

The transition from traditional society with its universal sense of collectivity (as expressed in fraternal associations) to modernity (as expressed in individual functioning), and the related differentiation and promotion of individuality defines the function of benefaction: it can be seen as the distinction of “I” (individual) within a wonderful “we” (collectivity). This is the reason benefactors acted to improve the conditions of the collectivity and render it not only more functional, at the institutional level, but more admirable at the imaginary level.

Egyptiot benefactors, expressing Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment thought,⁶ considered that “for Greece to be liberated, the Greeks have to be educated.”⁷ The progressive and emancipatory role of schooling the masses, and the consequent support for increasing the number of educational institutions, is a basic tenet of the Enlightenment, which

constitutes the ideological engine of modernity.⁸ “The first significant effort to establish schools in the Greek world, as early as the 17th century, is due to the initiative of the wealthy merchant Manolakis Kastorianos. This trend will be intensified during the 18th century thanks to continuous financial progress. Emerging urban centres such as Ioannina, Kastoria, Moschopolis, Chios, Smyrna, Kydonies, etc, at the same time become the intellectual hubs of the Hellenic world with numerous primary and secondary schools. The circulation of printed books increases significantly. More and more Greeks supported by diaspora merchants and enlightened Phanariots are able to study in the West and later become teachers in the schools of the Greek world. In these urban centres, with direct links to the ascendant bourgeoisie of the Greek communities of the West, the Greek Enlightenment has its roots. Its main characteristic is the continuous contact of Greek thought with western science and the new ideological trends of the West.”⁹

Up to the mid-twentieth century, a plethora of beneficent institutions were established in Greece. Many of them were related to the bourgeois desire to modernise the educational system. They were aimed at the provision of the intellectual requirements for succeeding in the emerging contemporary world. In other words, acquiring an education helped an individual to progress in society, and as such excellent schools were essential in a modern bourgeois environment. For this reason, benefactors financed the establishment and involved themselves in the running of educational institutions, offering the prospect of employment and economic success to those who availed themselves of the opportunity of acquiring an education. It is clear that provision of universal education by the state represents a key emblem of bourgeois modernity. With this in mind, many important educational institutions in the capital of the Greek state were founded thanks to the generous funding offered by expatriate benefactors. The Kapodistrian University of Athens was established in 1837 with funds provided by Ioannis Dombolis, a native of Epirus who was born in 1769 and lived for many years in Saint Petersburg and Nizny in Russia. The National Metsovion Technical University, established in 1836

and headquartered in its present buildings since 1873, came into being thanks to generous funding provided by the Epirot benefactors Georgios Averof, Michael Tositsas and Nikolaos Stournaris, all of whom were active in Egypt. The Hellenic Naval Academy, founded in 1845, was moved to its present headquarters in 1905 with funding derived from the Egyptian Pantazis Vassanis. The private school Athens College was founded in 1926 through the generosity of Egyptians including Emmanuel Benakis and Alexandros Choremis. The Panteion University was founded in 1932 with the support of Alexandros Pantos and Georgios Frangoudis.

As representatives of the Enlightenment, benefactors promoted its ideals with their own distinctive set of social tools: they financed the founding of schools which broadened Neo-Hellenic thought and helped their fellow Greeks become part of western European civilisation. They sent their children to European schools, universities and institutions of higher learning, while at the same time exhibiting an interest in establishing schools which would provide girls with the type of skills which could lead to employment outside the home. Panagis Charokopos, who founded the Charokopeios Professional School, is a case in point.¹⁰ Educational and occupational opportunities for girls became a particular concern for the Egyptian Greeks. From 1892 onwards, many of them decided to send their daughters to Athens, to study as boarders at the Arsakeion School, after which they would be able to work as teachers in the Greek community schools of Egypt and the wider diaspora. It is worth noting that the Arsakeion Schools of Psychiko, first established in 1836, were funded by the benefactor Apostolos Arsakis, who was active in Romania. At these institutions, Egyptian girls studied alongside expatriate Greeks from places as far afield as Russia, Germany, Italy, Constantinople, Kydonies, Bucharest, Smyrna, Trieste, Odessa, and even New York.¹¹

Offering girls educational and occupational opportunities contributed to the strengthening of their national identity and helped them adapt to new social realities. It was within this frame of mind that Egyptian benefactors financed educational institutions and the

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Society for the Promotion of Education. They founded schools, universities, scientific associations, philological societies and later, when new economic conditions brought about social changes, they financed the creation of technical and professional schools, which provided specific, employment-oriented education.

Alongside education, benefactors expressed a lively interest in the health sector and systematically financed the founding of hospitals. They were conscious that education and health, in other words intellectual ability and a healthy human existence, constituted the main prerequisites for the new world order they and their social class wished to create. From this perspective, support of the education and health sectors constituted essential elements of modernity. One of the earliest acts of benefaction towards the health sector is provided by the activity of Markos Porfyropoulos, a native of Cyprus who lived in Romania. In his will dated 16 February 1754, he provided funds for the *spitalia* (hospitals), and in particular the leper hospital, of the Ottoman-ruled island of Chios.¹²

It is evident that benefactors were aware that the existence of well-run hospitals provided an essential service for the wider population, which they viewed as the source of the wealth of all nations.¹³ This is the reason why benefactors supported public service institutions such as hospitals, portable medical aid units, radiology clinics, pharmacies, pharmaceutical companies, etc. Enlightenment thought contributed to the ideology of benefaction by emphasising the importance of community education and the provision of public health care. In practice, the realisation of both of these aims was facilitated by the economic prosperity which characterised the middle period of Egyptian Hellenism.

The role of benefaction can be seen as historically progressive, as it reflects the doctrine of the Enlightenment expressed by the ascendant bourgeoisie. In parallel, its ideology was developed as verbal-representational and factual-material discourse at the tension point where the limitations and weaknesses of the small national centre stressed the strategic superiority of personality within a transnational multicultural environment. In this sense, the benefactor embodies the organic intellectual par excellence, functioning within the context of a changing world as individual carrier of intercultural connections and references.