis (Athens: ASKI/I Avgi, 2014), 29–43.

a class-based perspective and harshly rejecting the approaches of national historiography.⁸ It was a book that upended long-established understandings of the revolution, offering a starkly different vision of 1821.

The 1821 Revolution, the “sacred locus” of modern Greek national identity, was naturally a focal point of revision for an ideology like communism, which sought not only to re-examine the present and the future of the people, but also to reframe their past, inviting them to interpret it through its own lens. The revolution was not just history – it was a roadmap for the future: within the framework of defining the necessary stages towards the communist revolution, characterising 1821 as a revolution was crucial for understanding the position of class conflict in Greece and determining the next steps for the working class. Kordatos’ portrayal of the 1821 Revolution as bourgeois-democratic laid the ideological groundwork for the preparation of the working class and its party for the next stage: the proletarian revolution.

The book was a remarkable publishing success, while it also sparked an unprecedented wave of outrage: denunciations in a large part of the press, resolutions and condemnations from professional associations and scientific societies, scathing criticism from university professors and threats of excommunication from the church.⁹ The impact of the book was not only linked to the radicalism of its content, but also to the fact that it was written by a communist. The source of the fear lay in associating the 1821 Revolution with a movement which, although small in numbers at the time, stood out for its militant stance, its internationalist character and, above all, its connection to the Soviet Union.

The Formation of a Marxist Historian

In 1925, one year after publishing his first book, Kordatos moved on to a second work covering the period from Ottoman rule to the independence of the Greek state in 1831.¹⁰ In the same year, he prefaced Herman Gorter’s translated edition on historical materialism,¹¹ reaffirming his connection to Marxist theory. Two

⁸ For the book, see Philippos Iliou, “Η ιδεολογική χρήση της Ιστορίας: Σχόλιο στη συζήτηση Κορδάτου-Ζέβγου,” *Αντί* 46 (29 May 1976): 28–34; Stavros Panagiotidis, “Το ‘Εθνικό Ζήτημα’ στην ελληνική μαρξιστική ιστοριογραφία (1907–1959)” (PhD diss., Panteion University, 1996). See also Panagiotis Stathis, “Το Εικοσιένα του Κορδάτου πριν και μετά τον πόλεμο,” *Διαβάζω* 523 (October 2011): 86–95.

⁹ See Giorgos D. Boubous, “Η ελληνική κοινωνία στην πρώιμη μαρξιστική σκέψη: Γ. Σκληρός – Γ. Κορδάτος (1907–1930)” (PhD diss., Panteion University, 1996), 1:118–212.

¹⁰ *Νεοελληνική πολιτική ιστορία*, vol. 1 (Athens: G.I. Vasileiou, 1925).

¹¹ Herman Gorter, *Ο ιστορικός υλισμός*, trans. Nikos Laidis (Athens: G.I. Vasileiou, 1925).

years later, he published two more monographs: one on the relationship between Christianity and earlier religions,¹² and another on the language question in Greece.¹³ It was in the same year that his relationship with the KKE entered a new phase, as the third party congress decided to expel him, the main reason being his articles on the Macedonian question in *La Révolution prolétarienne*, a Parisian newspaper associated with the Trotskyist opposition.¹⁴

Kordatos' expulsion did not mark a definitive break with the KKE, which continued to see value in using its former member for projects aimed at building broader fronts. Besides, Kordatos' radiance among left-wing audiences remained strong, owing in large part to the lasting impact of his first book. Between 1928 and 1932, he contributed to a series of literary journals affiliated with the KKE, a collaboration that was broken off in 1932 amid mutual grievances.¹⁵ During the same period, he went on to publish four additional studies on Greek history.¹⁶

Through his historical work of that period, Kordatos wished to cover the entire chronological spectrum of Greek national history, but also to introduce new themes and perspectives related to Marxist ideology, such as the trajectory of the working class in Greece or the history of the demoticist movement. His writing was explicitly designed to challenge the dominant ideology, delivering a decisive blow from a communist standpoint. His criticism was unapologetically dismissive of prevailing narratives, driven by a commitment to the cause of revolutionary change in the world through the action of the workers' movement.

In this regard, his work was met with aggression, irony and often contempt by academic historiography and state institutions. Its dismissal as mere politicking and nonscience also led to the exclusion of its author from the academic community. The real rupture did not lie solely in labelling the 1821 Revolution as social, but

¹² Yanis Kordatos, *Αρχαίες θρησκείες και χριστιανισμός* (Athens: Mich. I. Saliveros, 1927).

¹³ *Δημοτικισμός και λογιωτατισμός: Κοινωνιολογική μελέτη του γλωσσικού ζητήματος* (Athens: A.I. Rallis, 1927).

¹⁴ See Kostas Paloukis, "Η 'Αριστερή Αντιπολίτευση στο ΚΚΕ," in *Ιστορία της Ελλάδας του 20ού αιώνα: Ο Μεσσοπόλεμος 1922-1940*, vol. B2, ed. Christos Hadziioissif (Athens: Vivliorama, 2003), 230.

¹⁵ See Christina Dounia, *Λογοτεχνία και πολιτική: Τα περιοδικά της Αριστεράς στον Μεσσοπόλεμο* (Athens: Kastaniotis, 1999).

¹⁶ See Yanis Kordatos, *Η Επανάσταση της Θεσσαλομαγνησίας το 1821* (Athens: Pindaros A. Papageorgiadis, 1930); Kordatos, *Εισαγωγή εις την ιστορίαν της ελληνικής κεφαλαιοκρατίας* (Athens: Kololos, 1930); Kordatos, *Ο Ρήγας Φεραίος και η εποχή του* (Athens: Τυρ. Konstantinoupoleos, 1931); Kordatos, *Ιστορία του ελληνικού εργατικού κινήματος: Εικονογραφημένη επί τη βάσει αγνώστων πηγών και ανεκδότων αρχείων*, vol. 1, 1870-1907 and vol. 2, 1908-1910 (Athens: Kololos, 1932).

