

ANASTASIA TSAPANIDOU works as Special Teaching Staff in the Department of Greek Philology at the Democritus University of Thrace, where she teaches Modern Greek and Comparative Literature. She is also a member of the academic committee at the Hans & Niki Eideneier Laboratory in the same department, and director of two of its research projects on Byzantine Vernacular Literature and Early Modern Greek Literature. She graduated from the Department of Philology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, specialising in Modern Greek Literature, where she also completed her postgraduate thesis and doctoral dissertation and a five-year postdoctoral research programme. In addition, she has taken courses in Modern Greek Literature at the Institut Néo-hellénique de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne (ex Paris IV), in Translation in the Department of Foreign Languages, Translation & Interpreting at the Ionian University, and in Greek Palaeography at the National Bank of Greece Cultural Foundation. Her research interests mainly focus on the literary output of co-ethnic Greeks in the East from Ottoman times to the mid-20th century, the history of Modern Greek literature, the history of ideas of modern Hellenism, and on special issues in literary representation.

“There come times when coincidences - whims of fate, perhaps - happen to change your plans and lead you to new paths. Can a library ever have a hand in such things? Yes, it can, when it has a long and singular past, and is supported by inspired people who, in some magical way, persuade you to believe in them and their vision. I first met Abidin some years ago, and the result of our acquaintance would no doubt have lain tucked away in a drawer for quite some time. Everything changed when I received the extremely tempting offer to take part in a multicultural “Conversation”, via which the Hafız Ahmed Ağa Library aspired to fill its rooms with the whispers of people from times past, who reached their prime - as the library did - right where the East and West were being bridged. I am so grateful to Tarık Tüten who saw to me getting a ticket on this journey of the mind. It has turned out to be fascinating.”

Anastasia Tsapanidou

When Rhodes doesn’t inspire poetry

Abidin Pasha and his Greek poems*

Dedicated to Prof. Alexis Politis

1. The first Greek poems of a peripatetic Ottoman official

From 1873 onwards, the *Neologos* (Νεολόγος), one of the leading Greek newspapers circulating in Constantinople in the second half of the 19th century, began to host Greek poems written by Abidin Dino, a polyglot Albanian official in the Ottoman administration. Abidin had gained a fluent command of Greek by attending a Greek school in his native Preveza, and possibly also the famed Zosimaia School in Ioannina.¹ At the time he sent his first Greek poem – “The Ark of Smyrna” – to the *Neologos*, he was a thirty-year-old *Bey*, serving Sultan Abdülaziz as the governor (mutasarrıf) of Raideostos (Tekirdağ). As originally published (20.3/1.4.1873),² “The Ark” ran to 19 quatrains. It was an elegy inspired by a tragic accident in Smyrna, when the Ark, a coffee house built on wooden piles in the sea, collapsed under the weight of a crowd that had gathered to watch an acrobatic show. Both on account of the poem’s length and a desire to formally present it, the *Neologos* devoted a special second-page feuilleton to it, with a lengthy introduction praising the “well-educated”, “ingenious”, “capable” and “enlightened” “Ottoman fellow-citizen”, who had received a “liberal education”. The preamble notes his excellent knowledge of Greek and outstanding literary and poetic gifts, praising the poem itself and pointing out the main features of its structure and contents.

The introductory note ends with a broader political comment placing emphasis on the promotion of honest co-existence and collaboration between the ethnic groups living together in the Orient: Abidin’s Greek poems are a reminder that when one nation uses the language of another it cohabits with, there are ever more signs that the races living in the Orient will achieve greater rapprochement and brotherhood, which is the desideratum of everyone animated by kind-hearted and forward-looking sentiments. At the end of the feuilleton, this political comment by the *Neologos* is reinforced via literature, with the addition of a seven-stanza poem by a contributor to the paper inspired by the elegy on “The Ark”. Its lines praise Abidin as a “citizen”, “human” and “brother of the world”, for having the rare sensitivity to be moved by human misfortune irrespective of which race, nation or place it is experienced by. It is worth noting the deliberate vagueness of both calls for co-operation: neither makes it clear whether Abidin is to be seen as a representative of the sovereign

* Translated from Greek in collaboration with Dr. Ben Petre.

