

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

Alexandros Katsigiannis, Dimitris Polychronakis and Konstantinos Chrysosgelos (eds.), “Προς μάθησιν εντελεστέραν”: Ο Χριστόφορος Φιλητάς (1787-1867) και η συγκρότηση της Νεοελληνικής Φιλολογίας τον 18ο και 19ο αιώνα

Sofia Matthaiou

doi: [10.12681/hr.43844](https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.43844)

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:

Matthaiou, S. (2025). Alexandros Katsigiannis, Dimitris Polychronakis and Konstantinos Chrysosgelos (eds.), “Προς μάθησιν εντελεστέραν”: Ο Χριστόφορος Φιλητάς (1787-1867) και η συγκρότηση της Νεοελληνικής Φιλολογίας τον 18ο και 19ο αιώνα. *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique*, 21(1), 323–326. <https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.43844>

Alexandros Katsigiannis, Dimitris Polychronakis
and Konstantinos Chrysosgelos (eds.),
“ΠΡΟΣ ΜΑΘΗΣΙΝ ΕΝΤΕΛΕΣΤΕΡΑΝ”:
Ο ΧΡΙΣΤΟΦΟΡΟΣ ΦΙΛΗΤΑΣ (1787-1867) ΚΑΙ Η ΣΥΓΚΡΟΤΗΣΗ
ΤΗΣ ΝΕΟΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗΣ ΦΙΛΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ ΤΟΝ 18ο ΚΑΙ 19ο ΑΙΩΝΑ
[“Towards a more complete education:” Christoforos Phileas (1787–1867) and
the establishment of modern Greek philology in the 18th and 19th centuries],
Athens: Library of the Hellenic Parliament, Athens, 2022, 442 pages.

After a period of neglect, biographical and prosopographical studies have regained the significance they deserve within the fields of modern Greek philology and history. The combination of archival and bibliographic evidence forms the basis of such studies, the publication presented here being one such case.

Through the study of a scholar’s personal writings, one can see how research into Greek intellectual life during the prerevolutionary period and the early decades of the Greek state is enriched – namely, during a time when the intellectual and ideological foundations of the new state were being established. Such research reveals the concern of intellectuals with defining modern Greek identity. It also sheds light on another dimension of their personality – the professional one – as many began to recognise their autonomous role within the framework of modern Greek society. Another equally important aspect is the scientific knowledge they brought forth, which often became the driving force behind the development of various disciplines in Greece.

This publication is the outcome of the research project “At the Desk of a Cosmopolitan 19th-Century Scholar: The Publication of the Manuscript Notebooks of Christoforos Phileas and the Early Historiography of Modern Greek Philology and Education”, carried out by the Department of Philology at the University of Crete. The volume contains revised versions of the papers presented at the conference “Scholarship and the Formation of the History of Modern Greek Letters: 18th–19th Century”, organised by the Department of Philology of the University of Crete and the Library of the Hellenic Parliament in December 2019. The Library of Parliament participated due to its preservation of 16 manuscript notebooks containing Phileas’ notes covering all the years of his active life. Thus, in parallel with the conference, a related exhibition was held, curated by Elli Droulia.

Born in Epirus, Christoforos Phileas (1787–1867) was one of the scholars who contributed to the intellectual foundation of the newly established Greek state. He received his early education in his hometown and then at the Kaplaneios School

under Athanasios Psalidas. He later studied medicine in Naples and visited Paris, where he met Adamantios Korais. For a short time, he headed the Greek school in Trieste until 1819, when Lord Guilford offered him a scholarship to study at Oxford in order to later join the teaching staff of the Ionian Academy, which he planned to establish. Philetas taught philology at the academy from 1823 to 1829. After Guilford's death, he settled in Zakynthos as a schoolteacher. In 1841, he returned to Corfu, where he resumed teaching at the Ionian Academy until shortly before his death in 1867. A year before his death, he was appointed professor of Greek philology at the University of Athens, a post he never assumed.

The detailed "bio-bibliography" compiled by Stella Kourbana expands and enriches what was previously known from Stefanos Betis' important work.¹ It is based not only on the 16 notebooks in the Library of Parliament, but also on rich archival material from the General State Archives (both the Central Service and the Corfu branch), the Konstantinos Asopios Archive in the National Library of Greece, the Archaeological Society Archive, the Corfu Reading Society and the British Library in London. In addition to biographical data, Kourbana provides a detailed list of Philetas' works and a very useful catalogue of relevant archival materials – essential tools for further exploration of Philetas' personality and others like him.