also in refuting the concept of the nation and the positive role of the church, as it had been registered in modern Greek historiography up to that point. By referring to distinct social classes in conflict with each other, Kordatos questioned not only the homogeneity of the nation at the time but also its very historical continuity. In his analyses he pointed out the lack of any connection between the ancient and modern Greeks. He was particularly critical of the use of *nation* as a concept before the formation of the modern Greek state, viewing the former as a transient historical phenomenon, an invention of the bourgeoisie, which would ultimately fade away with the transition to a classless communist society.¹⁷

His criticism extended to all those features that ensured national continuity. He focused, in particular, on the question of language and its preservation, arguing that it was maintained because of the Christian religion and the fact that the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Phanariots had imposed it on the Balkan peoples by force from the mid-eighteenth century. As he noted about modern Greeks, refuting any theory of ethnic purity: “We are a mixture of Slavs and Arvanites, and to a lesser extent of Vlachs and Franks.”¹⁸

Kordatos’ interest in history stemmed from his political commitment. Like many other Marxists, starting from Marx and Engels, he turned to history, seeking to offer depth and justification to his analyses and claims, or using it to interpret contemporary events. Figures of the international socialist and communist movement, such as Lenin, Jean Jaurès, Leon Trotsky and Franz Mehring, also engaged in the study of the past, reinforcing their political vision through history, enhancing their political analysis with historical narrative.

The connection between politics and history was not novel. In the nineteenth century, national history was constituted as a field in a continuous dialogue with political developments. For instance, the emergence of the “Prussian” school of history was directly associated with the demand for the unification of Germany. Historians such as Johann Gustav Droysen or Heinrich von Treitschke supported Otto von Bismarck’s rule, establishing a shared historical past through their work.¹⁹ Similarly, exploring Greek national historiography from the nineteenth century to the interwar period, one constantly encounters this navel string between history and politics: the influence of geopolitical developments on the shaping of national historiography as a mostly recurring theme.²⁰

¹⁷ See Kordatos, *Ο Ρήγας Φεραίος και η εποχή του*, 11, and *Νεοελληνική πολιτική ιστορία*, 17–18.

¹⁸ Kordatos, *Ο Ρήγας Φεραίος και η εποχή του*, 13.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Walter Laqueur, ed., *Historians in Politics* (London: Sage, 1974).

²⁰ See, for instance, Elli Skopetea, *Το “Πρότυπο Βασίλειο” και η Μεγάλη Ιδέα: Όψεις του εθνικού προβλήματος στην Ελλάδα (1830–1880)* (Athens: Nisos, 2024).

On the other hand, the emphasis placed on the importance of facts and the value of sources was not new either. On the contrary, it was historicism and positivism that had highlighted the central role of sources in historical research. These two currents laid the foundations on which the professional and scientific status of the historian was established, in close connection with the development of national historiography. What distinguished Kordatos, however, was the connection he made between historiography and politics through a specific ideology, and especially through a specific party: the KKE. For Kordatos, history was not an isolated subject; it was embedded in a broader objective, that of understanding the evolution of the old world, overthrowing it and shaping the future. History was becoming part of a larger plan, turning into one of the weapons in the arsenal of the revolutionary intellectual. Its significance and its subversive power lay precisely in the truth of its conclusions, as secured through its method.

In terms of methodology, Kordatos stood out as a pioneer by introducing a new approach in the study of history: historical materialism. Although, in the Greek case, he had not been the first to invoke it in historical analysis; he was nevertheless the first who systematically utilised it for the study of a specific subject, the 1821 Revolution, and from then on through his entire body of work. From 1924 until his death, Kordatos' writings are full of references to historical materialism, both theoretical and methodological, while he also published specialised articles, wrote prefaces and edited translations of related works. Among the tools of Marxist analysis, two key elements stand out: the class struggle and the primacy of the economic over other factors.²¹

One of the most important critiques of Kordatos is his persistent reliance on his early readings of Marxist literature throughout his writings – at times accompanied by serious misunderstandings and simplifications. He was accused of a botched reading of the basic texts of Marxism, which in turn led to a flawed application of Marxist thought, one that was linked to the ideological use of history, based on party priorities.²² But was this characteristic unique to Kordatos among Marxists of his time? In Greece, the spread of Marxist ideas was the result of a slow and contradictory process, which involved their conflation with other theories and traditions as well as a gradual diminishing of their dynamism.²³ At the international level, Eric Hobsbawm, writing about the early

²¹ See Zoi Spanakou, “Η έννοια της ιστορικής νομοτέλειας στο μεσοπολεμικό έργο του Γιάννη Κορδάτου” (PhD diss., Panteion University, 1991).

²² Πιου, “Η ιδεολογική χρήση της Ιστορίας.”

²³ See Antonis Liakos, “Οι δυνατότητες πρόσληψης του μαρξισμού στην Ελλάδα το 19ο αιώνα”, in *Θέματα νεοελληνικής ιστορίας (18ος–20ός αι.)*, ed. George B. Dertilis and Kostas

twentieth century, refers to the spread of historical materialism through various revolutionary movements as a process of simplification and selective reading of Marx's texts, with an emphasis on the economic element and the relationship between base and superstructure. Hobsbawm identifies the phenomenon as "vulgar Marxism", noting the difficulty in drawing a line between the "real impact" of Marxist ideas and the mere adoption of some general statements derived from a broad and superficial understanding of Marxism.²⁴ On the other hand, Hobsbawm's observation about the amazement felt by an "intelligent and learned social scientist" when encountering Marxist ideas and their application to the interpretation of the past is particularly relevant. This remark resonates perfectly with Kordatos' own recollections of the shock he experienced when he first came into contact with Marxism and its conceptual framework.

If Kordatos gradually transforms from a revolutionary intellectual into a Marxist historian, what marks the turning point in this transition? What is it that sparked his shift from an initial fascination with history into an almost obsessive preoccupation with it? Kordatos belonged to a generation of communists who engaged with history as a tool for their political activism, with a body of writings that included historiographical works. However, he was the only one among them to evolve into a professional historian – a historian who derived much of his livelihood not only from his books, but also from his articles, as his collaborations with newspapers and magazines increasingly specialised in history. In my opinion, the pivotal moment in this transformation was Kordatos' departure from the KKE in 1924, followed by his expulsion and the subsequent severing of his ties with the party.