1 On Abidin’s roots, family and studies, see Nuri Şimşekler, “Devlet Adamı ve Mesnevî Şârihi Abidin Paşa. Hayatı - İdareciliği - Eserleri”, *Selçuk Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Edebiyat Dergisi* 9-10 (1994-1995) 117-118; Nikos Stylos, *Ο πρεβεζάνος Αμπεντίν πασάς Ντίνος, τα ελληνικά του ποιήματα και οι Ντιναίοι*, Ioannis Kouzas (ed.), Mülheim a.d.R [an der Ruhr (Germany)], 2014, p. 7-10, 61-78 (many thanks to doctoral candidate Maria Bolla for providing me with this hard-to-come-by publication). On Abidin’s Greek studies, according to Greek bibliography in his own time, see, e.g., *Ημερολόγιον της εφημερ. Αμάλθειας του έτους 1894*, Smyrna, 1893, p. ʒ88. “Η δολοφονία του Αμπεντίν”, *Εμπρός* newspaper (Athens), 29.4.1906; *Η φωνή της Ηπείρου* newspaper (Athens), 5.5.1906.

2 *Νεολόγος*, 1/13.2.1873. The newspaper uses a dual dating system, following the Old and the New [Gregorian] Calendar. Greek newspapers referred to here with a single date use the Old Calendar.

Ottoman nation³ or of the Albanian nation, whose cooperation the Greeks of the time anticipated.⁴ In both this and subsequent publications of Greek poems by Abidin, the newspaper avoids falling into the trap of making such clarifications; it only refers to him in the official capacity he holds as an Ottoman official at the time, without any reference to his Albanian roots.

What follows is a prose translation of the first four stanzas of “The Ark” along with the final one, as the prime examples of Abidin’s first known attempt at poetic expression in the Greek language:

The Ark of Smyrna

*Oh sea, what is your woe, why are you embittered?
Your waves do not laugh, your breast is cold;
Is all of you motionless, pallid and enshrouded?
Or has a mother’s angry shout embittered your heart?*

*You have become a dismal grave, sowing grief and fire,
And though you are the sea, you too will weep;
A mother’s cold tears will rend your heart,
You will see miserable little eyes reduced to fountains.*

*Oh sea, you should not have been bathed in blood,
It was never, ever fitting for you to become such a tomb;
Before you murdered them, you should have cast a glance,
And thought of the victims, thought of the crime.*

*Sorrowful Smyrna will condemn you,
Mourning bells on high will reproach you,
Harsh longing and cries will subjugate you;
The stars saw the wrongdoing and will tell of it.
[...]
Smyrna, you are not my homeland, but I pain for you,
In a short time you greatly honoured me, oh friend,
Though my destiny was to be appointed far away,
I shall pain for you in my heart, praise you with my lips.*

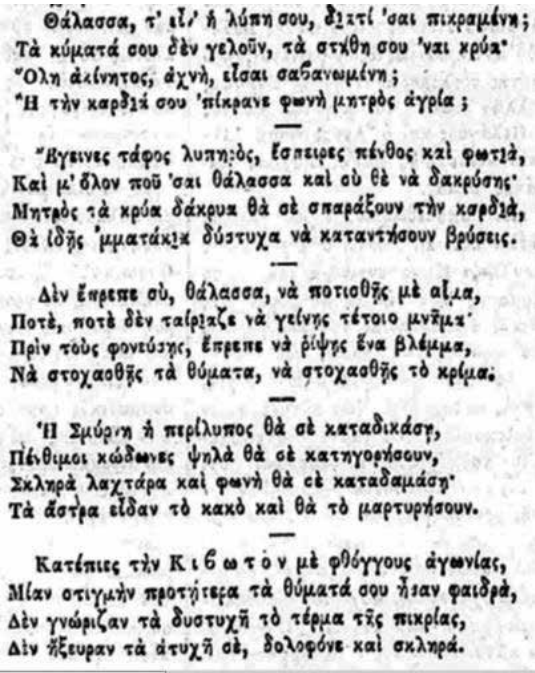


Figure 1: “The Arc of Smyrna” (an excerpt)
Neologos Newspaper, Constantinople, 20.3/1.4.1873,
(The Hellenic Parliament Library)

loses conciseness, some individual meanings are repeated, and at certain points the semantic sequencing of stanzas is so loose that they could be reordered. Later on, when Abidin had matured as a poet, he saw the imperfections in both “The Ark” and subsequent poems, and made some revisions before collecting them in a slim volume entitled *Poems*,⁶ which he published at the Neologos Press in 1888.⁷ The second feature of folk songs not adopted by Abidin was the density and drama gained by their poetic diction in relying on the use of verbs rather than adjectives. By contrast, both “The Ark” and Abidin’s subsequent poems brim with the repeated use of particular adjectives and their synonyms – excess baggage they are not freed of even when gathered in the poetry collection in 1888; in this instance, the Greek-educated poet clearly bypassed his folk song influences and leapt wholeheartedly onto the literary bandwagon of Romanticism, which the majority of 19th century Greek poets had joined quite some time earlier, so as to effusively express poetic emotion in elevated tones, and often in a needlessly pompous manner.

