

# The Historical Context of the Beginning of the 20th Century and the Spread of Demoticism in Greece

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## Abstract

The present paper refers to the Political & Social reality in Greece in the early 20th century in association with the creation of the Demoticist movement in Greece. At the beginning of the 20th century, Greek scholars raised questions pertaining to the Greek culture as well as the Greek language. Language was presented as a means of reforming the nation and a reflection of the bigotry of the time. Various historical events took place and within this context the bourgeoisie, which was led by E. Venizelos, prevailed. At the same time, among the intellectuals, two main opposing tendencies collide: the modernist and the traditional, with the spearhead of language creating the language issue. At this juncture, the demoticist movement is taking formed aiming at linguistic renaissance as a precondition for the wider national renaissance. There are also views of scholars of the time and scholars on the period of Demoticism and its importance.

**Keywords:** Language Issue, Demoticist Movement, Greek Language, Social & Political Reality, Philosophers

## 1. Introduction

Amidst of a turbulent period for Hellenism, the conditions are created for the rise of Demoticism. Merchants abroad are fighting for the national identity of the Greeks, and the rise of the Military League in Athens in 1909 paves the way for the rise of Venizelos in politics. During the same period, the Language Question exists as the issue of the national language of the Greeks and two trends are created, the purists and the demoticists (Kordatos, 1973). Many demonstrations in Athens seal this front of bilingualism. While the demonstrations are made by the supporters of the katharévousa, mainly professors of the University of Athens and their students, more and more voices appear in favor of Demoticism

and progress. Theotokas, Psycharis, Delmouzos, Glinos and Triantafyllidis are some typical representatives of Demoticism (Triantafyllidis, 1963).

Ultimately, demoticism becomes a historical necessity of the Greek reality. It does not only concern the choice of the national language but the Greek soul itself. It is a central axis, a spiritual revolution, a collective movement of people with different political profiles: conservative to progressive.

The interpretive method, also known as traditional-historical, was used with the aim of providing more complete and deeper understanding of the historical sources (Pigiaki, 2004), as well as the reconstruction of a specific area of the past from the perspective of the researcher. Otherwise, it is a systematic and as far as possible objective attempt to read, select, evaluate, reconstruct the primary and secondary sources (Cohen & Manion, 2000) and anecdotal and non-anecdotal material from libraries and archives in Athens, Thessaloniki and Amfissa (Greece).

## **2. The Political & Social reality in Greece at the beginning of the 20th century**

The beginning of the 20th century is a turbulent period for Hellenism and the Greek state: a gap between popular desires and the aspirations of the ruling class, the late-stage organization of agricultural production, rudimentary industrial development, the emancipationism and the national humiliation of 1897 and 1880, the great idea and the need to reform the nation through language according to Psycharis (Svoronos, 1999). Merchants from abroad and scholars of the Diaspora fight with their words and their money for the development of a national consciousness, realizing the need for economic change. The military movement of 1909 prepares the rise of Venizelos, who implements his remedial bourgeois policy (Stavridi-Patrikiou, 2007, p.p. 30, 31).

The expansion of Greece became a reality with the Balkan wars of 1912, 1913. At the same time, the industrial development of the country from 1870 onwards gave rise to the need for a reformation of the educational system in order for it to adapt to the new conditions (Dimaras, 1977, IEE, vol. IE', p. 487).

The same liberal reformist mood spreads to all sectors of modern Greek society, including the "language Question", with the revolution of the Military League in Goudi and the political change of 1910, with the rise of Venizelos. The territorial and population growth after the Balkan wars, the development of national consciousness inside and outside Greece, the exploitation of the ideas of the Enlightenment, the new pedagogical theories and a generation of young educated and people carrying strong ideological beliefs, compose a multidimensional puzzle of factors and perceptions in a dynamic interaction. Two trends are developing in Greek society with sharp contrasts, that of the modernists of a new enlightenment and that of the defenders of tradition. At the same time, from 1900 onwards, skirmishes on the language issue became more and more frequent and acute. In 1904, the first Greek educational conference takes place, which greatly promotes reform efforts (Kontomitros, 2007). Delmouzos, with his articles in the "Acropolis" of Gavrielides,

defends the ideas of Demoticism and expresses himself openly about the country's educational and language issues. He directs the first Greek urban school according to European ideas but with a commitment to Greek tradition and language.

Parallel to the various complications in the political sphere of the country, in 1913 and 1917 the reform attempts take place in 1913 and 1917 with the main protagonists of the EO, who adopt the belief that the liberal space will implement the desired civil reforms in education . (Bouzakis, 2003).

From the Asia Minor disaster onwards, the conditions for the industrialization of the country and the formation of the class consciousness of the bourgeoisie of the era were created again and are which is completed in the depth of the next decade until 1932 (Rigas, 1988). The refugees adopt the socialist ideas, which turns them into a dynamic labor force (Repoussi, 2012). Various associations and actions of a social nature are organized such as the socialist party, labor conferences, transnational events.