Kordatos' departure from the KKE did not happen in an instant. In fact, despite his expulsion, the historian maintained a strong relationship with the party until at least the early 1930s. During this period he also came into contact with other left-wing groups, as reflected in his collaborations with various periodical projects. Kordatos believed that through history he could formulate a discourse in his own way, contributing to the realisation of the communist vision. This confidence in his ability to engage with a broader audience was obviously reinforced by the success of his first book, a success which propelled him to fame and even helped resolve some of the livelihood problems that plagued him. Thus, Kordatos evolved into a Marxist historian, no longer bound with a political party, but aligned with a political faction: the Left. He was far from

Kostis (Athens: Ant. N. Sakkoulas, 1991), 405–16.

²⁴ See Eric J. Hobsbawm, "Karl Marx's Contribution in Historiography," *Diogenes* 64 (December 1968): 37–56. See also the comments in Ioannis Koubourlis, "Η αντίληψη περί ιστορικής μεταβολής στην πρώιμη ελληνική μαρξιστική ιστοριογραφία: Μερικές σκέψεις με αφορμή το παράδειγμα της οθωμανικής κατάκτησης," *Αρχαιοτάξιο* 23 (December 2021): 39–42.

a “poor relative;” on the contrary, he was a former high-ranking party official, an intellectual who, through his work, had dealt a decisive blow to bourgeois ideology and contributed significantly to the enlightening and awakening of the workers. Besides, even after his expulsion, his work remained highly prominent among left-wing perspectives on the past. At least until 1933.

The Conflict with Yannis Zevgos

On 15 October 1933, in *Κομμουνιστική Επιθεώρηση* (KOMEΠ), the theoretical organ of the KKE, Yannis Zevgos²⁵ (a pseudonym of Yannis Talaganis) published the first in a series of articles against Kordatos. The party official had recently returned to Greece from the Soviet Union, at a time marked by Stalin’s complete dominance over the communist leadership.²⁶ He was a member of the new party leadership, with Nikos Zachariadis serving as general secretary. This leadership had been imposed in 1929, following a decree of the executive committee of the Comintern, putting an end to the innerparty struggle that had broken out in the KKE in previous years.²⁷

Zevgos’ article displayed a peculiarity compared to the usual party attacks on Kordatos, as it focused specifically on his historiographical work. His sharp criticism was riddled with derogatory, insulting characterisations of his opponent, and his primary aim was to deconstruct him as a Marxist intellectual. Zevgos centred his critique on the theoretical aspects of *Κοινωνική σημασία*, accusing its author of developing an “economistic, mechanistic, social-democratic theory” that had nothing to do with Marxism. He also accused Kordatos of failing to properly understand the role of the “masses” in the 1821 Revolution. It was not the bourgeoisie but the peasant farmers who, together with the sailors, were the real revolutionaries. The revolution was not bourgeois-democratic but peasant-led.²⁸ Zevgos’ criticism extended to Kordatos’ entire body of work, whether it concerned his study of Greek capitalism²⁹ or the history of the workers’ movement, linking his ideology to his political position.³⁰ Kordatos’ distortion of Marxist theory was

²⁵ Yannis Zevgos, “Ο Μαρξιστής Γ. Κορδάτος ιστορικός της μπουρζουαζίας,” *KOMEΠ*, 1 December 1933, 19–25.

²⁶ See Kostis Karpozilos, *Ελληνικός κομμουνισμός: Μια διεθνική ιστορία (1912–1974)* (Athens: Antipodes, 2024), 265.

²⁷ See *Δοκίμιο ιστορίας του ΚΚΕ*, 1:228.

²⁸ Yannis Zevgos, “Ο Γ. Κορδάτος σαν ιστορικός της επανάστασης του 1821,” *KOMEΠ*, 1 November 1933, 30.

²⁹ Yannis Zevgos, “Ο Γ. Κορδάτος σαν οικονομολόγος στις πρώτες γραμμές της αντεπανάστασης,” *KOMEΠ*, 1 December 1933, 26–34.

³⁰ Yannis Zevgos, “Ο Γ. Κορδάτος σαν ιστορικός του εργατικού μας κινήματος,” *KOMEΠ*, 15 November 1933, 13–24.

labelled as a conscious attitude, rooted in his affiliation with Trotskyism. Zevgos accused him of having acquired “value by pure chance” at a time when class struggle was appearing for the first time in Greece within the framework of Marxist theory. He considered the dissemination of his historical writings dangerous, as they were seen to advance the political agenda of the Trotskyists, while undermining both the KKE and Soviet Union. As he noted: “Marxist theory is partisan, there is no Marxism apart from the movement and the proletariat party; ... only those who maintain living ties with the proletarian movement, operate within the line and accept the control of the party can be called Marxists.”³¹

In his reply, Kordatos, mirroring his opponent, also used a series of derogatory terms. Addressing party members, he wondered why, only a few years earlier, he had been celebrated as a “revolutionary writer”, yet was now branded as “a historian of the bourgeoisie and an enemy of the proletariat”. He accused Zevgos of distorting and oversimplifying his positions, while also questioning the existence of a “left bloc” in the Greek Revolution and defending his views on the bourgeoisie.³²

At the same time, in a series of articles, Kordatos proceeded to formulate a comprehensive critique. Beginning with a historical review of the emergence of Marxism and its function as a philosophical and political doctrine, he outlined the two main routes through which the application of Marxist thought was attempted: on the one hand, through the Second International and social democracy and, on the other, through the Third (Communist) International. While his critique of the Second International followed the common tropes of the communist Left, his position towards the Third International marked a significant departure: this is the first time, as far as I am aware, that Kordatos publicly expressed his opposition to what was happening in the Soviet Union. His criticism centred primarily on the way in which the dictatorship of the proletariat had been implemented in the country. He accused the Stalinist leadership of creating a “personal” dictatorship.³³ Kordatos went on to criticise Stalin personally, accusing him not only of fostering a cult of personality (“Pope”), but also of “dogmatising” Marxism and Leninism.³⁴

³¹ Yannis Zevgos, “Ο Γ. Κορδάτος αντιπροσωπευτικός τύπος αναθεωρητή του Μαρξισμού-Λενινισμού,” *ΚΟΜΕΠ*, 1 January 1934, 11.