While continuing to serve as mutasarrıf at Tekirdağ, Abidin sent a second poem to the *Neologos*, published on 23.6/5.7.1873; the newspaper accompanied it with a reminder to its readers that it had recently hosted another “ingenious and emotionally replete” poem by “the noble, muse-nurtured governor of Raidestos”. This new poem is again written in deeply plaintive tones, though now born

3 To say nothing of whether Abidin was affiliated with the more progressive part of the Ottoman community favoured by the *Neologos*. In a letter composed in French (14.2.1972) and published in translation by P. Kypriotis, Abidin’s grandson of the same name speculated that he had collaborated in secret with the progressive author Namık Kemal; see Platonas Kypriotis, “Αμπεντίν Πασάς Νομάρχης του Αρχιπελάγους”, *Δωδεκανησιακά Χρονικά* 2 (1974) 141-179.
4 On how Greek-Albanian relations were cultivated and fluctuated in the 19th century, see, e.g., Ilias G. Skoulidas, *Οι σχέσεις Ελλήνων και Αλβανών κατά τον 19^ο αι.: πολιτικές επιδιώξεις και θεωρήσεις (1875-1897)*, unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Ioannina - Department of History and Archaeology, 2001.

5 A later letter from Abidin to the Constantinople-based Greek poet Ch. Samartsidis reveals that he also had a fluent command of the official written language known as “Katharevousa”, used by sufficiently educated Greeks of the time (see *Νεολόγου Εβδομαδιαία Επιθεώρησης* 3.3 (21.11.1893) 47).
6 In this instance, the revised form of the “Ark” moves the fourth stanza to sixth position, the tenth and twelfth are deleted, and the ninth stanza swaps places with the eleventh.
7 *Ποιήματα* συντεθέντα υπό Αμπετίν πασά Ντίνου, νομάρχου Αγκύρας [*Poems* composed by Abidin Pasha Dino, Governor of Ankara], Constantinople, The Neologos Press, 1888.

of the profound personal pain felt by a lover far removed from his beloved, as forewarned by the title “The Soul-suffering Lover”. Once again, this poem succumbs to the bombastic diction of 19th century Greek Romantic poetry, rendering the context of lovers’ torment with overabundant lyrical effusion and rhetoric – the painful loss of blissful love, the unanswered questions tormenting the lover, his profound melancholy and his flirt with the spectre of death. As a result, when incorporated into Abidin’s collected *Poems* (1888), it is halved in length: of the twenty originally published stanzas, only ten of the best in terms of form and content are retained. The first five given below will more than suffice for readers to grasp how Abidin chose to depict the profound pain of an enamoured soul in verse:

The Soul-suffering Lover

*Are our sadness, separation, passions, pains
A cup of joy, a gift of happiness?
Or are the fiery, gut-wrenching sighs of the heart
Perhaps precursors of another bliss?*

*Are you mourning too, my beloved, as I am alone,
Or is a smile of joy blossoming on your lips?
Do your eyes seek me? Are they filled with tears,
Or is your dreamy gaze looking on another?*

*The Sun and Moon have long sought you, my beloved,
They are the palms of the sky and want to snatch you away.
But my many sighs hide you, so they do not see you,
My sighs become thick clouds to block their way.*

*Oh! How – wretched me – I envy even my heart,
The breeze and anything that can draw near you.
Oh! I even envy the earth wherever you tread,
The sky that sent you, lest it snatch you away again.*

*Yes, I envy my heart, though it may be broken.
Yes, I envy my heart, though it drips blood.
It has never separated from you, it stays ever with you;
It sees and feels your sad gaze.*

[...]

