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Teaching History in Greek Schools: Adventures of a “Fresh” History Curriculum for Compulsory Education. Another Lost Chance?

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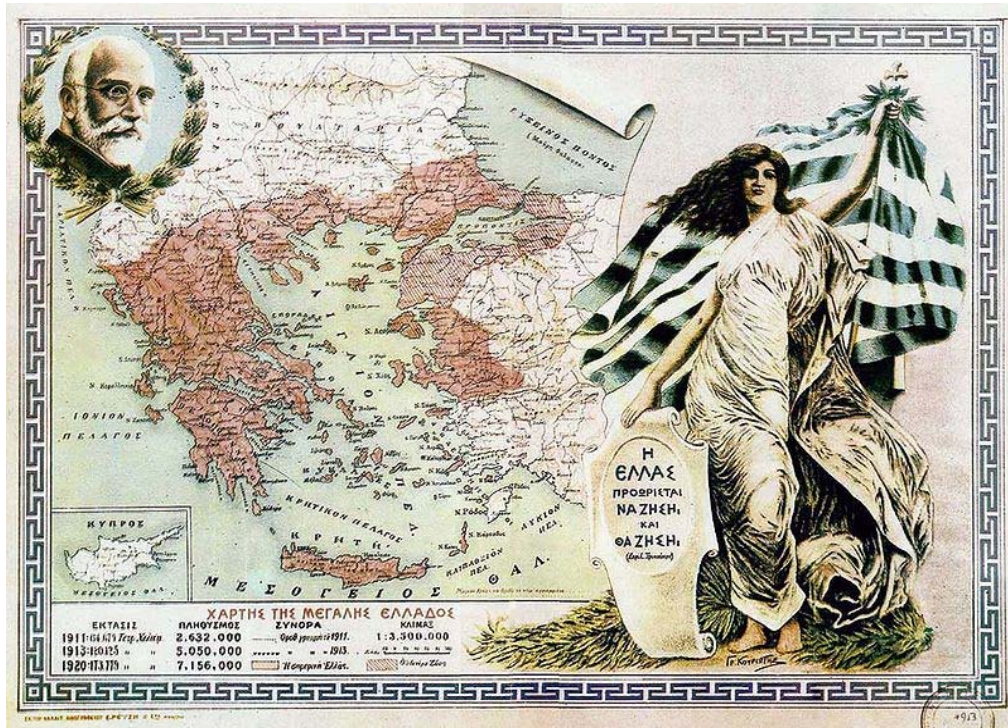
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History of History Education in Greece

History education in Greece corresponded to the successive formation of the Greek state as created during the 19th and early 20th century, from 1830 (Independent Greek state) to 1948 (annexation of Dodecanese islands to Greek state). As 19th century was the century of nation states building and at the same time the era when History was established as a discipline, history education follows the aims and questions raised by intellectuals and native academic community, closely attached to the aims and questions related to the formation of the Great Greek State and the *Megali Idea*.

The *Megali Idea* (*Grand Idea*) was an irredentist concept of Greek nationalism expressing the goal of establishing a nation state that would encompass all ethnic Greeks, since large Greek speaking populations after the Greek state independence in 1830 still lived under Ottoman rule; it was a visionary nationalist aspiration that was meant to dominate foreign relations and, to a significant extent, determine domestic politics of the Greek state – and of course education- for much of the first century of its independent existence.¹ The concept is illustrated in the following popular poster bearing the figure of prime minister Eleftherios Venizelos²; the ideal map of Greece including all territories where Greek population used to live along with the typical romantic female figure of the Greek nation, created in 1920.



History education was considered important long before Greek state gained independence.³ During the 18th century, Enlightenment affects dynamically both Greeks of Diaspora, living in major commercial cities in Western and Eastern Europe, and Greeks living within Ottoman Empire as well. History books were considered very popular and there was an actual ‘circulation’ of books among the literate population, even when handwritten. Geography books were very popular too. They were published in various types, even in early 18th c. (1716, 1728, 1759), in cities with strong Greek diaspora communities, such as Vienna, Venice, Odessa, Bucharest, Iasi, Marseilles, London, Paris, and in Ottoman cities such as Smyrna (Ismir).

In the 19th century, the discipline of History emerged, playing an important role in nation building process. The first official history and geography ‘curriculum’ for secondary education schools was formatted in 1835, just a few years after the Greek independence struggle (1821-1828) and the establishment of the independent Greek state (1830). The subjects within, completed each other and the quasi ‘curriculum’

was accompanied by decrees, guiding instructions for teachers, followed by detailed reports et alia. The role of textbooks was very important, as they were few and published and reproduced with difficulties. As a result of the lack of qualified teachers, a method of peer teaching was used (*allilodidaktiki methodos*; skillful elder students teaching younger and each other).

