

# Annales Benjamin Constant

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**Adamantios Korais reader of Benjamin Constant.  
An illustration of the transfer and reception  
of political ideas.\***

Some pages still preserved the traces  
Where fingernails had sharply pressed ;  
[...]  
And in the margins she inspected  
His pencil marks with special care ;  
And on those pages everywhere  
She found Onegin's soul reflected-  
in crosses or a jotted note,  
Or in the question mark he wrote.

Alexander Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*,  
transl. by James E. Falen  
(Oxford 1998), p. 167

The many questions raised by reception theory in the history of ideas can be illustrated in revealing ways by the study of the trajectories in time of the writings of Benjamin Constant and by the alternation of oblivion and celebration marking these itineraries<sup>1</sup>. The reception and

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<sup>1</sup> Helena Rosenblatt, "Eclipses and Revivals : Constant's Reception in France and America 1830-2007", in Helena Rosenblatt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Constant*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 351-377.

impact of Constant's ideas is generally acknowledged and taken for granted in two important domains of intellectual history in the broadest sense : in the debate on the French Revolution and in the reception of the classical tradition. Constant's stature as one of the major exponents of the liberal critique of the French Revolution, particularly the excesses associated with Jacobin dictatorship and the Terror and the authoritarian deviation associated with Napoleon, is well established in relevant historiography<sup>2</sup>. Equally well established is Constant's presence in the discussion of the reception of Greek political thought in the classical tradition, thanks to his best known work on the liberty of the ancients compared to the liberty of the moderns<sup>3</sup>. In fact, that deeply perceptive and influential essay has established Constant's work as a canonical reference point in all discussions of the theory of liberty, primarily of course thanks to the use of the dichotomy of modern versus ancient liberty by Isaiah Berlin in his own conceptualization of negative and positive liberty<sup>4</sup>.

These aspects of the reception of Constant's views are well established *topoi*, especially in the history of political thought and in political theory, whose ritual repetition does not necessarily enhance the understanding of his arguments and the subtlety of his broader conception of the challenges of modernity. Beyond looking at the *topoi*, however, there may be other ways and methods of detecting the intricacies of the reception and uses of Constant's ideas in the flow of intellectual history. One such method might be offered by tracing the circulation and reading of Constant's works by other scholars and the impressions, reactions and uses – or non-uses – generated by such readings of his ideas. What is suggested here is a more concrete study of the "materiality", as it were, of reception through attempts to come face to face with specific forms of evidence supplied by the objects of reading themselves, books, pamphlets and other products of print culture.

One such case study in "applied" reception concerning the ideas of Benjamin Constant is suggested by the present discussion, which attempts to bring to light the evidence of the reading of Constant's works by one

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<sup>2</sup> Marcel Gauchet, « Constant », in François Furet and Mona Ozouf (eds), *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution française*, Paris, Flammarion, 1989, p. 951-959 and more substantially, M. Gauchet, *La condition politique*, Paris, Gallimard, 2005, p. 277-354.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Yack, "Political Theory", in Anthony Grafton, Glean W. Most and Salvatore Settis (eds), *The Classical Tradition*, Cambridge ; London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010, p. 755-761, at p. 760. See also for a critical discussion Peter Liddel, *Civic Obligation and Individual Liberty in Ancient Athens*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 4-9.

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah Berlin, "Two concepts of liberty", *Four Essays on Liberty*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 161-166.

of the foremost among his contemporary classical scholars and the leading representative of the Greek Enlightenment in European culture, Adamantios Korais (1748-1833). Korais was born in Smyrna, studied medicine at the University of Montpellier and lived in Paris from 1788 to his death in 1833. He devoted his life to classical scholarship, to which he came through his medical training and his initiation in the neo-Hippocratic revival of the late eighteenth century. His overriding concern throughout his life and the main motivation behind his major project in classical scholarship, his editions of ancient Greek authors in his collection entitled *Hellenic Library*, was to promote the cause of the liberation of Greece<sup>5</sup>.

The main means to this end was two-fold : Primarily the intellectual and moral preparation of his compatriots through the appropriate education for the struggle for liberty and the enlightenment of public opinion and leading personalities in the free nations of the Western world about changing conditions in Greek society and the approaching moment of freedom<sup>6</sup>. When the Greek Revolution broke out in 1821, Korais intensified his efforts on these two fronts with remarkable determination and energy for his advanced age. His efforts can be followed in his voluminous correspondence and in his impressive editions of the classics, which now included primarily political works, such as Aristotle's *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* and Plato's *Gorgias*, in order to prepare the rebellious Greeks to the duties of free citizenship<sup>7</sup>.

To carry out his scholarly work but also to remain up to date with developments in scholarship and politics, Korais amassed over the years a remarkable library, which following his death, his executors, respecting his wishes, arranged to be transferred to the public library of the island of Chios<sup>8</sup>. Although he had never visited it, Korais felt Chios to be his

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<sup>5</sup> On Korais's life and work see Paschalis M. Kitromilides, "Itineraries in the World of the Enlightenment : Adamantios Korais from Smyrna via Montpellier to Paris", in Paschalis M. Kitromilides (ed.), *Adamantios Korais and the European Enlightenment*, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 2010, p. 1-33 and P. M. Kitromilides, "Korais, Adamantios", in A. Grafton, G. W. Most and S. Settis (eds), *The Classical Tradition*, op. cit., p. 504.

<sup>6</sup> See Adamance Coray, *Mémoire sur l'état actuel de la civilisation dans la Grèce, lu à la Société des Observateurs de l'homme le 16 Nivôse, an XI (6 janvier 1803)*, Paris, 1803, reprinted Paris, Institut Néo-Hellénique de la Sorbonne, 1978. See also Jean-Luc Chappey, *La Société des Observateurs de l'homme (1799-1804) : Des anthropologues au temps de Bonaparte*, Paris, Société des études robespierristes, 2002, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> See P.M. Kitromilides, "Enlightenment", in P.M. Kitromilides and Constantinos Tsoukalas (eds), *The Greek Revolution. A Critical Dictionary*, Cambridge ; London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021, p. 515-531.