2. Abidin and the Greek intellectuals

Although Abidin’s next move had nothing to do with writing Greek poems, it does reveal an implicit link between him and the world of Greek publishing in the Ottoman capital, which may call for further investigation. In 1875, by which time he had already spent two years serving as the first imperial commissioner of the Constantinople Bourse, and had published a concise Ottoman study on its operation,⁸ he placed the Greek translation of the French popular novel *Les Démons de la mer* (*The Demons of the Sea*) by Henry de Kock (1891-1892) “under his noble protection and support”, according to the cover inscription on the Greek edition.⁹ It is not known whether his “protection” and “support” extended beyond the fact that he bought an impressive 200 copies of the translated novel.¹⁰ At any rate, the driving force behind the publication in question, Ippokratis Margaritis,¹¹ dedicated it to Abidin, describing him as a “true Epirot and patron of the Muses”.¹² Five years later, when Abidin had become a pasha and was in his last days at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Margaritis honoured him once more by including a highly laudatory biography of him in the fortnightly magazine he was publishing at the time.¹³

The next known poem by Abidin is linked to his brief tenure in the vilayet of Thessaloniki, again in the capacity of governor general. In his response to the authorities and crowd that hastened to welcome him on his arrival in the city (16.3.1880), he stated how moved he was to hear the Metropolitan address him in Greek, and how happy he felt every time he heard his “mother” tongue, which he had been deprived the sound of during his previous tenure at Sivas.¹⁴ Some days later, during a tour of the area in his charge, being in Veria (Karaferye/Karaferya), he came across the poem “Everything Prays”, recently composed by the popular 19th-century Greek Romantic poet Achilleas Paraschos (1838-1895).¹⁵ Inspired by it, within ten minutes he had dashed off his own version, as the *Ermis* newspaper in Thessaloniki informs us (23.5.1880), publishing it forthwith as part of its coverage of the new vali’s tour. Roughly twenty days later, when Abidin had already assumed office as minister of foreign affairs,¹⁶ the poem also appeared in the *Neologos*,¹⁷ and was subsequently included in the published *Poems*. The newspaper notes that Abidin was in a fit of melancholy when

8 The work in question is *Konsolidenin hava oyunlariyla sâir muamelât hakkında müstakrazât-ı maliyyeye dâir risaledir* (1874), republished in Modern Turkish as: Abidin paşa, *Borsa Risalesi: Hava Oyunları*, Celali Yılmaz (ed.), İstanbul, VakıfBank Kültür Yayınları, 2018 (first edition: *Hava oyunları*. Osmanlı borsasında finansal işlemler, 2011).

9 Henri de Kock, *Οι δαίμονες της θαλάσσης ή οι Άγγλοι πειραταί*, Constantinople, 1875.

10 From the book’s List of Subscribers.

11 The French novel was rendered by three different translators and published in three small volumes produced at three different presses. Of the three individuals appearing on each cover as supervising editors, Ippokratis Margaritis is the only one common to all three.

12 Margaritis’ dedicatory preface to Abidin extends over two specially decorated pages at the beginning of the first volume, and is dated 21.5.1875.

13 “Η Α. Εξοχότης ο επί των Εξωτερικών υπουργός Αβεδδίν πασσάς”, *Ο Γραφικός Κόσμος* (Constantinople) 12 (15.8.1880) 365-368. Unfortunately for Abidin, by the time the magazine circulated he had already been relieved of his ministerial post; according to a later piece in the *Νεολόγος* (2/14.1.1881), he was dismissed on 31.7/12.8.1880.

14 *Ερμής* newspaper (Thessaloniki), 18.3.1880.

15 The poem by Paraschos had been written in Constantinople on 17.4.1880 and published in the *Νεολόγος* on 6/18.5.1880.

16 The *Ερμής* announced his appointment as last-minute news on 23rd May 1880 (Old Calendar).

17 *Νεολόγος*, 5/17.6.1880. Information on this second publication of the poem was kindly provided by Maria Bolla, who is close to completing her doctoral dissertation on the *Νεολόγος* newspaper.

under the inspiration of Paraschos; in common with the *Ermis*, the *Neologos* looks on Greek as being the poet’s mother tongue, pithily remarking that: “we publish the poem as proof that nature never abandons its rights, and everywhere and forever, the sighs of the soul escape a man’s lips in his true and real mother tongue, whatever his national or political sentiments may be”.

