



Summary :

The Orthodox community of the city of Smyrna was convulsed in 1809-1819 by fierce controversies concerning ideological and social matters. As regards ideology, the supporters of the earlier educational tradition of the city bitterly conflicted with the movement of the Enlightenment emerging at the time in Smyrna. The result was the establishment of the Philological Gymnasium. As regards society, there were controversies between the 'bourgeois' social classes, on the one hand, and the guilds and the lower social classes, on the other hand, concerning control over communal matters.

Date

1819

Geographical Location

Smyrna

1. The Reasons

The city of [Smyrna](#) towards the late 18th and the early 19th century was a cosmopolitan harbour, an important [commercial centre](#) of eastern Mediterranean, a hub for goods and people to and from the interior of Asia Minor with international fame. It became the seat of most European consulates, economy was thriving and the population was increasing enormously.¹

The events of 1819 are to a great extent connected mainly with the crisis the communal organisation of Smyrna was suffering at the time, and secondly with the concerted attack of the official Church, in the years of [Patriarch Gregorios V](#), against the educational movement inspired by the principles of the [Enlightenment](#). In Smyrna there had long been a conflict between the middle commercial class, on the one hand, and the guilds and the lower social classes, on the other hand, whose main purpose was to assume power in the community. In this long dispute the Church participated without adopting a firm stand, always aiming to defend its interests.

In 1819 as well as in the previous years the conditions led to a more serious controversy, which quickly took on an ideological character. According to the historian F. Iliou, although the ideological controversy between the supporters of the Enlightenment and its opponents was quite violent, it does not fully explain the events.² However, the ideological controversy between the supporters and the opponents of the Enlightenment has prevailed in sources and subsequent literature.

2. The Communal Organisation of Smyrna

The case of Smyrna is a typical phenomenon of a relatively common process taking place in Ottoman cities with a large Greek population, and with a differentiated social stratification. In the early 19th century, when the [Church](#) was holding most of the community power, Smyrna's merchants became rich,³ tried to reduce the administrative and political power of the Church and at the same time tried to control it through the community, as indicated by a 'memorandum' signed in 1785 by the then metropolitan of Smyrna and subsequent Patriarch Gregorios, through which he withdrew from significant administrative, economic and judicial privileges.

However, the Church of Smyrna, powerful and popular with the citizens, did not lose its power and, as a result, between 1785 and 1819 the representatives of the merchants and the diocese assumed power interchangeably. At the same time, a new power appeared and increased the 'bourgeois' profile of the city. It was the guilds,⁴ which allied sometimes with the Church and sometimes with the merchants. The constant competition among these three social groups aiming at the community power is described by conflicts and rebellions.



The communal organisation of Smyrna should be explained at this point. The community of Smyrna was governed by two elective councils, the five-member eldership ('dimogerontia') and a twelve-member council ('dodekania'), whose members were reelected each year. The five members of the dimogerontia were elected only by the merchants and the 'prokritoi' (notables), while the 'dodekanoi' (notable councilors) were elected from among the notables by the members of the dimogerontia. Prokritoi (notables) were those who had already participated in the city's administration either as members of the dimogerontia or as dodekanoi).⁵

3. The Crisis of 1788 – A Precursor of the 1819 Events

Within a period of sixty years Smyrna was convulsed five times by social disorder: in 1761, 1785, 1788, 1809-1810 and in 1819.⁶ Information concerning the events of 1788 is provided by a versed text titled *Σμύρνης τραγωδία ποιηθεῖσα ἐπὶ τῆς στάσει τῶν ὄχλων ἐγερθέντων κατὰ τῶν προυχόντων τῆς πόλεως ἐν ἔτει 1788* ('The tragedy of Smyrna during the Revolt of the Mob against the Potentates of the City in 1788') by an unknown writer, who attributed the rebellion to secret schemes. According to the poem, the crowd required that the potentates, who burdened the poor with taxes, should report to the guilds (esnafs), while the esnaf members (esnafilis) induced the crowd to elect its own potentates ("kotzabasides", from the Ottoman Turkish "kocabaşı"). However - according to the poem -, it was soon proved that the whole thing was a conspiracy against the potentates, who returned to power. The verses describe the events of 1788 from the point of view of a scholar who followed the principles of the Enlightenment and belonged to the circle of Koraes or had at least the same views with him and supported the potentates.⁷ It is interesting that this text includes a first example of the social confrontations that convulsed Smyrna in the late 18th century before they culminated in the events at the [Philological Gymnasium](#) in the first two decades of the 19th century.