The European influence in every aspect of political and cultural life was dominant. This was a consequence of the important role that the Great Powers played at the early years of the Greek state and the fact that after the assassination of Greece's first governor, Ioannis Kapodistias, Greeks were forced to accept a Bavarian noble, Otto von Wittelsbach, as a king. Otto was a young prince accompanied by numerous consultants, experts, militants etc. Following the trends of his country and without taking into consideration the reality and needs of Greece and its people, the Bavarian consultant L. G. Maurer initiated education frames and aims imposing an out of time and place classicist approach. A quite opposite direction was taken previously by Ioannis Kapodistrias, who chose to establish primary and lower secondary education - mainly vocational schools - in an effort to face the multiple and complicated problems of illiteracy, deep poverty, destruction of the country and infrastructure and disintegration of any essence of state when he came to the country, along with the goal of providing shelter to the many orphan children after the war of independence.

History textbooks used at the time were English and French history books on Ancient Greek History and World (European) History, adapted and translated in Greek.

Respectively, modern Greeks formed an idea of self which was based on the idea European intellectuals had for Ancient Greece during the 18th and the 19th c.. This was

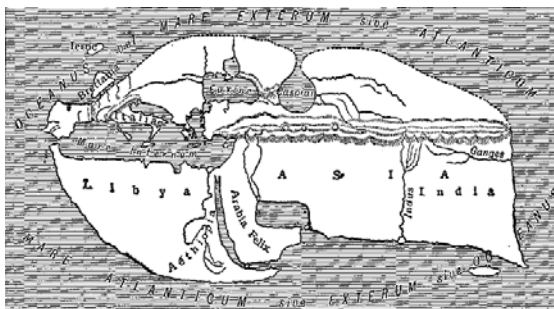
related to Ancient Greek Enlightenment and its conceptions of humanism, freedom, naturalness and democracy. School history initially followed this pattern. Gradually this approach changed. Frustration and insecurity, caused by continuous conflicts during the 19th century, turned modern Greeks obsessively to their glorious past, adopting a particular attitude: antiquity offers a normative pattern for the present and the future⁴. Consequently, Ancient Greek History dominated the curricula. The Eurocentric approach to history gradually turned to a hellenocentric one after 1880. Here one can find the first periodization of history, categorized in Ancient- Medieval- Modern Greek History in schools, still in use.

The Greek historian Constantine Paparrigopoulos, considered as the ‘national historian’ in modern Greece, first interpreted Byzantium as a very interesting period refusing to approach it as synonymous to decline, cultural darkness and corruption. This was in contrast with the Enlightenment tradition followed by English historian Edward Gibbon (‘History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire’) ⁵. For Paparrigopoulos, Byzantium was a purely Greek empire and Byzantine people were mainly Greeks. In his *‘History of the Greek Nation’* (1853) he argued in favor of the idea of continuity of the Greek nation from antiquity to present time.⁶ This was a romantic approach, serving the idea of the nation at the moment, which proved to be very strong and resistant through time and assimilated by the collective consciousness of Greeks to date⁷. From 1884 onwards, Byzantium is approached as an organic part of Greek history. The use of history education as a means to support the nation building process is also evident in the way in which the Balkan Peninsula is essentially described as a Greek peninsula in textbooks, according to the process of building the nation – state. Important dates for periodization: 323 B.C. (death of Alexander the Great), 146 B.C. (Destruction of Corinth by Romans), 330 A.D.

(establishment of Constantinople), 1204 (conquest and destruction of Constantinople by Crusaders), 1453 (Fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks), 1821 (Greek independence struggle). The character of history taught in schools is Greek - Orthodox Christian, as this religion was considered as a pillar for the Greek nation.

Despite this conservative approach, one can find innovations during the last decade of the 19th and the beginning of 20th century in history teaching. For example, in secondary education there are cases of educators' reports in which the use of terms such as 'fortunately', or 'unfortunately' within historical narrative are characterized as not pedagogically correct. This, suggests a more distant and objective approach. Also, since 1897, 'History of Civilization' was taught in parallel with political and military history.

Geography was taught in Greek schools throughout the 19th century. This was mostly Ancient Historical Geography based on the works of Pausanias (2nd A.D.) and Strabo (circa 64 B.C.- 24 A.D.). Historical Geography offered opportunities for identification of new and ancient names of places and cities, again embracing the idealistic idea of the nation.