The central idea running through the Paraschos poem is that all works of nature and all human beings, good or evil, pray to God; whatever constitutes nature or a human act is also, in its own way, a prayer to God, and the only one who cannot make a prayer is a person who does not believe in God. At the end of his poem, Paraschos wonders whether there is any hope that even unbelievers can be saved, via the prayers others offer up for their salvation. For his part, in the title of his own poem Abidin changes Paraschos’ certainty that “everything prays” into doubt (“whether everything prays”); in the opening stanzas he wonders whether a heart in unbearable pain over the death of a woman it has loved can pray, and in the closing ones whether God will allow the human beings who have worshipped him to turn to dust.¹⁸ Below are the intervening stanzas, where the poet converses with his departed beloved and asks her to pray:

Whether Everything Prays
[...]
*Pray, angel friend, angels do not die.
Pray to the heavens for my life to end.
Why, oh God, should souls be bound to bodies?
And why should my breath burn me like hell on earth?*

*Was the final hour a prayer to death,
When you bade the world farewell with a smile?
When you said for the final time “I am dying now,
But do not weep for me, think of me as alive”?*

*Who would not cry, my friend? Then what is the point of tears?
Why was the very blood in the heart created?
As I bid you farewell on the grave’s edge,
Is happiness possible anymore, oh God?*

*“It is true”, you would say to me, oh hapless friend,
When you still shone in the darkness of life,
“The time for my lips to be closed draws near,
And then patience is needed, not snapping of the heart!”*

*Virgin, bright angel, hope of another life,
I feel that humans live in torpor;
In the ecstasies of the soul I always saw you alive.
Death too is life, even if it is thought to be darkness.*¹⁹
[...]

18 In early published versions, this poem by Abidin extends over nine verses. Here again, they are reduced in number when included in the 1880 collected *Poems* (the seventh verse is removed, possibly because the meaning is out of temporal sequence with the following one). Above are verses 3-8 of the poem in its original form, i.e. including the subsequently removed verse.

19 In the 1888 collected edition, the last line is altered as follows: *death is light, even if it is thought to be darkness*.

Shortly after the intellectual encounter between the two poets, an in-person meeting between them was to take place in Constantinople, following an invitation made by Abidin in his capacity as minister of Foreign Affairs. According to some sources, Paraschos accepted the offer of hospitality in the Ottoman capital, much to Abidin’s delight.²⁰ Another version of events claims that Paraschos was already in Constantinople when he received the invitation to meet Abidin at his office, which he agreed to with great reluctance; the Greek ambassador conveying the message to Paraschos had to visit him twice to persuade him to accede to the Ottoman minister’s request; and when the Greek poet finally stood abashed before him, he was amazed to hear Abidin say:

I regard myself as fortunate to have the honour of meeting you in person. For many years I have numbered amongst your most ardent admirers. Your poems are full of feeling and emotion; they have been sustenance and pleasure for me, and even now, when I read your works in times of leisure, I often feel myself being reborn.

According to the same account, on seeing Paraschos taken aback at his words, Abidin produced in evidence a “magnificent” album, in which he had copied out many of his poems by hand. The conversation then turned to other matters, with Abidin striving to lard his speech with lines by Paraschos until, eventually, he repeatedly asked the Greek poet whether there was any way he could be of use to him. Paraschos then asked for a favour which he knew from the outset would be very difficult to grant – two years after it had gone out, could the minister see to the relighting of a sanctuary lamp in a ruined monument in Constantinople, where the last emperor of Byzantium was believed to lie buried?²¹ The account ends by saying that the minister promised to do so, but of course never kept his word.²²

Whichever version of the story we believe, the in-person meeting between Abidin and Paraschos and the composition of “Whether Everything Prays” led several of his Greek biographers to overemphasize the influence exerted on him by his Greek colleague. Yet given that we have no knowledge of what other Greek poetry Abidin read, it would be fairer to see him as someone who chose to compose poetry in the Greek language as inspired by the Romantic literary tradition; by the late 19th century this was already considered somewhat passé,²³ but was still maintained by some advocates of it, with Achilleas Paraschos as its leading light. In other words, intense lyricism and nostalgia, melancholy and grief, sighs and a suicidal disposition remained the standard Romantic elements attracting Abidin in his Greek poems, at a time when the majority of his Greek literary colleagues had gone in search of new modes of expression, having derisively turned their backs on Romanticism.

20 See the Athenian newspapers *Εμπρός*, 29.4.1906 and *Φωνή της Ηπείρου*, 5.5.1906.

21 This tradition is referred to in many 19th-century Greek sources, and is linked to the Vefa Kilise Camii quarter in the Fatih area of Istanbul.