4. The Guilds and their Role in the Crisis of 1819

What differentiates the events of 1819 from the crises of the previous years is that this time a part of the city's guilds, after it had allied with the Church, questioned the structure of communal power, roused the 'common people' of Smyrna and exercised power for at least a brief period. These guilds concerned small industries that did not extend beyond the city limits – a prominent position was held by food guilds. These guilds disputed with the merchants and the guilds connected with overseas commerce. The former, of course, were more closely connected with the lower social strata of Smyrna and were able to induce them to conflicts. Their vague but rather traditional ideological arsenal was in opposition to the modernist ideas of the Enlightenment.

This social stratification in Smyrna at the turn of the 19th century, as regards ideology, led to the upper social strata, the merchants, who had abandoned traditional conservatism and expressed new ideas, being clearly detached from the respective lower social strata, which resisted any progress. Their main index mark was religious identity and tradition, while they were often instigated by the Church and the guilds.⁸ It should be pointed out that, although in the lists including subscribers of books by the Oikonomos brothers and [Konstantinos Koumas](#) are included members of important Smyrna families, such as the Omiros, Pittakos, Rallis, [Baltatzis](#), Mavrogordatos and Mavrokordatos, Dromokaitis, Lomvardos, Rodokanakis, Vouros, Damalas, Alfieris, Palaiologos and Prousalis families, there is no mention of persons from lower social strata.⁹

5. The 1819 Events

Already from the last months of 1818 tensions coming from different directions started to grow in Smyrna: trade in Smyrna was slack, mainly because of the competition from English fabrics flowing into Eastern markets and the new commercial routes of the Black Sea, the fire in December 1818 caused extensive damages to the city's handicraft, and a plague epidemic had a dramatic impact on economic life. These tensions heightened greatly during the elections in the community of Smyrna in March 1819. At the same time, the traditionally hostile attitude of the Church of Smyrna towards the merchants was encouraged by both the forthcoming succession of metropolitan [Anthimos](#) to the bishop of Erythrai Kallinikos and the election of the new Patriarch Gregorios V of Constantinople, known for his anti-modernist attitude and his violent opposition to the ideas of the Enlightenment.¹⁰ In the same period some guilds were united, being all hostile against the merchants, and pursued good relations with the metropolitan of Smyrna. They aimed to support each other and hold a common attitude.



As the elections of March 1819 in the community came closer, there was growing social tension coming from the guilds, which denounced the 'rich' and insisted that the members of the dimogerontia be elected by the 'koinolaites' (the common folk), the community finance be controlled by the dimogerontia to-be-elected, those responsible for mismanagement be punished and taxes be reduced. They also demanded that the 'depoutatoi', the merchants who did not come from Smyrna and who were mainly occupied with long-distance trade, be not involved in communal matters. As a result of the pressure exercised by the guilds, the March elections were held in their presence for the first time, while only the electors (notables and merchants) had traditionally the right to be present until then. However, the election results did not satisfy the 'esnafliis', as only three out of the six new members were supported by the diocese and maintained close relations with the guilds, although the desired majority was not achieved. But the worst for the guilds was that the traditional communal structure, where they had no access at all, was not upset.

The guilds, however, were conscious of their power; thus they resorted to violent tactics and accomplished facts so that they could dominate the community. As a result, on election day the merchant Nikolaos Mavrogordatos was expelled from the Council and was replaced by the collaborator of the diocese, the merchant Antonios Chatzimichail. A few days later, the guilds gave the oligarchic communal system of the city a second heavy blow by blocking the election of the 'dodecanoi'. At the same time, the influence of Savvas Mousoudakis increased. He maintained close relations with the guilds and the diocese and proclaimed himself, without any formalities, 'councilor and assistant and patron of the Public'.¹¹