<sup>8</sup> Stephanos D. Kavvadas, *Η ἐν Χίῳ Βιβλιοθήκη Κοραΐ*, Athens, 1933, p. 18-42 et p. 53-55.

place of origin since his father's family hailed from that famous Eastern Aegean island. Korais had been actively interested and supportive of the development of education on Chios in the period preceding the Greek Revolution and of course was deeply anguished by the terrible massacre in 1822, whereby the Ottomans stifled the revolutionary stirrings on the island, a humanitarian tragedy immortalized by Eugène Delacroix in his famous painting of the subject.

The collection of books surviving from the library of Adamantios Korais now in the Public Library of Chios "Adamantios Korais", includes the following titles of works by Benjamin Constant :

04492 *Des Elections de 1818*, Paris, Béchét, 1818, 82 p.

1706 *Des motifs qui ont dicté le nouveau projet de loi sur les élections*, Paris, 1820, 76 p.

04493 *De la dissolution de la chambre des députés et des résultats que cette dissolution peut avoir pour la nation, le gouvernement et le ministère*, Paris, Béchét Aîné, 1820, 67 p.

1766 *Commentaire sur l'ouvrage de Filangieri*, tome I, Paris, Dufart, 1822, 111 p. ; tome II, Paris, Dufart, 1824, 303 p.

03126 *De la religion, considérée dans sa source, ses formes et ses développements*, tome I, Paris, Bossange, 1824, 370 p.

tome II, Paris, Béchét Aîné, 1825, 496 p.

tome III, Paris, Béchét Aîné, 1827, 476 p.

08072 *Mélanges de littérature et de politique*, Paris, Pichon et Didier, 1829, 483 p.

The sixth title in the list of Constant's works at Chios, *Mélanges de littérature et de politique* (1829), does not bear any mark of having belonged to Korais's library and in its black leather binding it appears quite different from the other eight paperbound publications by Constant, which bear the seal of Korais's library. It can be concluded, therefore, that the 1829 edition of Constant's *Mélanges* reached the Library of Chios via another route, not necessarily from Korais's library.

Of the remaining five works by Constant, which bear the seal of Korais's library, the first three, which were circumstantial political writings by Constant occasioned by his involvement in active politics, bear no notes by Korais, as hints of his impressions of Constant's views and arguments. We cannot even be sure whether Korais spent time reading these pamphlets or not amidst his very feverish engagement in writing, publishing and corresponding at the height of the ideological debates and conflicts in the Greek diaspora during the dramatic years marked by the preparation of the Greek Revolution that broke out in 1821.

On the contrary, the much longer and demanding works published by Constant in the 1820s, at the apogee of his political career, formed the object of attentive reading by Korais<sup>9</sup>. Constant's *Commentary on Filangieri*, which, according to his biographer, represented the "most complete exposition of Constant's political doctrine"<sup>10</sup>, attracted Korais's interest and careful study. In the two volumes of the work available at Chios we can notice in the back inside covers of each volume Korais's notes of pages which drew his attention. In volume I, he makes a note of pages 68 and 72. Next to the note of p. 68 he adds the comment :

*σοφώτερον τὸ ἔθνος τῶν ἀντιπροσώπων*  
[the nation is wiser than its deputies]

This obviously refers to the following passage in Constant's text :

Un Anglois très spirituel me disoit un jour : Dans la chambre des communes, l'opposition est plus éclairée que le ministère. Hors de la chambre des communes, la partie instruite du peuple anglois est plus éclairée que l'opposition.

For Korais this remark could be understood as a hint confirming his democratic convictions. Further in the same volume, he noted with interest Constant's comments on the decline of Spain (p. 71-81). In particular he signaled p. 72, with the note :

*population de l'Espagne.*

The pertinent passage is the following :

L'Espagne n'est pas tombée tout-à-coup dans l'état de foiblesse et de l'abaissement dans lequel cette monarchie étoit plongée, lorsqu' l'invasion de Bonaparte vint réveiller de sa stupeur un peuple généreux. Sa décadence date de la destruction de sa liberté politique et de la suppression de cortès. Peuplée autrefois de trente millions d'habitants, elle a vu sa population tomber successivement jusqu'à neuf millions.

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<sup>9</sup> These books are noted in the inventory of the library of Korais drafted shortly after his death in April 1833. See Polychronis Enepekides, *Documents notariaux inédits sur Adamantios Coray*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1959, p. 32 : « *De la religion* par Benjamin Constant, trois volumes » ; p. 16 : « *Œuvres de Filangieri* en sept volumes, incomplete ». Constant's *Commentaire sur l'ouvrage de Filangieri* is not mentioned.

<sup>10</sup> Kurt Kloocke, *Benjamin Constant. Une biographie intellectuelle*, Geneva ; Paris, Droz, 1984, p. 361.

The destruction of liberty as a cause of degeneration, weakness and depopulation, whereby Constant explains the decline of Spain, would certainly strike a familiar chord in Korais's own theory of history occasioned by the observation of the decadence brought to Greek society by subjection to despotism.

In volume II of the *Commentary on Filangieri*, Korais's attention was attracted by a part of the text of ostensibly purely economic interest, chapter XV « De l'impôt » (p. 132-160), in which Constant argues the case of liberalizing the economy. In this chapter Korais noted especially two points, remarking respectively, on p. 144 :

*contrebande*

and on p. 146 :

φόροι [taxes]

On p. 144 Korais highlights :

la véritable cause de la contrebande est moins dans les impôts indirects que dans le system prohibitif,

while on p. 146 he singles out the economic and social effects of taxation in the following passage :

C'est violer manifestement la propriété ; c'est vexer injustement l'industrie. Les impôts sur les denrées de première nécessité produisent l'effet des années stériles et de la disette.