³² Yanis Kordatos, “Άμυνα και αντεπίθεση: Παραχαράκτες κειμένων και κομπογιαννίτες του μαρξισμού. Απάντηση σε μία ‘κριτική’ που απευθύνεται και στα μέλη του ΚΚΕ,” *Νέα Επιθεώρηση* 7, no. 22 (December 1933): 184.

³³ Yanis Kordatos, “Όπισω εις τον Μαρξ,” *Νέα Επιθεώρηση* 9, no. 24 (February 1934): 256.

³⁴ Yanis Kordatos, “Λένιν και λενινισμός,” *Νέα Επιθεώρηση* 8, no. 23 (January 1934): 218.

He concluded his arguments with a complete condemnation of the Third International. At the same time, however, and despite Zevgos' accusations, Kordatos stood opposed to the idea of a new Fourth International. He called instead for self-criticism and a return to scientific socialism.³⁵

In this dispute, Zevgos' dismissive historiographical criticism carried a clear political dimension, deeply related to the broader historical context. By that time, following the exile of Trotsky and his sympathisers by the Stalinist leadership in 1928, the condemnation of Trotskyism by the Soviet Union, as well as the Comintern, had escalated into a full-scale campaign to root out any Trotskyist elements from national communist parties. Consequently, the criticism of Kordatos was linked, on the one hand, to a wider tendency, on an international level, of searching for the "sect", with the chief suspects being the cadres who had been expelled from the party.

Kordatos had taken a decisive step: from initially embracing the Soviet Union as the offspring of the October Revolution and a model country for the implementation of scientific socialism to ultimately rejecting its leadership and bitterly recognising that it had strayed from the original path. Drawing on his personal journey within the movement and his knowledge of Marxist theory, he went on, now as a leftist outside the party lines, to criticise the actions of the Soviet and Greek leaderships.³⁶

Zevgos' criticism of Kordatos and his historical framework did not just stem from his political suspicion. It reflected a broader shift in the politics of both the Greek and international communist movements. While in 1933 Zevgos had questioned the role the bourgeoisie in the revolution, a year later, in January 1934, the sixth plenum of the KKE would determine, in line with the decisions of the sixth Comintern congress, that Greece was at an intermediate stage of development, yet to complete its bourgeois-democratic transformation.³⁷

The latter would be the demand of the upcoming bourgeois-democratic revolution, which would swiftly transition to a socialist one. In December 1935, the sixth KKE congress, following the decisions of the seventh Comintern congress on the policy of popular fronts, set as its objective to join forces with other political parties in order to confront the pro-fascist forces in Greece, reinforcing the line of bourgeois-democratic transformation.³⁸ The opposition

³⁵ Yanis Kordatos, "Οπίσω εις τον Μαρξ ΙΙΙ," *Νέα Επιθεώρηση* 11, no. 26 (May 1934): 345.

³⁶ See Panayiotis Noutsos, ed., *Η σοσιαλιστική σκέψη στην Ελλάδα από το 1875 ως το 1974* (Athens: Gnosi, 1993), 3:207–11.

³⁷ KKE, *ΚΚΕ: Επίσημα κείμενα*, vol. 4, 1934–1940 (s.l.: Politikes kai Logotechnikes Ekdoseis, 1968), 18–26.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 307–11.

of Zevgos and the party apparatus to Kordatos exemplified the major shifts that had occurred within the communist camp. Unlike earlier periods, when the party maintained ambivalent relations with dissenters or former members – as reflected in Kordatos' case – a more rigid approach was now taking shape. According to it, there was no tolerance for anyone who had disagreed or clashed with the party.³⁹ The party now claimed sole authority over defining the truth; Marxism could not exist outside the organised political body of the working class. Anyone questioning this reality, even in the slightest way, would be cast out, severed from the communist community. Their condemnation would be absolute. This was the new reality that Kordatos would now have to face. That is why, after all, he directed his response to the party audience: he wished to maintain his connection with them, to inform them of the unfairness of the critique against him. Thus, our historian found himself doubly “exiled” – both from the bourgeois camp and his former comrades. Perhaps this explains why his frenetic writing activity came to an abrupt halt. Between 1932 and 1939, aside from a brief text on jurisprudence,⁴⁰ he published no independent historical work, and his overall historiographical output remained limited.

From the Occupation to the Postwar Period

During the German occupation of Greece (1940–1944), Kordatos was actively involved in the resistance through the National Liberation Front (EAM), the largest resistance organisation, with the KKE as its main component. In March 1945, shortly after the liberation of the country, his son Kostas, a left-wing militant, was mortally wounded by paramilitaries in the Battle of Athens (Dekemvriana).⁴¹

At the time of his son's death, Kordatos made a comeback on the publishing scene with a series of books and resumed his collaboration with newspapers and magazines. The period between 1945 and 1947 proved to be one of the most productive in his writing career, marked not only by the publication of a series of original studies, but also by reprints of his previous works. He published eight independent studies,⁴² works that had obviously been prepared during the

³⁹ See Karpozilos, *Ελληνικός κομμουνισμός*, 267–68.

⁴⁰ Yanis Kordatos, *Εισαγωγή εις την νομικήν επιστήμην* (Athens: I. & P. Zacharopoulos, 1939).

⁴¹ See the news items in *Ριζοσπάστης*, 27 March and 7 April 1945.

⁴² Yanis Kordatos, *Τα σημερινά προβλήματα του ελληνικού λαού* (Athens: J. & M. Loukatos, 1945); Kordatos, *Ο Ρήγας Φεραίος και η Βαλκανική Ομοσπονδία* (Athens: I. & P. Zacharopoulos, 1945); Kordatos, *Η Σαπφώ και οι κοινωνικοί αγώνες στη Λέσβο* (Athens: I. & P. Zacharopoulos, 1945); Kordatos, *Κοινωνική σημασία της Ελληνικής Επανάστασης του*

preceding years. Kordatos' reappearance in the publishing world was driven not just by the desire to publish his scientific work, but also by the need to make ends meet for himself and his family.