Since 1880, moral- religious education gives rise to moral- national education⁸. At the same period, the first hints of Citizenship Education *Patridographia*; the study of the homeland, are to be found within History Education. Also during the late 19th and

early 20th century, history textbooks for women' schools were produced. These were mostly biographies of important women serving as good examples for the nation: righteous, decent, brave.

From 1917 to 1921 innovations related to history education took place, such as more inclusive and objective approaches to historical events, introducing aspects of social history as well. These were directed by the 'Educational Association', a movement of educators affected by socialist ideas. This innovative process was interrupted by the Greek-Turkish war (1919-1922). During the interwar period, Greece struggled to face the problems of population exchange after the defeat in the Greek-Turkish war (1923), bearing a collective trauma and severe financial crisis. During the 1930s, Ioannis Metaxa's dictatorship imposed an ultra nationalist content in history textbooks, following fascist patterns of the time.

The difficult decade of 1940s is associated with the Nazi occupation of the country and the fierce Greek Civil War (1946-1949). At the time, the influence of Church and Sunday schools is on the increase with the aim of fighting the significant impact of leftist ideology in the population of cities and the country. National history was built on the bipolar: 'we and the others', encouraging a type of history that divided the nation. The 1950s signaled the cold war period. During that time, history textbooks served the anti-communist propaganda, while a significant number of the Greek population-those who were defeated in the Greek Civil War and were politically active left oriented- was in exile or imprisoned, persecuted and excluded from social life. School life was under tight control by conservative politicians and Church (curricula, extra curricula activities, censorship for teachers etc).

During the turbulent 1960s an important educational reformation, introducing new curricula and “dimotiki” language (popular oral language in use) in schools, took place. This was interrupted, however, by a military coup, followed by seven dark years; Junda (1967-1974). During the transitional period of 1974-1981, which followed the fall of the military regime, timid steps to liberalization in education were taken, albeit the nationalistic content in history education remained dominant. Greece’s accession to the European Union (European Economic Community at the time) in 1979 signaled a turning point. After 1982 the biggest reform in History textbooks took place⁹, characterized by a European turn; attempts to change the approach in history teaching, following curriculum change and educational reforms, occurred in 1984, 1999, 2003 and 2011. In 1984, the most important general educational reform was implemented. This included a different and multiperspective approach to Greek, European and World history (innovative at the time), introducing a variety of sources, visual material, updated historiography, social, economic and cultural history. Despite these, the approach in history education remained mainly ethnocentric; Greek perspective and historiographical interpretation were dominant. The new history textbooks were embraced by students and adored by teachers. The textbooks on Contemporary and Modern History produced at the time were in use for almost 23 years, signaling a kind of inertia.

On the other hand: during the past 28 years there are 4 cases of history textbooks (1984, 1991, 2001, 2006) which, although approved by Hellenic Pedagogical Institute and introduced to schools, were taught for a short period of time and then were withdrawn under the pressure of media, conservative right and left wing politicians and the church, manipulating public opinion.

The withdrawn books were considered as either undermining the nation's history, denying national 'truths' (= myths), deconstructing regional history and deteriorating national identity or extremely 'cosmopolitan'.

The Greek case: typical or 'sonderweg'?

Greeks are stumbling and trying to balance between a European, a Balkan and a national identity, focusing on the 'ideal loneliness' of the nation. This mentality affects the general attitude towards school history too. At the moment, euro-skepticism is growing fast due to severe financial crisis; a devastated country, humiliated and depressed which turns to good old fashioned nationalism in order to 'survive'. Financial crisis imposes more and more cuts in wages, the demolition of welfare state and consequently education, unpredictable recession and constant social unrest triggered by it. Several problems such as shortage of teachers, deteriorating working conditions, severe cuts in school budgets emerged. The country is at a state of shock.

Ten per cent of the current population in Greece consists of immigrants (mostly illegal ones) and in some schools, in downtown Athens, 70% of the pupils in a class are immigrants. Growing xenophobia, ineffective policies by the state and unprepared teachers draw the scenery. The crime rates raise dangerously feeding irrational xenophobia and donating 7% to the neo-nazi 'Golden Dawn' party in recent elections. The influence of Church and the media to public history remains strong, while a new form of nationalism, running horizontally from right to left wing political entities, has emerged.