Such reflections could perhaps be connected with the liberal economic policy Korais appears to prefer in his *Notes* on the first constitution of revolutionary Greece, the *Provisional Constitution of Greece*, voted at Epidaurus in 1822. On the evidence of his correspondence, Korais was at work on his commentary during the years 1823-1824, that is at the time he was reading Constant's comments on Filangieri. Constant's comments on the evils of taxation could be felt to be echoed in Korais's claim that "taxation is a necessary evil"<sup>11</sup>. It could also be surmised, with some uncertainty of course, that Constant might be included, along with Jeremy Bentham whom Korais greatly admired, among the leading political theorists alive while he was writing. He claims in fact that these living

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<sup>11</sup> Adamantios Korais, *Σημειώσεις εις τὸ Προσωρινὸν Πολίτευμα τῆς Ἑλλάδος*. Second edition, P. M. Kitromilides (ed.), Athens, Hellenic Parliament Foundation, 2018, p. 114.



thinkers were even wiser than the earlier succession of modern authors on politics, which had began with Grotius and was carried on by “Pufendorf, Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Mably, Beccaria and Filangieri”<sup>12</sup>.

Constant’s work, however, which primarily attracted and excited Korais’s interest was the imposing three-volume treatise *De la religion, considérée dans sa source, ses formes et ses développements*, published in 1824-1827. Korais appears well aware of the imminent publication of the work, which he was expecting with anticipation. In one of his important political letters to a younger disciple at Pisa on 23 December 1823, among many other subjects he also comments on the forthcoming publication of Constant’s work on religion<sup>13</sup> :

B[enjamin] C[onstant] has not finished his comments on F[ilangieri]. He promises us now toward mid-January the publication of the first volume of his work on religion. I wish it to be worthy of him ! Because (to tell the truth) I am afraid lest he runs afoul a rock, tossed to and from by glories that drag him around “True religion is the alienation of evils” I say signing a parody of what is chanted in our Church ; I know of no other.

Korais possessed a set of the first three volumes of the first edition, he read them carefully and annotated the text at many points. In the inside back cover of Volume I Korais notes in pencil p. 50. Constant’s text on that page refers to the relapse from “religions positives” to “superstitions les plus effroyables” and to the coexistence of skepticism with superstition. The example of Plutarch, cited by Constant on that page, must have struck a special chord for Korais, who had devoted a very important part of his editorial project to publishing new critical editions of Plutarch’s major works. The pertinent passage is the following :

Voyez les habitants du monde civilisé durant les trois premiers siècles de notre ère. Contemplez les tels que nous le décrivit Plutarque, honnête écrivain qui aurait désiré être dévot, qui s’imaginait quelquefois l’être, mais qui poursuivait malgré lui l’incrédulité contemporaine et la contagion du scepticisme.

It cannot be accidental that Korais noted this page in Constant’s text. On the basis of what we know about his own attitude to religion, he might have paused perhaps in reading this page feeling that Constant’s

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>13</sup> A. Korais, *Ἀλληλογραφία*, Contantinos Th. Dimaras et al. (eds), vol. V : 1823-1826, Athens, 1983, p. 101.

characterization of Plutarch's religious position was a reflection, to some extent, of his own inner spiritual dilemmas.

A hand-written note by Korais, found between pages 194 and 195 of the first volume, records the pages that attracted his interest in volumes I and II of the work :

91  
118  
254  
263  
276  
280  
305  
203

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35 cf. 94

The page numbers below the line refer to Volume II.

These page indications and Korais's short marginal notes allow the reader to recover with considerable precision the process of reception of Constant's ideas by the Greek classicist and cultural theorist at a time he was at work on some of his mature and most significant works. Korais's attention was drawn primarily by Constant's arguments and analysis of religious phenomena in the first volume of the work, especially the eloquent and incisive discussion of the interplay of religion and liberty. Korais noted in particular pages 84-91 of volume I of the first edition of *De la religion* and certainly he must have felt himself in total agreement with the following remarks by Constant<sup>14</sup> :

Prenez à la lettre les préceptes fondamentaux de toutes les religions, vous les trouverez toujours d'accord avec les principes de liberté les plus étendus, on pourrait dire avec des principes de liberté tellement étendus, que, jusqu'à ce jour, l'application en a paru impossible dans les associations politiques.

Mais parcourez l'histoire des religions, vous trouverez souvent l'autorité qu'elles ont créée, travaillant de concert avec les autorités de la terre à l'anéantissement de la liberté.

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<sup>14</sup> Benjamin Constant, *De la religion*, Tzvetan Todorov and Étienne Hofmann (eds), Paris, Thesaurus Actes Sud, 1999, p. 61.

Such views are recorded in many of Korais's texts written at the time he was reading Constant, as for example can be noted in his commentary on the *Provisional Constitution of Greece*.

On p. 89-91 of the first edition, Constant voices a severe critique of the intelligentsia of the Enlightenment, "les hommes qui se disent éclairés", a critique which is equal in its force to Rousseau's denunciation of the same group. Like Rousseau before him, Constant insists particularly on the hypocrisy of such people, *le salaire de l'hypocrisie*<sup>15</sup>. Korais notes at this point, referring to p. 91 of Constant's text :

φθορά ἐν πολιτισμῶ  
[ruin in civilization]

The next point in the text that attracted Korais's attention were Constant's remarks on the French Revolution on p. 118, at which point it is said that the

Révolution n'a pas tardé à se transformer en une force matérielle, sans frein comme sans règle, dirigée contre toutes les institutions dont les imperfections l'avaient provoquée. La religion a été en butte à la persécution la plus exécration. Il s'en est suivi ce qu'il devait s'ensuivre ; la réaction a été d'autant plus forte que l'action avait été plus injuste et plus violente.

