

# Anna Mandilara and Giorgos Nikolaou, eds., *Filiki Etairia: Revolutionary Action and Secret Societies in Modern Europe*.

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## ***Book Review***

The secret society of *Filiki Etairia*, whose name translates to “Society of Friends,” played a crucial role in the birth of the Greek Revolution. In modern Greek history, *Filiki Etairia* is both a well-known and unknown subject, as it has not been studied thoroughly. Founded in Odessa in 1814 by Emmanouil Xanthos, Athanasios Tsakalof, and Nikolaos Skoufas, its purpose was to overthrow Ottoman rule and establish an independent Greek state.

The book *Filiki Etairia: Revolutionary Action and Secret Societies in Modern Europe*, edited by Anna Mandilara and Giorgos Nikolaou, offers a timely and valuable perspective of the goals and contributions of this secret Society. It discusses various ideological and political perceptions in Europe and offers an informative and necessary glimpse into the complex genesis of the *Filiki Etairia*.

The book comprises a thorough introduction written by the editors, followed by twelve chapters grouped in two parts. The first part examines the social, political, and ideological conditions of post-Napoleonic Europe and the countries under Ottoman rule that helped create secret societies like the *Filiki Etairia*.

Historian Alexandra Sfini analyzes and interprets the concepts of nation and homeland from medieval times to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Era. She examines how these concepts affected the radical and liberal thought of the Greek

bourgeoisie, such as the pioneers of the *Filiki Etairia*. She highlights important texts of the European Enlightenment to present a framework of the political, social, and cultural transformations of European societies, particularly the English and the French.

Lampros Flitouris investigates the ideology and politics of the Carbonari organization. The rivalries among the Great Forces for political prevalence sparked propaganda campaigns and mobilized the actions of secret organizations. Within this framework, the *Filiki Etairia* differentiated itself from the Carbonari and achieved the unattainable, the establishment of a Greek state. Flitouris concludes that the Carbonari movement led to the creation of a network of revolutionists and ideas instead of an international, revolutionary organization with a clear, ideological program.

Anna Mandilara investigates the Greeks of Marseilles and their activity in some of the numerous tectonic lodges. Many aspects of Greek Masonry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are unknown due to its secrecy and the absence of archival material. Nevertheless, European tectonic lodges played important roles in the formation of the Greek bourgeoisie and its activities in highly competitive environments, such as Marseilles. Partnerism, along with the Enlightenment, formed the liberal political thought of the time, which was based on religious tolerance, fraternity, friendship, and equality.

Kyrillos Nikolaou uses a geostrategic and a geopolitical perspective to compare the plans of Rigas and the *Filiki Etairia*. The long-term interests and coincidental plans of Russia, England, and France in the Ottoman-dominated Balkan region and Asia Minor, together formed the political framework of Rigas and the *Filiki Etairia*. Despite their ideological differences, Nikolaou sustains that the *Filiki Etairia* incorporated some of Rigas's revolutionary objectives.

Eleonora Naxidou introduces a novel federalist perspective of Balkan politics as an integral part of the ideologies that influenced the *Filiki Etairia*. The historian studies the relation between the Society and federalist tradition, as well as the European origins of the latter. However, it seems that, despite being influenced by the idea of a liberal, Western federation, the Society did not fulfill its federalist proposals.

The second part of the book focuses on the role of *Filiki Etairia*. Konstantinos Papoulidis studies nineteenth-century Odessa, a multiethnic and multicultural city-port where fifty languages were spoken and where French monarchists, Russian anti-revolutionaries, and Polish revolutionaries sought shelter. Nikolaos Novikov challenged Tsarist sovereignty by spreading ideas of philanthropy and masonry to Russian society in a movement called "the spirit of Novikov." In this context, a small but strong Greek merchant community formed. In the summer of 1814, some of these merchants met in secret and founded the *Filiki Etairia*.

Aggeliki Marou explores archival material to interpret the political thoughts and strategies of prominent Society members in the Epirus region, such as Asimakis Krokidas, Manthos Oikonomou, and Konstantinos Marinoglou, who tried to persuade Ali Pasha of Ioannina to rebel against the Sultan in order to distract him during the Greek Revolution.

Using archival material from the Historical and Ethnological Society of Greece, Reggina Katsimardou presents a biography of the great merchant and Society member, Panagiotis Sekeris. The archives were donated by his offspring, Dimitrios Sekeris, who was a colonel of Artillery. They include various items, such as a handwritten book with 89 copied letters from Panagiotis Sekeris and other members of the Society, their revenue and expense accounts, and a detailed list of 520 members of the Society. This archive is unique and allows us to study the *Filiki Etairia* from 1818 until 1821.

Dimitris Bacharas studies the conflicts between the Peloponnese dignitaries (*prokritoi*) from 1819 to 1821. He focuses on the long-standing conflicts within the local communities and how dignitaries attempted to use Society members in their own conflicts.

Elpida Vogli studies a crucial question: who was the “leader” of the Greek Revolution? Numerous issues emerge, as the formation of revolutionary power was complex. The historian concludes that the struggle for power not only revealed personal ambitions in Greek politics but also introduced ideas and theories about the formation of the State.

Giorgos Nikolaou analyzes the post-revolutionary narrative of the *Filiki Etairia* through the memoirs of the fighters and dignitaries. The memoirs discuss the significance of the Society, the role of the authors’ social statuses, their relationship with Ottoman power, and the influence of the first works of Philemon and Xanthos on the Society’s narrative ideology about the Society.

Konstantinos Chatzopoulos studies the *Filiki Etairia* by examining relevant primary and secondary school history textbooks. He analyzes many interesting aspects of the Society, such as its establishment, purpose, character, and organization. More specifically, he examines the risks of revealing the Society’s secrets, the mass initiation of Greeks, the “Invisible Authority,” the election of a leader, and its role in the declaration of the Greek Revolution. The analysis leads the historian to conclude that the school history approaches the subject of *Filiki Etairia* in a flat and fragmentary way.

This book underscores the complexity of the *Filiki Etairia* in terms of its historiographic relevance. Because it seems a trivial topic in Greek historical culture, some might argue that we already know everything about it or that the little we know is sufficient. *Filiki Etairia* is a challenging issue for many reasons. First, the national narrative preaches the unique and unprecedented nature of the Greek Revolution and thus the *Filiki Etairia*. Second, the rich, fragmented, chaotic bibliography has not been fully researched, and thus a wealth of information may be yet undiscovered. Third, formal education has presented *Filiki Etairia* as a complete narrative accompanied by kitsch customs like national holidays and outdated traditions e.g., wearing *tsarouchia*, the national traditional shoes, and *fustanella*, the national traditional skirt. Fourth, but equally important, the rumors surrounding masonry and other secret societies describe members of the *Filiki Etairia* as figures resembling Rasputin, James Bond, or church candle lighters.

In total, this excellent book presents original, modern approaches to understanding the *Filiki Etairia*, even if some theories do not converge. It is a useful tool for those who wish to place their own research into a wide context. Scholars working on the Greek Revolution or on secret societies also will find this an invaluable resource. As a significant contribution to the literature, this book provides

many original studies. With eclectic and widely ranged contributions from some of the most eminent scholars, *Filiki Etairia: Revolutionary Action and Secret Societies in Modern Europe* is undoubtedly a book that readers will find themselves delving into repeatedly. The book is published by Asini Publications, and literary editing was performed by Spyros Michaleas.