22 Ioannis M. Damvergis, “Πόθος ποιητού (ιστορικόν ανέκδοτον)”, *Εβδομάς* 3 (19.1.1891) 1-2.

23 Romanticism reached its peak in Greek literature mainly over the half century from 1830 to 1880.

3. The Archipelago in Abidin's mind. Chios

In insisting on the idiom he had learned to use from the outset, Abidin took to verse once more to lament the terrible earthquake that struck Chios on 3rd April 1881, resulting in over 7,500 fatalities.²⁴ The new poem was completed on 16.4.1881 and dispatched to the *Neologos* from Adana, where its composer had yet again assumed office as governor general. The newspaper published it on 28.4/10.5.1888, reiterating its view of the significant fact that the poem was written in Greek: it was in the language that the former minister of Foreign Affairs had been raised and educated in – the language always used to express the pain felt in his soul, as the paper comments. Only things were not quite that way. The *Neologos* was either unaware of or disregarded the fact that when Abidin had become actively involved in settling Albanian national issues outstanding after the Congress of Berlin (1878),²⁵ he had had no hesitation in communicating what was then his national pain in the Albanian language. He had taken pains to do so outside Ottoman territory (possibly for peace of mind), in the now long-forgotten weekly newspaper *Voice of Albania. Albanian Rights Newspaper* [*Η φωνή της Αλβανίας. Εφημερίς των αλβανικών δικαιωμάτων*],²⁶ published in Athens from 1879 to 1880.²⁷

The first published version of “The Destruction of Chios” runs to 17 quatrains, divided into four thematic sections. The poet begins by addressing Chios, describing how the island was destroyed and blaming it for drowning its children (stanzas 1-6). Chios reacts on hearing that it is a filicide and begs the sea to drown it, being unable to bear the thought of its own destruction (stanzas 7-8). The poet then turns to the earthquake, and once more laments the death it has caused (stanzas 9-12). He ends by making successive requests: to the Muse not to let him continue his description of the disaster (stanza 13); to merciful God to take care of Chios and its orphans (stanzas 14-16); and to compassionate people to assist those same orphans (stanza 17). Yet again, the poem was to be abridged when included in the 1888 collection; the fifth verse was removed, being a superfluous flashback to scenes of the happy life on Chios before the earthquake, as was the closing verse calling for a fundraising collection, which only made sense when first published. Below is a translation of stanzas 1-3, 6-7 and 13 from the original publication in the *Neologos*, as the finest excerpts from the

24 On the enormous losses suffered by Chios in terms of its workforce and infrastructure, see, e.g., *Βυζαντίς* newspaper (Constantinople), 5.4.1881 and 8.4.1881. See also the dispatches sent from Chios by K. N. Papamichalopoulos, son of the Greek minister of Foreign Affairs, who hurried to the island after the earthquake; having initially appeared in the Athenian newspaper *Εφημερίς*, they were published immediately thereafter as a volume entitled *Εκ των ερειπίων της Χίου. Ημερολόγιον*, Athens, 1881.

25 Via his participation in the Greek-Turkish committee on settling the borders of Epirus and Thessaly and on the founding of the Albanian League, which succeeded in having the borders settled to the advantage of Albanian interests. See, e.g., Kypriotis, 145-148; Stylos, 10-16. In general terms, 19th century Greek intellectuals living in the free Greek state (e.g., Tryphon Evangelidis, Georgios Tsokopoulos, Neoklis Kazazis) took a dim view of the developments set in chain by Abidin and the Albanian League. A different line was taken by Pavlos Karolidis, a historian of Cappadocian descent, who had lived within the Ottoman Empire for much of his life and was personally acquainted with Abidin (see his study *Σύγχρονος ιστορία των Ελλήνων και των λοιπών λαών της Ανατολής από 1821 μέχρι 1921*, vol. 7, Athens, 1929, p. 259-260).

26 On 22.12.1879 Abidin published a poem in Albanian without a Greek translation, and another on 1.3.1880 with its Greek translation, which ends with the phrase: “Do not, oh do not, my virgins [i.e. of Albania] / I am Shqipëri [i.e. Albania], / Do not weep black tears, / For I will fight against Turkey, / Otherwise from my bones, / The new freedom shall not rise” (Stylos, 28-30).

27 For information on the content and ideological trends in this particular newspaper see *Εγκυκλοπαίδεια του ελληνικού Τύπου 1784-1974*, L. Droulia - G. Koutsopanagou (ed.), vol. 4, Athens, Modern Greek Research Institute - National Hellenic Research Foundation, 2008, p. 292-293.

poem. In the closing stanza, major revisions made by Abidin before the 1888 edition are given in normal type either side of a forward slash, as a sample of how he corrected himself later on, once freed of the haste to record his poetic sentiment in the heat of the moment.