This judgment of the French Revolution by Constant generated the following comment by Korais<sup>16</sup> :

διὰ τὸ οἱ Γάλλοι δὲν ὠφελήθησαν ἀπὸ τὴν πολιτικὴν μεταβολὴν  
[why the French have not benefited from the revolution]

Constant's remarks undoubtedly led Korais to recall his own judgment and extensive commentaries on the events and the vicissitudes of Revolution, which he recorded as an "eyewitness of terrible things" in Paris in the 1790s. His own verdict on the French Revolution was very close to that of Constant<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>17</sup> See P. M. Kitromilides, « Témoin oculaire des choses terribles : Adamantios Korais, observateur de la Révolution française », *Dix-huitième siècle*, n° 39, 2007, p. 269-283. On Constant's parallel views see Léonard Burnand, « Benjamin Constant et l'interprétation de la Terreur », *Annales Benjamin Constant*, n° 35, 2010, p. 43-55.

On pages 202-203 (Livre I, Chap. IX) Constant refers to the metaphysical predispositions of ancient Greek philosophers<sup>18</sup> :

Il n'est d'ailleurs nullement exact de prétendre que la théologie scientifique fût la seule religion des savants et des philosophes. Nous voyons des traces de croyance populaire chez les hommes les plus érudits et chez presque tous les sages de l'antiquité. Si nous traitons un jour de la philosophie grecque, nous montrerons Socrate consultant la Pythie ; Xénophon se conduisant d'après les oracles ; Platon accordant une foi implicite à la divination.

In connection with this passage Korais notes :

*Περὶ θρησκείας Σωκράτους*  
[of the religion of Socrates]

Constant's cautions about the religious predispositions of ancient philosophers, could have been read by Korais in conjunction with his own understanding of Socrates's religious attitude as an expression of pure religion, free of superstition, fundamentally as the source of a strong deontological moral sense<sup>19</sup>.

Korais's reading did not remain indifferent to the logic of romantic sensibility recorded by Constant at several points in his text. On p. 253-254 Korais paused at this passage but without a comment :

Sur cette combinaison merveilleuse (de la plus tendre des affections avec le sentiment de la honte) repose tout ce qu'il y a de délicat, de touchant, de pur, dans les relations de l'amour, et nous lui devons encore ce qu'il y a de régulier dans notre organisation sociale<sup>20</sup>.

On p. 263 of the treatise Korais noted the name *Saint Janvier*. Constant's relevant text in a footnote reads as follows<sup>21</sup> :

Qui le croirait ? Les Napolitains, en 1793, à l'occasion des victoires des Français, firent condamner Saint Janvier, par une espèce de procédure

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<sup>18</sup> B. Constant, *De la religion, op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>19</sup> Korais was a great admirer of Socrates as a teacher of virtue and in his texts, there are innumerable references, but the connection with Pythia does not occur, so he must have been intrigued by Constant's reference at this point.

<sup>20</sup> B. Constant, *De la religion, op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 626, note 35.

juridique, et ils le traitèrent de même en Novembre 1804, pendant une éruption de Vésuve.

This incident was obviously cited by Constant as an anecdotal illustration, among innumerable other examples from the records of history, of the “infantile and ridiculous scandals” concocted by irrational human vengeance against religion, occurring even “dans les temps les plus éclairés”<sup>22</sup>.

It is interesting to note that Korais appears aware and fascinated by the hagiological evidence about San Gennaro, the patron saint of Naples in Italy, and he discusses the cult of the saint in his critical religious essay on the holy light of Jerusalem, published in his *Miscellany* in 1830<sup>23</sup>. Hence his notice of the reference to Saint Janvier by Constant could not be accidental.

Korais read with interest Constant’s discussion of the religious practices of primitive or “savage” peoples, as they were called at the time, and noted the contribution of religion to the reliability of oaths taken by such people by contrast to the frivolity, marking oaths in “civilized” societies<sup>24</sup>. At this point, by reference to p. 276 Korais notes :

*Εὐορκία ἀγρίων*  
[scrupulous keeping of oaths by savages]

This obviously refers to the following passage :

Mais dans l’état sauvage, le serment a quelque chose de plus solennel, et il faut rendre grâces à la religion, de ce qu’elle crée, dès l’origine des sociétés, cette garantie<sup>25</sup>.

Constant’s remarks on the social effects of religious *Tabous* among the islanders of Nuka-Hiva were also noted by Korais, who read the relevant account on page 280 as an explanation of the origins of property, recording the note *ἰδιοκτησία* in connection with the following passage :

Ces lois et cette police consistent à déclarer que telle chose est sacrée, c’est-à-dire que le propriétaire seul a droit d’y toucher. [...] Les personnes et les propriétés de tous les insulaires sont *Tabou*<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>23</sup> A. Korais, *Ἀτακτα*, vol. III, Paris, 1830, p. 355 et p. 396-397.

<sup>24</sup> B. Constant, *De la religion*, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

Continuing his discussion, Constant associated the religious *Tabou* of the islanders of Nuka-Hiva in French Polynesia with the Greek god Jupiter, “protecteur des faibles et des suppliants”<sup>27</sup>, remark which should have certainly appealed to Korais.

Reading further on in Constant’s treatise on religious practices in primitive societies, Korais paused at the discussion on page 305 of the sacrifice of the retinue of tribal chiefs upon their death as *dévoués*, destined for his purpose<sup>28</sup>. Korais makes a note about this traditional practice by borrowing a very rare ancient Greek word from Herodotus<sup>29</sup> :

εὐχολιμαῖοι

Korais’s reading of *De la religion* was continued in the following two volumes of the work. Obviously since the receipt of the purchase of the book is dated 10 October 1825, that initial purchase included volumes I and II of the work. Volume III, published in 1827, was added to Korais’s library later and bears the marks of its owner’s reading, although, from the notes kept in that book, it seems that it was not read as closely as volume I. In his reading of Volume II of the original edition of *De la religion*, Korais noted with particular interest two points, both of which referred to the tendency of ministers of religion to arrogate temporal power to themselves. On page 94 (Book III, Chapter V), Korais noted Constant’s remark about the religious life of the African tribe of Giagues, in whose society “l’autorité temporelle, aussi bien que spirituelle, est réunie dans les mains du calendula ou premier pontife”<sup>30</sup>.