In early 1945, Kordatos published his study *Τα σημερινά προβλήματα του ελληνικού λαού*, which concluded with a tribute to the Soviet Union and the struggle against fascism, advocating for the establishment of a Balkan workers' and peasants' federation.⁴³ As part of his re-engagement with public life, Kordatos became involved in several associations primarily associated with the Left, a constituent element in the formation of his identity as a public intellectual. At the same time, he signed numerous petitions emanating from this political sphere, which denounced state policies or called for specific demands. The signing of these petitions by influential figures was crucial to the attention they garnered and significantly amplified the reach of their message.

In July 1947, amid the ongoing Civil War, Kordatos was exiled to Ikaria for one year. He was released on 12 September 1947, following a suspension of his deportation, but the threat of rearrest hung over him like a sword of Damocles, should he resume political activity. In 1950, he was arrested and spent several months in prison due to his involvement in the case of Nikos Beloyannis.⁴⁴

In his defence in November 1951 regarding the case, Kordatos stated that he had voluntarily left the KKE in 1925 because he had disagreed with the party's stance on the autonomy of Macedonia. He argued that, as he believed both then and in the years that followed, a communist party should not be involved in matters concerning Greece's national claims.⁴⁵ He also maintained that ever since he had no ties or contact whatsoever with the party, and that he remained

1821, 4th ed. (Athens: Petros D. Karavakos, 1946); Kordatos, *Η αγροτική εξέγερση του Κιλελέρ* (Athens: Central Committee of the AKE, 1946); Kordatos, *Ιστορία της αρχαίας ελληνικής φιλοσοφίας* (Athens: Petros D. Karavakos, 1946); Kordatos, *Οι επεμβάσεις των Άγγλων στην Ελλάδα* (Athens: Ta Nea Vivlia, 1946); Kordatos, *Η Παλαιά Διαθήκη στο φως της κριτικής* (Athens: Petros D. Karavakos, 1947).

⁴³ Kordatos, *Τα σημερινά προβλήματα*, 75–77.

⁴⁴ Nikos Beloyannis, a high-ranking member of the KKE, entered Greece illegally to organise underground communist organisations. In June 1950 he was arrested along with several others accused of participating in the illegal KKE organisation, including Kordatos. On the Beloyannis case, see, for example, Potis Paraskevopoulos, *Ποιος σκότωσε τον Μπελογιάννη: Η δικαστική συνέχεια του εμφυλίου πολέμου* (Athens: Ekdoseis Istoria kai Politiki, 1976) and Tasos Vournas, *Ποιοι και γιατί σκότωσαν το Νίκο Μπελογιάννη και τους συντρόφους του*; (Athens: Tolidis, 1981). See also Stavros Kasimatis, *Οι παράνομοι* (Athens: Filistor, 1997).

⁴⁵ See Giorgos Petropoulos and Nikos Chatzidimitrakos, ed., *Υπόθεση Νίκου Μπελογιάννη: Η προανακριτική έκθεση της Ασφάλειας για την πρώτη δίκη* (Athens: Kastaniotis, 2015), 163–64.

committed to scientific socialism and Marxism. Kordatos' reference to the Macedonian question prompted a response from Beloyannis, who stated that Kordatos had not hesitated to exploit the party's positions, much as the regime had done by sending hundreds of people to the firing squad.⁴⁶

Kordatos' connection with the Beloyannis case demonstrates that, despite the extent of his involvement, he retained links with the illegal party apparatus. The critical issue once again was his stance on Macedonia. By explicitly stating his opposition to the party's use of a national issue, he was able not only to distance himself from the party and its "antinational policy", but also to defend his status as a communist. The strong reaction from Beloyannis underscored the rift between the former party member and the party leadership as well as its policies.

The first study that Kordatos published independently after 1947 was, in 1953, his book *Ακμή και παρακμή του Βυζαντίου* (published by P. Karavakos). The following year, in 1954, he published *Η αρχαία τραγωδία και κωμωδία: Ποιες είναι οι κοινωνικές ρίζες του αρχαίου θεάτρου*, also by same publisher. In the same year he began his collaboration with the newspaper *Η Αυγή*, the official organ of the United Democratic Left (EDA). EDA was the new party aiming to represent the defeated Left in the post-civil war period, by participating in the political and parliamentary system. Kordatos' collaboration with *Αυγή* was only one aspect of his broader relationship with the party. He was one of EDA's "public figures", frequently participating in events organised by it, often at its offices, and effectively being anointed as the established historian of the Left. In 1956 he was elected as a member of the party's general council, a body that held no real power, yet consisted of the most well-known and important personalities of that political sphere – including Kordatos.

The recognition that Kordatos received from EDA did not translate into a similar gesture by the KKE. While Kordatos was delivering lectures at party offices and regularly writing for *Αυγή*, none of his books were included in the KKE's publications abroad,⁴⁷ despite his historical works continuing to be a subject of criticism by the historians who were now representing the party in the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁸

Between 1955 and 1960, Kordatos embarked on his most ambitious project to date: the publication of *Ιστορία της Ελλάδας*, a comprehensive history of

⁴⁶ Ibid., 193.

⁴⁷ See Anna Matthaiou and Popi Polemi, "Το '21 των πολιτικών προσφύγων (1948–1968)," *Αρχαιοτάξιο* 23 (December 2021): 104–13.

⁴⁸ Ibid. Matthaiou and Polemi refer to the "outcast" Kordatos, whose writings would appear in newspapers and magazines of political refugees, after the controversy over his

Greece from the prehistoric times up until the Asia Minor Catastrophe. In this context, he reissued several individual studies and published new ones, creating a unified historical narrative that spanned a period of some 2,700 years. The work was a remarkable publishing success, becoming one of the best-known histories of its time.