Controversial and traumatic topics affect history teaching (Greek-Turkish affairs, the Macedonian issue, the Cyprus issue, the concepts of genocide and ethno cleansing, non recognized minorities). These issues have to be dealt within school history and

not depend on the willingness and efficiency of some teachers. The need of a deep change in history education in Greece was obvious. Under these circumstances a new proposal was made regarding History Curriculum. It was prepared for compulsory Education (Primary and Gymnasium; ages 6-15).

For the first time the new curriculum does not follow Brunner's spiral pattern.

History is approached from kindergarten and the curriculum unfolds offering alternative and multiple perspectives for each grade, based on methods of active and teamwork learning.

The curriculum is not based on a single official textbook (which is one of the factors describing Greek pathology); it is partly open and demands confident and well trained teachers (and more work of course) using a variety of sources and offering detailed instructions for them.

Public uses of history and hidden curriculum were taken into consideration as factors affecting pupils' historical consciousness.

More specifically the new curriculum of 2011 for compulsory education (suggestion) is structured as follows:

- Kindergarten: Introduction to the concept of the past, based on the family near past. Topics: life, work and leisure in grandmother's and grandfather's time (such as school, toys, games).
- Primary school, 1st and 2nd grade: Introduction to history based on family, social, local near past.
- 3rd grade: Prehistory. People of Mediterranean. Space - everyday life, climate, food, housing, transportation, communication. Mythology, as a way to understand and interpret the world.

- 4th grade: Ancient Greek History up to Hellenistic period. Culture and civilization. Frames and basic references.
- 5th grade: From Antiquity to Medieval Age. Roman history, Byzantine history, Medieval Europe (2nd century B. C.-15th century). Evolution, society, migrations.
- 6th grade: Modern History: 16th c. to early 19th c. Renaissance, Discoveries, American and French Revolution, Greek Revolution, independence and formation of Greek State (1830). Ideas, states, citizens and society.
(Focus on *out of school* history and museum education)
- Gymnasium, 1st and 2nd grade: 19th century and 20th century, respectively: World, European, Regional, National History (several aspects of History)
- Gymnasium, 3rd grade: Starting from 21st century and going back: important historical topics regarding to their different manifestations through time. For example: Athenian and contemporary democracy, forms of slavery, political regimes, feudalism and capitalism, clash of civilizations, art, people on the move, etc. Suggested 5-6 core topics and more to be implemented separately in schools, according to needs, interests and choices of students and teachers.

Public History is part of all grades' curriculum. In this context students can understand and question, discuss and deconstruct the meaning and purpose of anniversaries, commemoration monuments, museums, media etc (out of school history).

The implementation of the curriculum (aims, content, methodology) was based on the 4 pillars of education prescribed by UNESCO: *knowing and understanding, researching and spotting, communicating and cooperating with others, connecting with life*¹⁰. This suggests a holistic approach to history which means working on main historical issues (national and global), multiperspectivity¹¹, use of multiple

sources, focus on visual material (visual and media literacy), development of ICT skills. Also, teamwork, implementation of project work, experiential approaches (drama techniques, simulations, playing ‘devil’s advocate’), development of empathic skills and communication skills.

The new curriculum suggested two successive hours per week, within the timetable, as one session for history.

Also, the proposal insisted on constant revision and connection of new historical knowledge to prior, active, discovery and team work methods approaching new knowledge, avoiding unnecessary details, but insisting and coming back to the big picture: focus on basic outlines of historical phenomena and periods, provocation of pupils’ interest, since history has a meaning for their life and this should be made clear to them. Historical narrative and project work were based on broader topics within a historical period such as: wars and treaties, society and everyday life, art and communication, economy and nature/climate, cultural clashes, historical personalities. The concept encouraged team work allowing participation and learning for students with special learning /educational needs as well as presentation of projects and creation of pupils’ own historical narrative, uploaded to the school, website are the final steps.

The program was submitted by the educational committee ¹² to the Ministry of Education, which was quite skeptical about the openness of the curriculum, especially in the 3rd grade of Gymnasium ¹³. So the proposed curriculum was considered too demanding (infrastructure / ICT, training) and ‘slippery’. Also the efficiency of teachers to implement such an open curriculum was questioned. Additionally there was an insistence on maintaining Brunner’s spiral model, i.e. repeating Ancient, Medieval, Modern history in Primary and Lower Secondary Education (Gymnasium).

The implicit argument was: “we cannot skip ancient and Byzantine history as taught so far (linear, strictly chronological approach) because this questions national identity as approached for the last 200 years. We do not have an alternative to Paparrigopoulos’ pattern based on the continuation of Greek nation”.