To Constant’s location of a “suprême pontife” among the African tribe, Korais compared further on in the text, on page 94, Constant’s broader generalization of the phenomenon<sup>31</sup> :

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 632, note 42.

<sup>29</sup> Herodotus, II, 63. Korais had worked extensively on Herodotus and wrote a detailed commentary on the text which was incorporated in the French translation of the *Histoires* by Pierre-Henri Larcher in the 1802 edition. See *Histoire d’Hérodote traduite du grec. Nouvelle édition revue, corrigée et considérablement augmentée*, Paris, 1802, Vol. I, p. xli. Korais was also planning his own translation into Modern Greek. Evidence of his work on Herodotus survives at the Public Library of Chios, Mss. 461 and 462. See also S. D. Kavvadas, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

<sup>30</sup> B. Constant, *De la religion*, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

Mais le sacerdoce ne se contente pas d'exercer ainsi exclusivement les fonctions religieuses. Il s'arroge une part considérable à l'autorité politique et civile.

Constant's comments on the unavoidable political functions that the power of religion ascribed to its ministers, must have sounded very familiar to Korais, who was well aware and had repeatedly criticized similar phenomena connected with the role of the Orthodox Church in Greek society. In Korais's judgment, as in Constant's, religion should be detached from politics and serve as the basis of the moral education of people, by teaching them disinterestedness and self-sacrifice.

After reading the first two volumes of *De la religion* in late 1825 or sometime in 1826, Korais also purchased and read the sequel of the work that appeared as volume III in 1827. In the pages of the new volume, Korais's attention was attracted in particular by four subjects, which he noted in the inside of the back cover of the book. The four subjects noted are the following :

*Trimourti* 173

*Κουζίνος*? [Cousin ?] 231

*Il faut* 298

*Κάλλος*[Beauty] 324

The Indian religious concept of *Trimourti* appears in Constant's discussion of the religions of India in Book VI, Chapter V. Korais just noted, without comment, the term *Trimourti*, occurring in the following passage of the text :

Suivant une tradition, Ady-Sakty, la force originaire, enfanta les trois dieux ou la *Trimourti*, réunie en un seul corps<sup>32</sup>.

There can be little doubt that this formulation intrigued Korais, perhaps even it functioned as a challenge to his own religious sense, as a reminder in a broad perspective on comparative religion, of the Trinitarian doctrine upon which Christian theology is based. We can only surmise what Korais might have thought or felt in view of the concept of the *Trimourti* as an idea of the deity. In his own religious writings, he never questioned any of the fundamental religious doctrines of Orthodox Christianity, including the doctrine of the Trinity. At the same time, throughout his extensive corpus of works, he repeatedly voiced his

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 296.

criticism of the clergy, both of the Western and of the Eastern Church and their moral and pastoral failures. In his story about Papatrechias, which he included in the prolegomena to the edition of Rapsody A of the *Iliad* in 1812, he put forward the model of the Enlightenment priest, a virtuous vicar dedicated to his duty and a supporter of education and moral progress<sup>33</sup>.

Korais next paused at the following passage on page 231 in Constant's text (Book VI, Chapter VI) :

C'est donc bien à tort qu'on prétend élever la religion de l'Inde au-dessus de toutes les anciennes religions, et que les dévots d'espèce nouvelle la placent de nos jours presque à côté du christianisme, parce qu'ils espèrent puiser dans les Vèdes, instruments et œuvres du sacerdoce, des moyens de plier à ses vues despotiques l'Évangile, doctrine céleste qui a rendu à l'homme sa liberté légitime et sa dignité première<sup>34</sup>.

Korais could not have identified more closely with Constant's remarks about the Gospel closing the above passage, but the reference to the *dévots d'espèce nouvelle* provoked his curiosity and in paying attention to this passage he also felt a question about it as to the authorship of the views of the new species of *dévots* by asking :

*Κουζίνος ?*  
[Cousin ?]

Whether he meant Victor Cousin, who at the time was making his appearance in French philosophy cannot be answered for certain<sup>35</sup>.

The next passage in volume III that was noted by Korais occurs on page 298, in the remarkable chapter Constant devotes to the comparison between Homer and Hesiod :

Il faut du temps à l'homme pour découvrir qu'il a le droit de se plaindre<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> See further Michael Paschalis, "The history and ideological background of Korais' *Iliad* project", in P. M. Kitromilides (ed.), *Adamantios Korais and the European Enlightenment*, *op. cit.*, p. 109-124.

<sup>34</sup> B. Constant, *De la religion*, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

<sup>35</sup> Victor Cousin had just made his appearance with the two volumes of *Cours d'histoire de la philosophie*, Paris, 1827. Korais may well have been aware also of Cousin's translation of Plato's *Œuvres Complètes*, initiated in 1825.

<sup>36</sup> B. Constant, *De la religion*, *op. cit.*, p. 333.



Korais's final attentive look and reflection on Constant's treatise focuses on a passage on beauty. In his record of pages that attracted his interest he notes on page 324 of the third volume :

Κάλλος  
[Beauty]

This obviously refers to the following passage :

Le besoin de contempler dans leurs dieux l'idéal de la beauté, inspira aux Grecs cette passion pour la beauté en elle-même, source de chefs-d'œuvre que nous ne saurions imiter. Mais lorsque le sens mystérieux eut pénétré dans leur religion, il resta toujours en seconde ligne ; la beauté fut le but. Le symbole lui fut constamment sacrifié<sup>37</sup>.