The 1821 Revolution and Left-wing Postwar Historiography

If Zevgos had already integrated the 1821 Revolution into the world of the communist Left by the mid-1930s, the German occupation and the National Resistance were pivotal in its full adoption, giving rise to a historiographical production that focused on the popular character of the revolution.⁴⁹ A new genealogy now linked the fighters of 1821 to the partisans of the resistance, allowing for the transformation of 1821 into a “betrayed revolution” whose time had finally come for vindication. Kordatos’ interwar interpretation of the bourgeoisie’s pioneering role in the 1821 Revolution now seemed completely out of place, as the emphasis was now shifting to the “people”, a concept so vague and encompassing as to include as much of Greek society as possible. The “people” were considered inherently progressive, without clear class distinctions, and were placed in opposition to the reactionary “oligarchy”, which had come to collaborate with foreign powers.⁵⁰

In 1946 Kordatos made a significant shift in his study of the 1821 Revolution, as reflected in the publication of the fourth edition of *Κοινωνική σημασία*. This edition was, in fact, a completely new version, spanning many more pages than the original and marked by substantial revisions which indicated a change of line in content. Contrary to his initial position, which argued that the revolution had been driven by the bourgeoisie, Kordatos in the 1946 edition asserted that the bourgeoisie had betrayed the struggle from its outset, allying themselves with the feudal lords, while the people opposed them.⁵¹ Thus, on the one hand, the feudal

historiographical approach had subsided. His writings, as the scholars note, focus on the Balkan dimension of the 1821 Revolution.

⁴⁹ Yannis Zevgos, *Σύντομη μελέτη της νεοελληνικής ιστορίας* (Thessaly: Kokkini Simaia, 1944); Giorgis Labrinou, *Μορφές του Εικοσιένα* (Athens: Aetos, 1942); George Valetas, *Το προδομένο Εικοσιένα: Η πνιγμένη αναγέννηση, η επαναστατική κληρονομιά* (Athens: Korydalos, 1946).

⁵⁰ See Panagiotis Stathis, “Η νεοελληνική ιστοριογραφία για το 1821: Ερμηνευτικά σχήματα για το ξέσπασμα της επανάστασης,” *Η Αυγή*, 24 March 2002.

⁵¹ See Panagiotis Stathis, “Το Εικοσιένα του Κορδάτου πριν και μετά τον πόλεμο,” *Διαβάζω* 523 (October 2011): 86–95. See also the detailed comparison of the two publications in Panagiotidis, “Το Έθνικό Ζήτημα.”

forces appeared extremely powerful, given the limited development of industry, while the bourgeoisie were particularly sceptical about the idea of a revolution. It was not the latter who had lured the feudal lords into the revolution, but the peasant classes who went on to revolt. The popular masses were crucial to the success of the revolution, providing the backbone of the army and championing a series of democratic reforms, including land nationalisation, the establishment of democratic constitutions, ultimately compelling other social groups to follow their lead.

The revision was not limited to this particular edition. A year earlier, in 1945, Kordatos had published his study *Ο Ρήγας Φεραίος και η Βαλκανική ομοσπονδία*, in which Rigas Feraios was no longer seen as the “precursor of Greek imperialism” or a leading representative of the bourgeoisie,⁵² but rather as a visionary of revolutionary movements. That same year, his brief study *Οι επεμβάσεις των Άγγλων στην Ελλάδα* was published. This book, released by Τα Νέα Βιβλία, a KKE publishing venture, provided an overview of England’s interventions in the eastern Mediterranean, starting in the eighteenth century and ending in the National Schism. The study, influenced by the political context of the time, concluded by portraying the December 1944 clashes as the fulfilment of Britain’s plan for the occupation of Greece – a dream of the “English imperialists” that had been in the making for over 120 years, dating back to the Greek Revolution.

The association of the Left with a wider audience and the mobilisation of a large segment of Greek society in the antifascist struggle, with EAM as a leading force, combined with Kordatos’ personal experiences, may have led him to revise his historical views on the 1821 Revolution and the role of the people. Conversing, as he did throughout his work, with the political realities of his time, while always placing history at the service of his vision for social change, Kordatos reworked his positions on the revolution. The death of his son undoubtedly contributed to this renewed alignment with the KKE, strengthening his opposition to the party’s political and ideological opponents – a stance he maintained in the years that followed.

Eleven years after the fourth edition of *Κοινωνική σημασία*, Kordatos would revisit the 1821 Revolution once again, this time by writing the relevant volume in his *Ιστορία της Ελλάδας*. In this work, he returned to an interpretation much closer to that of the first edition. Unlike the fourth edition, the author now emphasised the central role of the bourgeoisie, reaffirming the bourgeois-democratic character of 1821. In the most mature moment of his critique, Kordatos rejected the “theory of populism”, which, he argued, “may make an

⁵² Kordatos, *Ο Ρήγας Φεραίος και η εποχή του*, 82.

impression on the historically ignorant and the uneducated, but has nothing to do with Marxism”, while clarifying instead that the “character of the historical action of the popular masses is determined by certain economic and social relations, as well as by economic laws that are independent of the people’s will”.⁵³

Kordatos’ return to his original interpretation of the 1821 Revolution as bourgeois-democratic was facilitated by the shifts in the reception of the struggle by party historiography during the 1950s. These developments were reflected in the draft programme prepared by the KKE in 1953 and published the following year. The programme set popular democracy as its political objective,⁵⁴ while explicitly aligning the Greek Revolution with the European national and bourgeois-democratic movements of its time. It acknowledged the influence of the French Revolution and recognised the *Philiki Etaireia* as the “party of the bourgeoisie, mainly of the bourgeoisie”, responsible for organising the 1821 Revolution. This shift in the KKE’s emphasis on the role of the bourgeoisie was likely linked to the evolving political conditions of the 1950s, particularly the catalytic role played by the Cyprus question, which “pushed the Left to adopt policies tending towards nationalism”.⁵⁵ The juncture of 1954–1955 was particularly critical for the KKE, as it had to balance the need for alliances with broader democratic forces – aligning with Soviet policy, which urged Western communist parties towards a more moderate stance – while simultaneously maintaining its commitment to its communist character, particularly at a time when Zachariadis’ leadership was being challenged.⁵⁶ Eventually, the draft programme was withdrawn, following an intervention by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in November 1954, which rejected the characterisation of the Greek Revolution as bourgeois-democratic. The Soviet party argued that the revolution had been a national struggle against foreign occupiers, asserting that Greece had not yet resolved its agrarian question, remained subservient to foreign imperialists and had yet to achieve the bourgeois-democratic stage. In the following period, in the wake of de-Stalinisation and internal upheavals within the KKE, the draft programme was ultimately abandoned.