In 1929 the essay 'Eleuthero Pnevma' or 'Liberal Spirit' of Theotokas, which promotes the rapprochement with the West, is published (Dimaras, 1977). Theotokas comments on of its spiritual crisis. He recognizes the demoticists as the first attempt to acquire national self-awareness, i.e. the knowledge of the modern greek culture and in the discussions within the association ' Ekpedeutikos omilos' the fermentation and conception of new ideas from diametrically opposed political poles belonging to the same family, that of the modern greeks. His Europeanism brings together the national identity of Greece and the rest of the countries in a creative synthesis. For him, tradition is expressed as the fortress of the past that surrounds the present and that we must overcome to enter the future (Theotokas, 1973). Thus, it is identified with the vision of a liberal democracy, as Venizelos wants to implement it.

## **2.1 Beginnings and evolution of Demoticism during the first decade of the 20th century**

The language issue has roots in the distant past and as Charalambous points out, it is also found in other European states such as Italy, Germany and France (Charalambous, 1987). In Greece, the 'language question' is shaken up after the establishment of the free state between the representatives of logitatism and those who express themselves in the poor language of the people (Kordatos, 1943). The term 'language question' represents the social and political aspects of the language situation in general and the debate about it, while the term 'language dispute' defines the explicit and specific disagreements, as these were expressed via the written Greek language during the 19th and early 20th centuries (Mackridge, 2013).

The existence of the common Hellenistic language of the gospels and the people and the language of the scholars that imitates the ancient attic dialect, leads to bilingualism and the formation of two parallel ways of communication, which reaches up to the 19th century (Evangelopoulos, 1985). From early on, Atticism prevailed in the Greek territory and later the tendency to purify the language. At the same time, the 'Demotic', the language spoken by

which class of people it is spoken, is used (Glinos, 1922). Gradually from the end of the 19th century the use of the ancient Greek is identified with the forces of conservatism, while the use of modern greek with the forces of progressivism (Kordatos, 1974). Therefore, the language issue is seen as a deep conflict between perceptions that concern not only the language but also the overall perspective on Greek society. A reality is formed divided into two factions, the purists and the demoticists, supported among others by the merchant class of the diaspora of the time (see Pallis, Delta, Fotiadis) (Stavridis-Patrikiou, 2007).

From the beginning of the 20th century until the end of the First World War, demoticism reaches its peak and becomes the focus of unification of progressive forces, always with a national orientation, including from the most conservative to the most revolutionary forces. Demoticism as a spiritual movement has its roots in the greek language, but the modern change in the language form and expression signals something deeper and more essential, the change in the quintessence of the Greek soul (Glinos, 1922, Gianidis, 1974). The linguist Mackridge attributes the origins of the demoticism to the Greek romanticism cultivated in the Ionian Islands with D. Solomos as the speaker during the decade of the Greek independence struggle and reappears from 1880 onwards (Stavridi-Patrikiou, 2007, pp. 68).

At the same time, real dramas were being played out in Athens with real victims the people protesting in favor of the *katharévousa*. The case of the "Evangelicals" start in 1898, when Queen Olga designed and finally carried out a version of the gospel comprehensible to poorly cultured readers. Opponents was declared that the translation is a hypochthonic plan of slavism with the aim of co-opting the Greeks of Macedonia from the Bulgarian exarchate (Khourmouzi, 1977). Demoticists are accused of financing in order to grant benefits to enemies of Hellenism. In 1901, another translation of the gospels into the demotic was published by A. Pallis with the aim of simplifying the language. On November 5 and 6, 1901, students conflicts between protesting students and the police take place, where three students and 8 civilians are killed and 80 injured.

In November 1903, new demonstrations took place in Athens on the occasion of the staging of the tragedy of the Oresteia, translated into the Demotic. In the conflicts between protesters and the police, three citizens lost their lives. The disturbance against the evangelical and the orestian, according to Patrikiou, is an acute political crisis with dramatic events that in the long run had three significant consequences-extensions related to the language issue: the constitutional establishment of the '*katharévousa*', the pure language, the interventionist tactics of the church in educational matters and the genesis of the russian ruble myth although subsequently debunked (Stavridi-Patrikiou, 2007).

However, around The Parnassos philological Association<sup>1</sup> and Palamas, many young poets and talented popularist writers gather and the circulation of magazines that serve demoticism

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<sup>1</sup> Parnassos was founded in 1865 in Athens by the sons of the numismatist P. Lambros with the aim of the spiritual, moral and social improvement of the people through various activities. It functions as a real Academy with several departments: philological, archaeological, legal, artistic and

begins. The best known, “Noumas” is established as the official organ of Psychari Demoticism centered on Psycharis and according to the expression of P. Haris, it becomes the impregnable stronghold of the demoticists.