This reflection is a fitting conclusion to Korais's study of Constant's *De la religion*. In its pages Korais must have followed with curiosity the enormous ethnographic material on world religions collected by Constant and no doubt with great admiration and even pleasure his exhaustive knowledge of the entire range of sources of Greek and Latin literature, from which he draws information and illustrations of his arguments.

No reader of *De la religion* can fail to be impressed by this work, which could perhaps be considered as Constant's most significant contribution from the perspective of the history of ideas. As a classical scholar himself, Korais must have appreciated Constant's treatment of classical literature, which included some truly original and pioneering views, such as the discussion in Book VII of the treatise (volume III of the original edition) of the two Homeric epics. Beyond the philological appeal of the work, what would have meant most to Korais would probably be Constant's political sociology of religious life and the discussion of the ways sacerdotal power imposes itself on societies and correspondingly the efforts of societies as they move on the road of civilization to bring sacerdotal power under control by means of the development of morality and rational politics<sup>38</sup>. The case of the ancient Greeks and their religious

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340.

<sup>38</sup> On the place of religion in Constant's thought see further, Guy H. Dodge, *Benjamin Constant's Philosophy of Liberalism. A Study in Politics and Religion*, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1980, p. 122-131 ; on religion as a foundation of liberty Stephen Holmes, *Benjamin Constant and the making of modern liberalism*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1984, p. 168-170, but especially the perceptive discussion in Étienne Hofmann and François Rosset, *Le Groupe de Coppet*, Lausanne, Presses polytechniques et universitaires romandes, 2005, p. 113-125 and the authoritative account

life was paradigmatic of the movement from primitiveness to civilization according to Constant and this judgment would certainly have greatly appealed to Korais. In Constant's treatment of sacerdotal power and the need to bring it under control if societies were to progress on the way of civilization Korais would have recognized one of the most fundamental needs of his contemporary Greek society. A considerable part of his writing, including the cultural criticism he voiced in his extensive prolegomena to his editions of classical Greek literature, and also many of his pamphlets were directed to this end<sup>39</sup>.

The affinity of views between Korais and Constant, which can be rather easily discernible to scholars of their thought, in turn can be seen to point to a paradox. The two men had been living in the same city since Constant's settlement in Paris in 1816. In the 1820s, Constant, at the height of his political career, had been actively engaged in the politics of Philhellenism, the movement in support of the struggle for the liberation of Greece. Korais, the foremost Greek intellectual leader in Europe during the same period, was equally active in the same cause. In September 1825 Constant, at the behest of the Philhellenic committee of the *Société de morale chrétienne*, published his *Appel aux nations chrétiennes en faveur des Grecs*, a work characterized by his biographer "un pamphlet fameux"<sup>40</sup>, which besides its Philhellenic motivation, was also an eloquent defense of resistance to arbitrary and despotic authority.

The publication of the *Appel* was without doubt Constant's most important public Philhellenic pronouncement but certainly not the only one. Already in March 1822 he spoke in the Chamber in support of the Greek Revolution and on 28 October 1822 in an article in the *Courrier français* he strongly criticized the French government for not reacting actively to the massacre of Chios. During his service in the Chamber of Deputies from 1824 onward, Constant repeatedly supported the Greek

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by Tzvetan Todorov, "Religion according to Constant", in H. Rosenblatt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Constant*, *op. cit.*, p. 275-285.

<sup>39</sup> See further, P. M. Kitromilides, *Enlightenment and Revolution. The making of Modern Greece*, Cambridge ; London, Harvard University Press, 2013, p. 260-290.

<sup>40</sup> K. Kloocke, *Benjamin Constant...*, *op. cit.*, p. 280, 283. See also Loukia Droulia, *Sens et portée du Philhellénisme*, by Alexandra Sfoini (ed.), Athens, Institute for Historical Research/N.H.R.F., 2020, p. 75 et p. 211. Constant's pamphlet was translated the same year into Swedish and Danish. See L. Droulia, *Philhellénisme. Ouvrages inspirés par la Guerre de l'Indépendance grecque 1821-1833. Répertoire Bibliographique*. Seconde édition revue et augmentée, Athens, Institute for Historical Research, 2017, nos 981 (p. 142), 983 (p. 142) and 993 (p. 144). For details on the membership of both Korais and Constant in the Society of Christian Morals see Jean Dimakis, « La 'Société de la Morale Chrétienne' de Paris et son action en faveur des Grecs lors de l'insurrection de 1821 », *Balkan Studies* 7 (1966), p. 27-48.

cause and also voted in favour of the French expedition to the Morea in 1828<sup>41</sup>. In 1824 he received a letter from Prince Dimitrios Ypsilantis, one of the chief military leaders fighting in revolutionary Greece, appealing to his support for the cause<sup>42</sup>. The details of Benjamin Constant's involvement in the cause of the liberation of Greece have been presented and documented in a number of very good specialized studies<sup>43</sup> and I am only summarizing this record here in order to illustrate the paradox by reference to which I wish to close this study of the reception of his ideas by Adamantios Korais.

At the time during which Constant was emerging as one of the most distinguished proponents of the liberation of Greece, assuming the position of a literary counterpart of Delacroix in French Philhellenism as it has rightly been pointed out<sup>44</sup>, Korais was engaged in correspondence with prominent personalities in Europe and America in order to promote the Greek cause. He reached out to Jeremy Bentham in Britain<sup>45</sup>, to Thomas Jefferson and Edward Everett in the United States<sup>46</sup>, he was even in touch with President J.-P. Boyer of the Republic of Haiti<sup>47</sup>. Yet in all his voluminous correspondence and in the extensive corpus of his manuscripts that survive in the Library of Chios no trace of any contact with Benjamin Constant can be located, nor is there any pertinent hint of evidence in the correspondence of Benjamin Constant himself<sup>48</sup>. Korais was in the habit of sending copies of his works, especially his authoritative editions of the Greek classics, to some of his contacts. Following the appearance of the *Appel en faveur des Grecs* in late 1825, one might expect that Korais would have made such a gesture of appreciation. Nothing of

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<sup>41</sup> Roger Francillon, « Benjamin Constant et la Grèce », *Annales Benjamin Constant*, n° 28, 2004, p. 69-81.