As a result of all these actions, two members of the 'dimogerontia' were made to resign; they were Loukas Amiras and Dimitrios Chatzistratis, who supported the merchants, while the council from then on consisted of four members supporting the guilds. The next decisive step was the formation of a new administration that took over communal power and was constituted according to the majority secured by the guilds. The new administration included the four members of the dimogerontia and one potentate (supporting the Church), the 'patron of the public', and seven masters of the guilds – 'agitators', according to Oikonomos.¹² There is little information on this administration. However, it is known that the decisions were made in the name of the people of Smyrna and the administration tried to replace the 'bourgeois' involved in communal work with supporters of the guilds. But the legal formalities were not completed and the administration could not be recognised as an official body representing the city before the Ottoman authorities and the Patriarchate, which continued to accept only the dimogerontia. It seems that it was a temporary type of administration, as the dimogerontia of 1820 involved the merchants in administrative matters of the city, although it had some things in common with the administration of 1819.¹³

According to Oikonomos, after the issue of communal power was settled, an old plan for the eradication of the Philological Gymnasium was launched. There is no full study on the events concerning the closure of the school. There is only scarce information which comes mainly from reviews in magazines and personal correspondence of the time. According to Stefanos Oikonomos, there were reports against [Konstantinos Oikonomos](#) signed and sent to the Patriarchate, while assembled esnafliis under Savvas Mousoudakis and Manouil Peroglou employed violent methods on 16 July 1819 and made the board of the Philological Gymnasium clear the school from things and books, turn the students and their personal belongings out and give the infuriated mob the keys.¹⁴

In the first place the attitude of the patriarch was at least inconsistent. Although he tried to eliminate the 'dangerous' influences of the Enlightenment, at the same time he protected the Philological Gymnasium and its principal Konstantinos Oikonomos. This attitude may be explained by the pressure Gregorios faced at the time: the prince of Moldavia was in favour of Oikonomos, while the Phanariote Kallimachis family was against him. On the other hand, the metropolitan of Smyrna Anthimos had become dangerously powerful. The best way probably was the strengthening of his opponents, the supporters of the Philological Gymnasium. Nevertheless, at the same time the patriarch wanted to implement the principles of the hostile to the Enlightenment 1819 circular employing indirect, though equally effective, methods. All these problems were solved in the middle of the crisis, when supporters of the Philological Gymnasium proposed that the Gymnasium should be under the patronage of the patriarch so that it would not depend on the local Church and the guilds. However, the patriarchal document recognising the school as a [stauropegian](#) establishment was rejected by the esnafliis, who did not accept the loss of communal control over the city's establishments and, as a result, the Philological Gymnasium was permanently closed down after it had successfully operated for ten years.

6. The Characteristics of the 1819 Crisis



To sum up, the crisis that troubled Smyrna in 1819 had two main characteristics: the first was violence perpetrated by the guilds, which aimed to impose a new reality on the organisation of the community. 'Esnafs are furious and potentates are frightened' says Konstantinos Oikonomos one week before the elections, thus giving the atmosphere of the period. There are several and characteristic incidents: as mentioned above, the member of the dimogerontia Nikolaos Mavrogordatos was expelled, while Loukas Amiras and Demetrios Chatzistratis were made to resign, the guilds revolted and prevented the election of the dodecania, the public scribe Nikolaos Damianos was also expelled, the members of the board of St. Fotini were replaced when they denied to sign a report against Konstantinos Oikonomos, the commissaries of the [communal hospital](#) managed to escape to the suburbs in order to avoid violent pressure, while those opposing the 1819 administration were threatened to be taken to the Ottoman authorities accused of debts to the city. In July the 'lower' guilds invaded into the city's cathedral, where the meeting of the potentates was being held. They started shouting and forced the potentates out. On the same day demonstrations in the streets of Smyrna resulted in the Philological Gymnasium being closed down. In September the esnafis tore inside the cathedral the patriarchal documents that appointed the Gymnasium as a stauropegian establishment and caused new disorder. In 1820 violence seems to still exist in Smyrna, as indicated by the violent incidents that took place in the cathedral, when the supporters of guilds stormed into the building again, tore the documents and threw the city into disorder, while the patriarchal sigillia, which restored Konstantinos Koumas and Konstantinos and Stefanos Oikonomos to their previous positions were being read out.

The second characteristic of the crisis is that a new ideology, which advocated egalitarianism, resisted plutocracy and served as a prelude to 'class conscience', was formed; according to Iliou, a 'fourth class' was created, opposing the middle class merchants who dominated the major Greek cities in the early 19th century.