Most of the volume's studies stem from the analysis of Philetas' manuscript

notebooks. Through a meticulous examination, Alexandros Katsigiannis explores Philetas' bibliographic and linguistic interests. During his studies at Oxford, Philetas – according to Katsigiannis – attempted to map Greek intellectualism as part of a broader quest for the "collective self-awareness" of Greek professional scholars. Maria Kamilaki and Eleni Karantzola's linguistic study of his lexical lists reveals his moderate stance towards the Greek lexicon, showing a "back-and-forth" between the variety of expressions he identifies in texts and those used in spoken language. A similar vacillation is noted in his engagement with Byzantium. As Konstantinos Chrysosgelos observes, his notes combine influences from Korais and elements of Romantic historiography. Dimitris Polychronakis examines Philetas' relationship with Korais through two comparisons from the *Iliad* and *Erotokritos*. Giannis Papatheodorou argues that Philetas' literary notes are rooted in earlier traditions but also align with contemporary methods of organising knowledge. Following developments in philology, Philetas integrated history into his literary approach – something he clearly understood. Nikos Kokkomelis examines the autonomy of the philological discipline and the pedagogical function of Philetas' notes. Stesi Athini's very useful presentation of the European and Greek traditions of bio-bibliographical cataloguing helps contextualise Philetas' contribution. According to Athini, the wealth of information in these catalogues – enhanced by digital technology – could provide the basis for a broader and more detailed study of Greek scholarship.

Philetas' teaching at the Ionian Academy is explored by Eleni Angelomati-

¹ Stefanos Betis, *Φιλητάς και Ασώπιος: Οι διδάσκαλοι του γένους* (Ioannina: Society for Epirotic Studies, 1991).

Tsougkaraki and Konstantinos Garitsis, drawing on material beyond the Library of Parliament manuscripts. Similarly, Konstantinos Kardamis studies music inside and outside the Ionian Academy during Philetas' time.

A substantial part of the volume is devoted to broader topics enriching research into the scholarship of the period. Dimitris Arvanitakis examines the reception of antiquity in the Ionian Islands during and after Venetian rule. The awareness of a connection with antiquity and classical knowledge, which reinforced the consciousness of Greek descent, acquired a political dimension after Venetian rule. Antiquity became the ultimate democratic model for Ionian republicans. Arvanitakis analyses various stages and gradations of this relationship, arguing that historiography has often obscured them under generalisations. Georgios Zaviras' work *Νέα Ελλάς*, an excellent biographical and bibliographical resource for the period 1453–1800, is considered by Nassia Yakovaki as evidence of the role of “educated Greeks” in the emerging Greek society of the early nineteenth century and as an “expression of national competence”. The library catalogues of Dimitrios Postolakas, discovered and commented by Giannis Kokkonas, reflect both knowledge of earlier editions and a constant awareness of the publishing activity of the time. Ioannis Kyriakantonakis approaches the wide network of Constantinopolitan scholars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and their relation to the Phanariots, though the exact nature of this connection remains somewhat unclear. Ioannis Koubourlis rejects the overemphasis on Phanariot influence in the historiographical work of Iakovakis Rizos Neroulos,

highlighting instead the broader ideological framework of the author, which aligns with other contemporary interpretations of the causes of the 1821 Revolution. According to Koubourlis, Phanariots are one – though not the sole – factor invoked by Neroulos. Also from the Phanariot intellectual milieu is Nikolaos Karatzas, whose known and lesser-known translations are the focus of Markos Xydakis' contribution. Central to his study is the modern aspect of Karatzas' work, especially his incorporation of Western ideas. Alexis Politis' contribution is pivotal in shaping the concept of the volume, though it does not focus on Philetas. Based on a study of publishing activity, Politis identifies a renewed interest in Greece's literary past between 1865 and 1880 – an interest, in his view, closely tied to the emergence of modern Greek philology.

Studying a scholar not considered one of the so-called “major” figures – though this designation is itself problematic given the many gaps in our knowledge of Greek intellectual life – such as Philetas, helps us understand the broader intellectual context of the time.

Considering the volume as a whole, one can observe a shared characteristic among the Greek scholars of the era: they all, in one way or another, engaged with European knowledge and ideas beyond the narrow confines of their origin or residence. Many had studied at European universities, travelled frequently and gained a wealth of diverse experiences. They can rightly be described as “cultural mediators” – a term used by the editors in the book's preface to describe Philetas.

In terms of knowledge, their engagement with developments in the philological discipline – especially in Germany – is

particularly significant. Their contact with classical philology laid the groundwork for all related humanities, including modern Greek philology. This discipline is the central focus of most contributions in the volume, which collectively examine the conditions under which modern Greek philology was gradually born in Greece. Beyond Philetas' detailed bibliography (by Kourbana), the systematic documentation provided in some studies (by Athini and Politis) constitutes essential infrastructure for studying Greek intellectual history.

In conclusion, both the book and the research programme it stems from represent an important contribution to a field that, through new interpretive approaches, merges philology with history. They demonstrate that a meticulous study of primary sources can liberate us from dogmatic classifications – not only concerning the ideological identity of scholars but also regarding the multifaceted ways they fit into the intellectual world of the Greek pre- and post-revolutionary years.

Sofia Matthaïou

Institute for Historical Research / NHRF