Much earlier in 1888, Psycharis made a great impression with the release of his work ‘‘My Journey’’. It is a milestone work that provokes exchanges of ideas and new complications and exhibits three characteristics: a strong national sentiment, a nostalgic turn to the past, a demoticist attitude. My journey of Psycharis according to Delmouzos, shakes to its foundations the whole spiritual movement of this place (Xydis, 1980) and with its momentum that calls for an immediate linguistic change, despite its rigidity in terms of the typical demotic and its phonetics, is a foundation of educational demoticism (Delmouzos, 2014). Tsirimokos in 1927 recognizes that the publication of Psychari's book contributed within fifteen years to the public imposition of the demotic as the language of literature and the rise of demoticism (Tsirimokos, 1927). According to Stavridis-Patrikiou (2007) Psycharis reinforces the identification of the national language with the language of the people, of popular education, and stops the omnipotence of the *katharévoussa*.

The movement of Demoticism is initially found in the literature of the 19th century with the Greek poets and prose writers Tertsetis, Trikoupis, Valaoritis, Vizyinos, Fotiadis, Dragoumis, Mavilis and Solomos. It aims at initiating a national renaissance based on living tradition and overcoming bilingualism as the cause of many and deep problems; it further advocates the need to implement a national language policy based on the language needs of the nation (Triantafyllidis, 1963).

Triantafyllidis defines demoticism as an intellectual, educational, social movement with the aim of acquiring a common national language of the nation's language and defines its individual goals to make the language of the people an instrument of education, to elevate and cultivate it and to escape from the types of the archaism of the past. He himself characterizes it as a spiritual revolution in the deadness of modern Greek life with a new perception of the national mission that instills new ideals to the nation and asks to unite Greeks in an effort of national regeneration.

Demoticism seeks to rule out all religious hypocrisy and soulless type and benefit religious life by training the people in sincerity. He doesn't despise religion, the church, the tradition, nor does he wish to change the language of the sacred texts. The translation of sacred texts of the Old Testament by Pallis into the demotic is aimed at helping ordinary Christians at home in their personal cultivation, not at its official use during sacred ceremonies (Foteinos, 1922).

According to Glinos, urbanism raises a more dynamic ideal in education, pushing young people to high spiritual struggles (Glinos, 1924). As a historical event, it is a historical necessity, an expression of the mental needs of the modern Greek reality and not the birth of the ambition of a few unbalanced people. Glinos defines the characteristics of demoticism as follows; respect for the past, turning to the essence, moral and social values, cultivation of the

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natural science. In: Papyros-Larous-Britanika (1992/1996), vol. 48, Papyros publications, pp. 214, 215.

living sensible language, elements that he recognizes in the school of Delmouzos as elements of democratic historicism. Theotokas recognizes as the main work of demoticism the fact that it highlights the issue of the acquaintance of the New Greeks with the Greek culture and parallels it as the process of self-knowledge of a young person. According to Svoronos, this is a collective movement, with a greek character, a renewal and a gathering of various diverse conservative and revolutionary forces of modern Greek thought with the national problem as its starting point. With this logic, Psycharis equates the struggle for the homeland with the struggle for the language (Foteinos, 1915).

Demoticism is characterized by Charalambous as a movement of heavy ideological importance as it encompasses the universal questioning of the ideological and linguistic past and at the same time constitutes an alternative method of national integration and the vision of the great idea (Charalambous, 1987). According to Stavridis-Patrikiou, demoticism functions as a space where new fields of thought and action are cultivated. With the appearance of socialist Marxist ideas in the Greek area, demoticists create two currents, the nationalists (rationalists) and the socialists, who interpret differently the role of the popular language, as a proof of national continuity and an instrument of popular will from the former or as a weapon of the working class.

With the appearance of demoticism, three main political directions co-exist; conservatism, liberalism and socialism. In parallel with the political ascendancy of Venizelos, the second trend prevailed, absorbing a large part of the socialist forces within Venizelos' party during the period of 1920, as later Venizelos would be on the defensive side.

### 3. Conclusion

In the middle of a turbulent period for Hellenism, the conditions are created for the rise of demoticism while merchants abroad are fighting for the national identity of the greeks, and the rise of the Stratiotic League in Athens in 1909 paves the way for the rise of Venizelos in politics.

In the same period, the "language question" exists as the Question of the national language of the Greeks and two trends are created, the Purists and the demoticists. Many demonstrations in Athens take place, due to bilingualism of new greeks. Therefore, while the demonstrations are made by the supporters of the "katharevousa", mainly professors of the university of Athens and their students, more and more voices are heard in favor of demoticism and progress; Theotokas, Psycharis, Delmouzos, Glinos and Triantafyllidis.

Ultimately, demoticism constitutes one historical necessity of the Greek reality: It does not only concern the choice of the national language but the Greek soul itself. It is a central axis, and a spiritual targeting/revolution, a collective movement of people with different political profiles: conservative to progressive according to several specialists.

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