The Destruction of Chios

*Chios, are you dead or alive? Chios is in the throes of death;
surrounded by tears rather than the cool of May,
encircled by death painful and cold,
unadorned, as it once was, by the shining of the sun.*

*How does death not pity so many shattered bodies?
how does it not pity motherless orphan children?
how does it not pity sighs and crossed arms?
how does it not hear cries and lamentation in the air?*

*My devastated island, island of such grace!
how can you awaken? To see what? Your terrible convulsions
levelled you, emptied you, pride of the sea
and shake your heart to seize your life.*

[...]

*You will see ships in your harbour and you will ask,
“Which wind brought them to me?”
but if you look on your breast, you will take fright,
then you will say “Wretched me! I have smothered my children!”*

*I! compassionate mother, have I become a filicide?
to kill my beloved children?
oh! What curse is this on me? What darkened year?
drown me, friendly sea, I have no wish to escape.*

[...]

*Cease, my terrible/mournful muse, I can no longer bear
to describe victims, abandoned bodies.*

*Why should I recall such a deathly scene/a bitter and painful scene
to the memory of so many relatives, to bloodied/tearful eyes?*

4. Poems, Constantinople 1888, Rhodes 1894

Abidin’s last poem, published in the *Neologos* (24.8/5.9.1885) before being included in the first edition of the *Poems* (1888), is “The Sorrowful Man”, running to seven quatrains. It is the monologue of someone who nostalgically recalls the happy times he spent with his beloved in the past, and who is in deep pain over remaining far from her against his will. In other words, it revisits the motif lamenting the unwanted separation of a love couple he had used earlier in “The Soul-suffering Lover”. In the 1888 version Abidin makes an interesting additional step: he mentally pairs the sad male lover’s voice heard in “The Sorrowful Man” with a corresponding female one, also lending space for it to be heard. “The Sorrowful Woman” follows on from the “Sorrowful Man”, with its six quatrains presenting the monologue of a woman who has not seen her beloved in five years, and who lives in lamentation, agonizing over whether he has already died. Let us now see the facing stanzas at the beginning and end of the two poems, in the form assumed in the 1888 edition (stanza numbers are in brackets).

The Sorrowful Man		The Sorrowful Woman	
Oh, the heartbes, the sighs oh, my bitter thoughts Ever burn my heart without a moment’s respite.	(1)	You gave still not written to me migratory bird, Who knows where you might be, where you are wasted away.	(1)
How much I hurt, I mourn, how fruitlessly I seek you, Much-suffering love, I know I shall see you no more.	(2)	Or has cruel death cut your thread And have you a slab as a shroud and a tomb as a bed?	(2)
I do not know if death Will leave me, to be inflamed. It leaves me in foreign lands To burn in your pain.	(6)	Oh! I the orphan am waiting to hear your name. Oh! Unhappy me, I hope to find myself near you.	(5)
Where did you sweet days go joys and laughter and glances And now have left me to torments and fires?	(7)	The day passes with sobs, the night with pains, My God, I am always alone, five years on my own.	(6)



Figure 2: Poems, 1st Edition, inside cover, Neologos Press, Constantinople, 1888, (National Library of Greece).

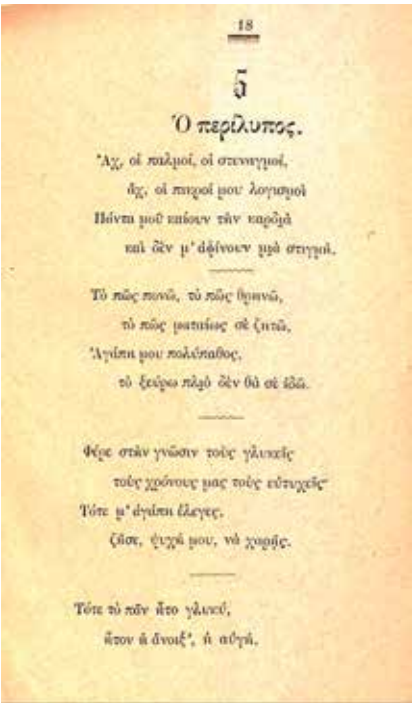


Figure 3: “The Sorrowful Man” (an excerpt), Poems, 2nd Edition, Provincial Press of Rhodes, 1894, (Koraes Public Library, Chios).



Figure 4: Poems, 2nd Edition, inside cover, Provincial Press of Rhodes, 1894, (Koraes Public Library, Chios).