<sup>42</sup> Boris Anelli, « Benjamin Constant et la guerre de l'indépendance de la Grèce : deux lettres inédites (1824 et 1825) », *Annales Benjamin Constant*, n° 20, 1997, p. 153-161.

<sup>43</sup> See especially Boris Anelli, « Benjamin Constant et la guerre de l'indépendance de la Grèce (1821-1830) », *Annales Benjamin Constant*, n° 23-24, 2000, p. 195-203.

<sup>44</sup> R. Francillon, « Benjamin Constant ... », art. cit., p. 81.

<sup>45</sup> See P. M. Kitromilides, "Jeremy Bentham and Adamantios Korais", in P. M. Kitromilides, *Enlightenment. Nationalism, Orthodoxy. Studies in the Culture and Political Thought of Southeastern Europe*, Aldershot ; London, Variorum, 1994, Study n° VIII.

<sup>46</sup> See Ioannis D. Evrigenis, "A Founder on founding. Jefferson's advice to Korais", *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique*, Vol. I, 2004, p. 157-181.

<sup>47</sup> A. Korais, *Αλληλογραφία*, vol. IV : 1817-1822, Athens, 1982, p. 303-305, p. 331-332.

<sup>48</sup> Information from Professors Étienne Hofmann and Léonard Burnand, whose kind response to my questions I gratefully acknowledge.

the sort can be noted in the published catalogue of Benjamin Constant's library<sup>49</sup>.

As noted in this study Korais was far from indifferent to Constant's work and on two occasions at least, in the years 1825 and 1827, he included Constant's edition of Filangieri's works in collections of books he sent to recipients in Greece<sup>50</sup>. Why then did he remain aloof and kept distances from Constant whom he could contact or even meet in person in Paris to express his appreciation for his support for Greece? For the time being at least this paradox should remain an open question.

The paradox of Korais's distance from Constant does not end with this suspended question. It has a further implication, which I should like to spell out as no more than an intuitive supposition, a working hypothesis for further research and reflection. Korais read Constant's *De la religion* in late 1825, following the purchase in October of that year or sometime in 1826. In 1827 he purchased and read the third volume of the work. At the time he was working on his late works, his editions of the Athenian orator Lycurgus, Epictetus and Arrian, which came out in 1826-1827. There is no trace of his reading of Constant in these works. There followed in 1828-1832 his last major scholarly publication, the successive volumes of his Miscellaoeny, *Ἀτακτα*, which include invaluable philological and linguistic material. In the third volume of *Ἀτακτα* in 1830 Korais publishes his late religious writings, which are among the most important statements of his critical thought. They included his essay on the translation of the *New Testament* into Modern Greek and his dialogue on the holy light believed to emerge miraculously from Christ's tomb in Jerusalem on Easter eve every year<sup>51</sup>. Korais draws on an extensive range of primary evidence, especially on a wide selection of patristic sources, to suggest that this belief is unfounded. In his annotations to this work, he repeatedly refers to major Enlightenment authors, primarily to Voltaire, but also to Bacon and Newton, Pierre Bayle and to the *Essai historique sur la puissance temporelle des Papes* by his contemporary Pierre Claude François Daunou, even to Anthony Collins, whose *Discours sur la liberté de penser* he cites as an important critical authority<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Information from Professor Léonard Burnand. The pertinent negative evidence in *Catalogue de la bibliothèque de Benjamin Constant*, Kurt Kloocke (éd.), Berlin, De Gruyter, 2020.

<sup>50</sup> A. Korais, *Ἀλληλογραφία*, vol. V : 1823-1826, Athens 1983, p. 211 and vol. VI : 1827-1833, Athens, 1984, p. 29.

<sup>51</sup> « Περί τοῦ ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις Ἁγίου Φωτὸς », *Ἀτακτα* III, p. 327-417.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 404.

Constant is absent from Korais's sustained dialogue with modern critical thought on religion. The same silence is to be remarked in what can be considered Korais's most important work on religion, his 1831 edition of Saint Paul's pastoral epistles, in the extensive prolegomena to which he remains completely reticent vis-à-vis Constant's *De la religion*<sup>53</sup>.

It is difficult to explain Korais's silence and the evidence presented in this essay turns this silence into a puzzle. The puzzle, however, cannot be solved or reasonably discussed in the absence of any form of evidence. What can be retained, nevertheless, from the evidence which is available and has been presented in this study, is the fact that in Korais's case we possess a documented variety of reception based on focused and sustained reading, by contrast to the vacuous ritualistic references which betray no reading at all and which have been found to be endemic in the reception of Constant<sup>54</sup>.

In concluding this study, all I can hope to do in the direction of clarifying Korais's attitude is to just put on record, with considerable hesitation I admit, two conditional hints that might point at an understanding of the paradox. One suggestion could emerge rather easily from a comparison of Korais's religious writings with *De la religion*. Korais's interest is exclusively in Christianity and in Orthodox Christianity in particular, which he is trying to lead to a recovery of the spirit of the original evangelical faith and the teaching of the New Testament. By contrast Constant's work has the broadest focus on the religious phenomenon as such on a world scale and he writes primarily on polytheism. It is in fact an impressive political sociology of religion, in which Korais's interest could be excited by the really insightful discussion of religious change toward a civic morality as reflected in ancient Greek literature, discussed by Constant in the third volume of the first edition. When Korais was reading Constant's ideas, what dominated his own mind was primarily Christianity. He could not of course but concur and fully approve Constant's general appraisal<sup>55</sup> :

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<sup>53</sup> A. Korais (ed.), *Συνέκδημος ιερατικός*, Paris, 1831. Korais's spirit in this work is epigrammatically stated in the following assertion : "Christianity today has been reduced to veritable Pharisaism". See A. Korais, *Προλεγόμενα στους αρχαίους Έλληνες συγγραφείς*, vol. IV, Athens, MIET, 1995, p. 366. On Korais's religious thought more generally see Alexandros Papaderos, *Μετακένωσις*, transl. from the German by Emmanuel Georgoudakis, Athens, 2010, p. 169-222.