1. Frangakis-Syrett, E., *The Commerce of Smyrna in the Eighteenth Century (1720-1820)* (Athens 1992).
2. Ηλιού, Φ., *Κοινωνικοί αγώνες και Διαφωτισμός. Η περίπτωση της Σμύρνης (1819)* (Athens 1986), pp. 37-38.
3. Smyrna in the 18th century became a major commercial centre because the commercial routes of the East were transferred from southern regions to Asia Minor. Σβορώνος, Ν.Γ., *Το Εμπόριο της Θεσσαλονίκης τον 18ο αι.* (Athens 1996), p. 382.
4. As regards the role of the guilds in the political autonomy and social conflicts in Greek communities of the Ottoman Empire, see Κοντογιώργης, Γ., *Κοινωνική δυναμική και πολιτική αυτοδιοίκηση. Οι ελληνικές κοινότητες της τουρκοκρατίας* (Athens 1982), pp. 151-173.
5. Ηλιού, Φ., *Κοινωνικοί αγώνες και Διαφωτισμός. Η περίπτωση της Σμύρνης (1819)* (Athens 1986), p. 14.
6. Ηλιού, Φ., *Κοινωνικοί αγώνες και Διαφωτισμός. Η περίπτωση της Σμύρνης (1819)* (Athens 1986), p. 15.
7. Καρατζάς, Σ., *Σμύρνης τραγωδίες. Δύο ανέκδοτα ποιήματα σχετικά με ταραχές στη Σμύρνη (1788, 1810)* (Athens 1958).
8. Ηλιού, Φ., *Κοινωνικοί αγώνες και Διαφωτισμός. Η περίπτωση της Σμύρνης (1819)* (Athens 1986), pp. 16-21.
9. Αργυροπούλου, Ρ., 'Η ελληνική κοινότητα της Σμύρνης την εποχή του Διαφωτισμού' in *Σμύρνη. Η Μητρόπολη του Μικρασιατικού Ελληνισμού* (Athens 2001), p. 35.
10. Patriarch Gregorios V had denounced Enlightenment already from his first term of office (1797-1798), when he had excommunicated the French Revolution and Rigas Velestinlis, while the attack of the official church against the radical ideas of the Enlightenment was organized and co-ordinated in his third term of office (1818-1821), with events such as a series of excommunications against Greek intellectuals living in western Europe and the circular of March 1819, which became the theoretical background to the subsequent actions of the Patriarchate against the Enlightenment.
11. Οικονόμος, Στέφανος, 'Περί των κατά το εν Σμύρνη Φιλολογικών Σχολείων συμβάντων', in Οικονόμος, Σοφοκλής (ed.), *Κωνσταντίνου*



Οικονόμου, Τα Σωζόμενα Φιλολογικά Συγγράμματα Α' (Athens 1871), pp. 461-462.

12. Οικονόμος, Στέφανος, 'Περί των κατά το εν Σμύρνη Φιλολογικών Σχολείων συμβάντων', in Οικονόμος, Σοφοκλής (ed.), *Κωνσταντίνου Οικονόμου, Τα Σωζόμενα Φιλολογικά Συγγράμματα Α'* (Athens 1871), pp. 462.
13. Ηλιού, Φ., *Κοινωνικοί αγώνες και Διαφωτισμός. Η περίπτωση της Σμύρνης (1819)* (Athens 1986), pp. 21-32.
14. Οικονόμος, Στέφανος, 'Περί των κατά το εν Σμύρνη Φιλολογικών Σχολείων συμβάντων', in Οικονόμος, Σοφοκλής (ed.), *Κωνσταντίνου Οικονόμου, Τα Σωζόμενα Φιλολογικά Συγγράμματα Α'* (Athens 1871), pp. 463-466.