⁵³ See Yanis Kordatos, *Ιστορία της νεώτερης Ελλάδας* (Athens: Ekdoseis 20os aionas, 1957), 2:7–11.

⁵⁴ See Central Committee of the KKE, *Πρόγραμμα (Σχέδιο)*, 1954, available in the ASKI library, call no. 8831-1. See also Venetia Apostolidou, *Λογοτεχνία και ιστορία στη μεταπολεμική Αριστερά: Η παρέμβαση του Δημήτρη Χατζή 1947–1981* (Athens: Polis, 2003), 211–16.

⁵⁵ Stathis, “Αριστερές αναγνώσεις,” 40.

⁵⁶ Apostolidou, *Λογοτεχνία και ιστορία στη μεταπολεμική Αριστερά*, 215.

The Formation of a National Left-wing Historian

The production of postwar left-wing historiography was associated with critical shifts in both its size and composition. First of all, there was an extremely significant expansion of the leftist population, largely driven by the experience of participation in the EAM resistance. While the defeat in the Civil War and political exile severely reduced or marginalised the left-wing population, it still outnumbered its prewar counterpart. Despite the emergency measures of the Civil War and the segregation of public life, this population maintained the influence of left-wing political formations in Greek parliamentary life from the aftermath of the Civil War, and helped propel EDA to prominence, enabling it to become the leading opposition party in 1958. A considerable portion of this population was in exile and in prison, particularly in the early years following the Civil War, while its majority moved on with their lives, seeking opportunities for improved living standards amid the postwar reconstruction. At the same time, its political expression became much more complex than during the prewar period. The banning of the KKE led to the formation of EDA, creating this peculiar dualism, both formal and spatial. On the one hand, the leadership of the KKE found itself exiled in countries of the Eastern Bloc, alongside tens of thousands of political refugees, establishing there its own party and ideological mechanisms. On the other hand, in Greece, EDA carved out its own political and ideological space, which, although decisively influenced by the KKE, did not fully identify with it. The gradual recovery and reconstruction of the Left in the 1950s created a much broader field for integration and activity, allowing individuals with no direct ties to the KKE, such as Kordatos, to find a place within it. EDA included Kordatos in leading organisational formations, offered him space for articles in its publications, advertised his work and positioned him as one of its own public historians. Kordatos was addressing the new “people” of the Left – larger than before the war and, to a great extent, shaped by different characteristics, rooted in the shared experiences of the occupation and the new postwar reality in Greece, which contrasted sharply with that of the political refugees in the Eastern Bloc.

Kordatos’ prominent position was no accident. First of all, compared to other left-wing historians, he was the best known, with a rich body of work and public presence dating back to the interwar years. The subject matter of his work, his method and his writing had attracted a wider readership, as reflected in the editorial impact of his books and articles. His public presence expanded significantly after the end of the Civil War through lectures, popular speeches and guided tours. In addition, his frequent contributions to newspapers and magazines, especially *Αυγή*, amplified his visibility and cemented his reputation as a historian of the Left. This recognition was further reinforced by his honorary

membership of EDA. At the same time, his displacement, his long imprisonment during the Beloyannis case and his treatment by the Security Service linked him even more closely to the world of the Left, making him one of the thousands of militants who suffered in prison or in exile.

At the core of Kordatos' identity were his writings, which included a number of new publications and edited reissues, offering an alternative approach to Greek history. Perhaps the most defining aspect of his work was his attempt to present a work that spanned the entirety of Greek history, from antiquity to the 1920s – a national history from the perspective of the Left. Through his work, Kordatos sought to establish a new “canon” for the narrative of Greek history over time. His history did not solely appeal to leftists, but also to “progressives”, an audience situated politically between the Centre and the Left. We can rightly regard him as a “national left-wing historian”, a title he repeatedly defended through both his work and his public presence.

But why do we describe as “national” a historian who, from the outset, distanced himself from what is arguably the most fundamental pillar of national history, the concept of continuity? What was it that did not alienate the audience which embraced his work and perhaps even facilitated its reception?

Let us first consider the narrative choices, strategies and practices in Kordatos' writing. Even as he questions the notion of national continuity, at the same time, particularly in the multivolume *Ιστορία της Ελλάδας*, he adheres to a narrative structure that serves it, from antiquity to contemporaneity. The Marxist historian ultimately produces a history that again aspires to cover the entirety of national history. Despite his references to economic and class analysis, he writes a predominantly political factual history, often relying on a reductionist and binary approach. He constructs a refutative argumentation, at the same time embedding it in a logic and duration familiar to his reader – an act which, to a certain extent, undermines his very schema.

Kordatos' work, despite its Marxist positioning and emphasis on class analysis, did not alienate its audience, either narratively or methodologically. Over time, his initially extensive forays into Marxist literature were gradually curtailed, evolving into a “classical” narrative style that bore little difference to the common approaches of postwar Greek historiography. Another point of convergence with academic historiography was his meticulous use of literary sources and his commitment to rigorous documentation. The demand is common: to search for the historical truth, to use proper citation, in order to substantiate the conclusions of the research, and to ensure the scientific legitimacy of the historical narrative – a principle that national history had claimed as a trait under the influence of German historicism.

Even when exploring new themes – drawing on previously untapped sources, such as the history of the labour or peasant movements – Kordatos employs what has been called the historical-philological method. He relies primarily on written sources, whether in the sense of “uncovering” new ones or in making proper use of them, in contrast to bourgeois historiography, which, as a rule, concealed or distorted them to serve its own purposes. On the one hand, Kordatos, seeking to supplant the bourgeois national historians, is compelled – even if he sometimes fails to acknowledge it – to confront them on their own terrain, to win them over by using their own methods. On the other hand, these are the tools he has gotten to know through his readings; he does not appear to be aware of, or incorporate, new historiographical perspectives beyond his Marxist interwar framework.

The enlightenment of the populace – ensuring the transmission of “correct” knowledge through carefully selected translations or original compositions – is one of the key concerns in Kordatos’ project. This effort was about the popularisation of history, aimed at challenging academic historiography and countering perceptions deeply entrenched in the public. It was essentially a political project, rooted in the longstanding tradition of the Left to simplify its ideas to make them as comprehensible as possible, especially for the less-educated working classes, which it sought to attract.