Epilogue

The reform of history curricula is always a painful process full of controversies. Even in countries with a strong tradition in history teaching we can see backlashes, based on political agendas promoting an instrumental knowledge of history, supporting the ideas of the nation, following a public debate questioning open curricula and modern (or post –modern) approaches¹⁴. In countries like Greece, ‘tormented by history’¹⁵ where history is a constant and open battle field between academics and the public, it becomes even more difficult. In periods of crisis (social, political, economic) any attempt of reform in history curricula is rather ‘doomed’: *‘Every nation has its family secrets...’* as Marc Ferro mentioned. These family secrets are at stake when politicians lose control of history education. But this is also the bet that history educators have to win.

¹ The term appeared for the first time during the debates of Prime Minister Ioannis Kolettis with King Otto von Wittelsbach that preceded the promulgation of the 1844 constitution. Although the expression was new in 1844, the concept had roots in the Greek popular psyche, nurtured as it was by prophecies and legends that had kept hopes of eventual liberation from Turkish rule alive. This is reflected in the folk saying:

‘Πάλι με χρόνια με καιρούς, πάλι δικά μας θα ’ναι!’

(‘Once more, as years and time go by, once more they shall be ours’).

This legacy followed the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

² Eleftherios Venizelos served as a prime minister of Greece in 7 different occasions, from 1910 to 1936. He was the High Commissioner of the autonomous island of Crete (1910) before joining Greece. He was the leader and victor in the Balkan Wars and a widely acknowledged and respected diplomat and negotiator during the World War I and the Turkish –Greek war (1919-1923), a great reformist and he created the foundations of a modern and strong Greek state in the 20th century.

³ Christina Koulouri, *Istoria kai Geografia sta Ellinika scholeia (1834- 1914)* [History and Geography in Greek schools (1834-1914)] (Athens: General Directoire of Youth, 1988).

⁴ Yiannis Hamilakis and Jo Labani, “Time, Materiality and the Work of Memory” in *History & Memory*, 20, no 2 (2008): 5-17.

⁵ J.G.A. Pocock, "Between Machiavelli and Hume: Gibbon as Civic Humanist and Philosophical Historian," *Daedulus* 105,3 (1976), 153–169

⁶Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, *Istoria tou Ellinikou Ethnous* [History of the Greek Nation] , (Athens, Alexandros, 2001, 1st ed. 1853). A very sophisticated performance based on this narrative was presented at the opening ceremony at the Olympic Games in Athens 2004, created and directed by the chorographer Dimitris Papaioannou. See Dimitris Papaioannou, *Opening Ceremony of the Athens Olympic Games: Hourglass* (Athens, 2004) [Online] Available at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoJKHmkb0g4&feature=related> [Last accessed 13 December 2012].

⁷ Ernest Gellner, *Ethnikismos* [Nationalism], (Athens: Alexandria, 2002), 107-109

⁸ At the time, Charilaos Trikoupis, a great politician in 19th century, was prime minister, promoting modernization and further changes in education.

⁹ At the time, the first Socialist Party government ruled Greece with Andreas Papandreou as prime minister.

¹⁰ Jacques Delors, *Learning: The Treasure Within. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission* (Paris: United Nations Educational, 1998).

¹¹ Council of Europe, *Recommendation Rec (2001) 15 on history teaching in twenty-first-century Europe*

¹² 10 people, appointed by the government: 4 academics, experts on history and history didactics, 6 history teachers in primary and secondary education.

¹³ Meanwhile, the members of the education committee were informed that the new curriculum was rejected. We were not really surprised, though deeply disappointed for another lost chance for history education in Greece:

‘Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better...’ Samuel Becket

¹⁴ Antonis Liakos, “History Wars: Questioning Tolerance” in G. Hålfadanarson (ed.), *Discrimination and Tolerance in Historical Perspective*, Pisa: Plus-Pisa University Press (2008): 77-92 , Maria Repoussi, “Politics question history education. Debates on Greek History Textbooks”, in *Historical Consciousness-Historical Culture*, International Society for the Didactics of History, Yearbook 2006/2007, Schwalbach/Ts: Wochenschau Verlag (2007): 99-110, Giorgos Kokkinos, *Symbolikoi*

polemoi gia tin istoria kai tin kouloura. To paradeigma tis Amerikis [Symbolic wars for history and culture. The U.S.A. paradigm] (Athens: Metaixmio, 2006).

¹⁵ Umut Özkirimli and Spyros Sofos, *Tormented by History. Nationalism in Greece and Turkey* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008)