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	Βέης Ν. , "Συμβολή εις τα σχολικά πράγματα της Σμύρνης", <i>Μικρασιατικά Χρονικά</i> , 2, 1939, 1-48
	Δημαράς Κ.Θ. , <i>Νεοελληνικός Διαφωτισμός</i> , Αθήνα 1977
	Κιτρομηλίδης Π. , <i>Νεοελληνικός Διαφωτισμός. Οι πολιτικές και κοινωνικές ιδέες</i> , Αθήνα 1999
	Ηλιού Φ. , <i>Κοινωνικοί Αγώνες και Διαφωτισμός. Η Περίπτωση της Σμύρνης (1819)</i> , Αθήνα 1986
	Αργυροπούλου Ρ. , "Η ελληνική κοινότητα της Σμύρνης την εποχή του Διαφωτισμού", Χατζηγεωργίου, Ν. (επιμ.), <i>στο Σμύρνη. Η Μητρόπολη του Μικρασιατικού Ελληνισμού</i> , εκδόσεις Έφεσος, Αθήνα 2001, 19-41
	Ηλιού Φ. , <i>Τύφλωσον Κύριε τον Λαόν Σου. Οι προεπαναστατικές κρίσεις και ο Νικόλαος Πίκκολος</i> , Αθήνα 1988
	Καρατζάς Στ. , <i>Σμύρνης Τραγωδίες. Δύο ανέκδοτα ποιήματα σχετικά με ταραχές στη Σμύρνη (1788, 1810)</i> , Αθήνα 1958
	Κιτρομηλίδης Π. , "Ιδεολογικές συνέπειες της κοινωνικής διαμάχης στη Σμύρνη (1809-1810)", <i>Δελτίο Κέντρου Μικρασιατικών Σπουδών</i> , 3, 1982, 9-39

Glossary :

	patriarchal monastery (stauropegeion) A monastery under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate, autonomous from the administration of the local bishop. The term stauropegeion applied also to villages, meaning that in tax matters (mostly in regard to ecclesiastical taxes) they were under the control of the Patriarchate and not of the local diocese.
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Auxiliary Catalogues

Numerous texts, mainly verses, inspired by the social conflicts in Smyrna were published between 1788 and 1820:



1. Σμύρνης τραγωδία ποιηθείσα ἐπὶ τῇ στάσει τῶν ὄχλων ἐγεθθέντων κατὰ τῶν προυχόντων τῆς πόλεως (1788). Included in: Καρατζάς Στ., *Σμύρνης τραγωδίες. Δύο ανέκδοτα ποιήματα σχετικά με ταραχές στη Σμύρνη (1788, 1810)* (Athens 1958).
2. Τραγωδία κατὰ τῶν δημογερόντων τῆς Σμύρνης οἵτινες κατὰ τὸ 1810 ἔτος, μηνὶ Αὐγούστου 10, ἀποβάλουσ[ι]ν τὰ δύο νεοσυσταθέντα παρὰ τῶν προόντων δημογερόντων φιλολογικά, ἐπιστημονικά καὶ γραμματικά σχολεῖα (1815). Included in: Καρατζάς Στ., *Σμύρνης τραγωδίες. Δύο ανέκδοτα ποιήματα σχετικά με ταραχές στη Σμύρνη (1788, 1810)* (Athens 1958).
3. Ὁ λίβελλος κατὰ τῶν ἀρχιερέων (c. 1808-1810). Included in: Κιτρομηλίδης, Π.Μ., 'Ἰδεολογικές συνέπειες της κοινωνικής διαμάχης στη Σμύρνη (1809-1810)', *Δελτίο Κέντρου Μικρασιατικῶν Σπουδῶν* 3 (Athens 1982), pp. 9-39.
4. Σχολιάς (1815). Included in: Μπουμπουλίδη, Φ.Κ., 'Ἀνέκδοτον στιχοῦργημα περὶ των σχολικων πραγμάτων Σμύρνης ἀρχομένου του 1815 αἰῶνος', *Μικρασιατικά Χρονικά Η'* (1959), pp. 409-439.
5. Αἰτία καὶ τρόπος τῆς δημεγερσίας πρὸς καταδρομὴν τοῦ Οἰκονόμου (1819 ἢ 1820). Unpublished, reported by Sophokles Oikonomos in *Σωζόμενα Φιλολογικά Συγγράμματα του Κωνσταντίνου Οικονόμου*, p. 472, and by Κ.Θ. Δημαρά in his *Σατιρικά κείμενα του 1821* (Athens 1960), p. 8.
6. Articles of the time in the *Μέλισσα* 3 journal (1821), pp. 299-301.

All the above texts are both fierce polemics against those who caused the violent shutdown of the Philological Gymnasium and expressions of the most anti-clergy side of the Modern Greek Enlightenment.