Another point of convergence between academic and left-wing historiography concerned the role of “foreign powers” in Greek history and the “suffering” caused by their interventions. From the Battle of Navarino and the Great Powers’ involvement in the making of the Greek state in the nineteenth century to the National Schism, the issue of the role of foreign powers had remained one of the recurring motifs in national historiography. Their policies were linked not only to their strategic interests but also to their general attitude towards Hellenism, shaped by ethnic or religious differences. World War II and particularly the subsequent Civil War, with the involvement of the British and Americans, obviously reinvigorated this narrative, steering it in a markedly leftist direction. The genealogy that Kordatos constructs for the British intervention in Greek affairs is characteristic, spanning from the years of the Ottoman Empire to the Δεκεμβριανά and the Cyprus question. Frameworks such as the ones regarding the foreign powers transcended the divide between Left and Right, resonating with deeply entrenched perceptions among those whose expectations had been dashed or who felt marginalised in the postwar world.

In this regard, the Cyprus question in postwar Greece became a focal point for the emergence of a potent anti-British and anti-American popular sentiment. At the same time, it provided EDA with an opportunity to assert itself as a “national force”. By placing the demand for self-management at the centre of its political

discourse, at a time when the Left was calling for the release of political prisoners and holding the government to account, EDA's stance on the Cyprus question once again underscored the patriotic character of the Left. Kordatos' columns played a supporting role by constructing a genealogy of Cypriot struggles for union with Greece or by exposing the brutality of British policy.⁵⁷

From the Revolutionary Intellectual to a National Left-wing Historian

Understanding how Kordatos emerged as the pre-eminent Marxist historian until at least the 1960s is inextricably linked to the development of the Greek communist movement over roughly four decades. His intellectual development occurred during a period of intense interaction and conflict within the communist camp, marked by the profound influence of the October Revolution. He belonged to a new international generation of revolutionary intellectuals who actively engaged in politics, participating in national communist parties and local political arenas – in Greece, too, largely experiencing persecution and repression.

At the core of Kordatos' activity lay his intention to change the world. History, like science as a whole, served this purpose. Just as Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, Greece's foremost national historian, was shaped by the rise of national ideology in the nineteenth century, Kordatos was a child of the development of the communist movement, particularly in the period before Stalinist rule.

In this regard, *Κοινωνική σημασία* served as a turning point in Greek historiography. The scandal it stirred up by challenging an established view, with a "sacrilegious" stance towards the foundational moment of modern Greek national history, was a constitutive element – like the rest of Kordatos' work – of a new political identity: that of the Greek communist. An identity that was marked, during the interwar, by pronounced radicalism and steadfast opposition to the established ideology.

The gradual removal of Kordatos from the party ranks acted as a catalyst for his transition from a revolutionary intellectual to a Marxist historian. His

⁵⁷ On 16–17 February 1955, Kordatos, in his article "Όπως σήμερα στην Κύπρο: Η αντιστασιακή ποίηση στα αγγλοκρατούμενα Εφτάνησα," drew a characteristic historical parallel, linking the case of Cyprus with the Ionian Islands, which had been part of the Greek state since 1864. In his article "Η Λαϊκή επανάσταση της Κύπρου το Μάρτη του 1833: Αναδρομές στην Ιστορία," *Η Αυγή*, 22 September 1956, 2, Kordatos, referring to an unknown uprising of the Cypriots against the Ottomans, once again highlighted their involvement in the 1821 Revolution as an integral part of Hellenism. The front page of that issue was dedicated to the hanging of three Cypriot fighters by the British the previous day.

engagement with history was his own way of formulating his positions and of striving to change the world while securing his livelihood. Even after leaving the party, however, he remained the foremost example of a new type of historian: the Marxist, whose work proposed a fresh reading of the past, directly linked to the Left. His positions became central to the discourse of a public eager to break with the established order.

The real crisis and the definitive break in Kordatos' relations with the KKE after 1933, a consequence of the party's wholesale transformation, also signalled, as it seems, a largely internal crisis for Kordatos himself. His writing activity stalled until 1944 and the liberation.

From 1945 onwards, Kordatos resumed writing, producing a rich and multithematic body of work. This return was primarily catalysed by his integration into the new milieu of EAM, which enabled him to re-establish himself within the left-wing camp, albeit on different terms. The shift in his positions resulted from the experience of the resistance and from his integration into the world of EAM. His return to the active political scene through his participation in EDA, after the turbulent 1940s, was now about a renowned historian lending his name and reputation to the newly formed project of another Left, which could also accommodate him.

In this regard, developing a new historical narrative that, while maintaining a leftist perspective, could function as a renewed national framework was key. In the 1950s, Kordatos undertook his major compositions on Greek history within this framework, constructing a new narrative, in which a sense of national continuity emerged organically, albeit now reinterpreted through a leftist lens. These compositions, which were a major publishing success, broadened the reception of his work among a wider public seeking an alternative account of national history, thereby reinforcing the identity of the "left-wing citizen".

He was not, obviously, the only historian. Unlike the prewar period, in the postwar years many party cadres and members of the Left turned to history. Their historical work was often caught between the demands of scholarly inquiry and the needs – or even dictates – of the party apparatus. It was also largely developed against and mostly outside the official historiography as cultivated by academic institutions – and were frequently met with silence or outright exclusion as unscholarly. Nevertheless, this form of history was disseminated through the party press, featured in publications across Greece and the exiled political community, and served as the basis for lectures and speeches in party offices, public squares and meetings; it was integrated in celebrations, in theatrical or musical performances; it played a leading part in a series of networks set up by the Left in the 1950s and 1960s. Within this new context, Kordatos emerged

as the pre-eminent national left-wing historian, with a work that directly engaged with political developments, while his own intellectual formation and positioning were shaped by them. Largely excluded from academic history and, for extended periods, from party-sanctioned history as well, he carved out his own historiographical niche. By the end of the 1950s, this had become a refuge for citizens who felt excluded or betrayed by the official state, citizens who longed for a national history they could call their own – a history that was transformed from a revolutionary project into a potent element of identity, a source of pride as well as a defence against accusations of betrayal and anti-Hellenism.

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