<sup>54</sup> See H. Rosenblatt, "Eclipses and revivals", art. cit., p. 377 : "Constant will continue to be cited without being read".

<sup>55</sup> B. Constant, *De la religion*, op. cit., p. 247.

[...] de toutes les formes que le sentiment religieux peut revêtir, le christianisme est la plus satisfaisante à la fois et la plus pure. Tel que l'enseignait son divin auteur, il apaise toutes les douleurs de l'âme ; il respecte toutes les libertés de l'intelligence, en la délivrant néanmoins de l'angoisse du doute [...].

Yet Korais remains persistently silent on these views. I suspect that there may be a broader political motivation for his silence on Constant, a motivation that can be connected with another noticeable absence in his political arguments and philological writings as well as from his library, any indication of awareness of Constant's most famous work, the 1819 lecture, *De la liberté des Anciens comparée à celle des Modernes*. It is possible that that work impressed posterity more than it impressed Constant's contemporaries and thus perhaps –although I think rather unlikely– it escaped Korais's attention<sup>56</sup>. In view of Korais's own views and commentaries on the French Revolution and the Terror, however, this is improbable. One could suppose, nevertheless, that some implications of Constant's views, which could be and have been read to be motivated by a criticism of democracy and popular sovereignty, were inimical to Korais's strong democratic sense and this political feeling could explain the distance he kept from Constant. Like Constant, Korais was a liberal, deeply convinced and unwaveringly attached to the values of the rule of law, individual rights and civil liberties. This strong liberal commitment was reinforced and indissolubly intertwined in his political conscience with a lively democratic sense, which in the 1820s had been strengthened not only by his observation of politics in Restoration France but also by politics in revolutionary Greece and especially by his active involvement in the opposition to the rule of Governor Ioannis Capodistrias from 1828

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<sup>56</sup> In any case at the time of its appearance, it did not escape the attention of one of Korais's younger contemporaries and followers, Alexandros Mavrocordatos, who was to play a leading role in the politics of the Greek Revolution. Writing from Pisa on 20 November 1820 to his bookseller in Geneva, Mavrocordatos orders urgently the recently published "brochure de Benjamin Constant", which he says has provoked "beaucoup de bruit". See *Ιστορικόν ἀρχεῖον Ἀλεξάνδρου Μανροκορδάτου*, Emmanuel Protopsaltis (ed.), Athens, Academy of Athens, 1963, p. 22. Constant's lectures at the Athénée royal in 1818 and 1819 were reported by a correspondent from Paris in the leading Greek literary journal of the period, *Ἐρμῆς ὁ Λόγιος*, published in Vienna since 1811. The report announcing Constant's intention to lecture on history includes in a note the following characterization of the man: "He is one of the most distinguished scholars of politics, which secured for him from time to time splendid political appointments ; in France public officials do not suffer from the pusillanimity to be embarrassed to teach in public, but they consider it an honour, if they have the ability, to do so". See *Ἐρμῆς ὁ Λόγιος* VIII (1818), p. 77 and *Ibid.*, p. 81-82 an announcement of the content of Constant's lectures on the religions of antiquity. *Ibid.* IX (1819), p. 137-138 announces Constant's forthcoming course of lectures on legislative institutions in England.

onward. What these engagements led Korais to believe was that respect of democratic rules and procedural requirements, respect of public opinion and criticism were imperative for the survival of liberty in a society. It is possible that he could have understood Constant's reasoned fear of popular sovereignty and radical democracy as inimical and incompatible with his own ideal of a well ordered and well governed democratic society and this feeling inevitably motivated his silence on his great contemporary liberal thinker, who, nevertheless, at the time was preoccupied in a very serious and original way with the dynamics of opinion in a free society<sup>57</sup> while his political thought was serving radical and democratic aspirations around Europe and Spanish America during those very same years<sup>58</sup>. The ironies of history, through the intricacies and the quirks of the transfer and reception of ideas, can never fail to surprise us.

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<sup>57</sup> For the need of such "a more complex reading" of Constant's political thought see Jeremy Jennings, *Revolution and the Republic. A History of Political Thought in France since the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 158-167. More specifically on the significance of Constant's reflections on public opinion Arthur Ghins, "Benjamin Constant and public opinion in post-revolutionary France", *History of Political Thought*, n° 40, 2019, p. 484-514.

<sup>58</sup> See Jonathan Israel, *The Enlightenment that failed. Ideas, Revolution, and Democratic Defeat, 1748-1830*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019, p. 529-530, p. 716-722.





## SUMMARY

### **PASCHALIS M. KITROMILIDES: Adamantios Korais reader of Benjamin Constant. An illustration of the transfer and reception of political ideas.**

The many questions raised by reception theory in the history of ideas can be illustrated in revealing ways by the study of the trajectories over time of the writings of Benjamin Constant and by the alternation of oblivion and celebration which characterise these itineraries. The reception and impact of Constant's ideas is generally acknowledged and taken for granted in two important domains of intellectual history in the broadest sense: in the debate on the French Revolution and in the reception of the Classical tradition. Constant's stature is well established in relevant historiography as one of the major exponents of the liberal critique of the French Revolution, and more specifically of the excesses associated with Jacobin dictatorship, the Terror and the authoritarian deviation associated with Napoleon.

This study in "applied" reception concerning the ideas of Benjamin Constant attempts to bring to light the evidence of the reading of Constant's works by Adamantios Korais (1748-1833), one of the foremost Classical scholars among Constant's contemporaries and the leading representative of the Greek Enlightenment in European culture.