Figure 5: “The Exile” (an excerpt) Poems, 2nd Edition, Provincial Press of Rhodes, 1894, (Koraes Public Library, Chios).

When they first appeared, most of the above poems acquired a provisional title from their publication in the *Neologos*. This was finalised (with the addition of “The Sorrowful Woman”) when forming part of the collected *Poems*, published by the Neologos Press in Constantinople when Abidin was governor general of Ankara. A slim volume, it obtained a circulation license from the Ottoman Ministry of Public Education on 8 Safer 1306, i.e. 2/14.10.1888, running to just 21 pages octet and priced at two silver kuruş.²⁸ According to a note on the last page, publication of the poems was to be continued in “a special forthcoming issue”. This new “issue” did indeed appear, though six whole years later, in 1894. In that instance it was published by the Provincial Press of Rhodes, capital of the vilayet of the Archipelago, where Abidin had recently assumed office as governor general – formally from mid-December 1893, though in practice after mid-January 1894.²⁹

On the cover, the new publication misleadingly describes itself as a reissue (“*Poems* [...] published a second time”), in all probability so as to avoid the business of obtaining a new circulation license from the Ministry of Public Education (the initial one from 1888 was reused). As a matter of fact, it retains the same pagination for the six poems as in the first edition, organized in the same order, but then adds four new ones. Running to 33 pages,³⁰ it is thus noticeably expanded. The price increased to 3.5 kuruş, with the proceeds being “graciously donated by the most excellent poet” to the Provincial Press, according to a note to that effect on the inside front cover.

The new poems added to this second edition are “Maiden in Love”, “Memories” with an “Elegy” written as a sequel, and “The Exile”. In all but the last poem, Abidin abandons his favoured division of poetic meaning into quatrains, and spreads it uniformly across the entire poem, only ensuring that his fifteen-syllable lines are in rhyming couplets. The distressed figure of the “sorrowful” young woman reappears in “Maiden in Love” (52 lines). She is now gazing intently out to sea, wracked by mourning, waiting in vain for the ship that will bring her beloved back.

*She searches for a ship to see on the boundless swell,
she spies no ship but a gaping tomb,
she sees the sun red, like the blood of the heart,
sinking into the sea, regally, calmly.
Her motionless eye sheds blood and tear
sadness overwhelms her pale face.
Her mind soars like an eagle, crosses the sea;
desire has laid her low, she has little hope.
She runs, seeks, always seeks her friend in pain
and curses life, separation, time.*

(lines 3-12)

28 Information from the digital copy of the edition provided to me by the National Library of Greece.
29 *Stamboul* newspaper, 16.12.1893. On Abidin's delayed arrival in Rhodes, see the information published in *Stamboul* on 19.12.1893, 27.12.1893, 5.1.1894 and 17.1.1894.
30 Warm thanks to the Koraes Public Library, Chios, and especially to Mr. K. Zafeiris and supervisor Ms. Anna Chaziri, for providing me with a digital copy of the second edition of the *Poems*.

While the maiden is in this dire plight, a sea nymph appears before her; she explains that she is the soul of the maiden's long-dead sister, and invites her to leave the terrestrial world, where love has consumed her, and follow her into the immaterial world of souls. The maiden first asks what has become of her beloved, and when her sister's soul confirms that he has died, she begs God to free her of her body so that her soul can meet the man she loved on earth in heaven; God grants her the wish:

*God took pity on her, she falls dead.
Her soul leaves like a bird, only the body remains.*

(lines 51-52)

In the very next poem, “Memories” (52+2 lines), a “sorrowful” lover speaks to his heart, sighing over its sorry state, having lost its past happiness and being constantly steeped in grief.

*You have a sky, my heart, but without stars;
you have an unhealing wound no knives have seen;
you have your tempests, you too have winters,
you have the poundings of separation, bitter struggles.
In times past, my heart, you had a radiant sun;
you had ardent glances, you had the whole world.
Alas! you have now grown like a rough sea,
having your bitterness as life and abysses as a tomb!
Alas! How have you now grown like a reed in the wind,
with the north wind of pain bending you night and day;
alas! now you have grown like a sad moon,
with night your partner and grief your light!
Oh! What sorrow, what a burning candle in my heart,
what endless visceral pain!*

(lines 5-18)

Thereafter, the distraught lover addresses time, which has left him so many sweet memories of the past, and asks it what has become of the woman he loved and whom he has never forgotten; the night wind always feels for him, but does not manage to cool him; the “sorrowful” one is now in Rhodes, which is stunningly beautiful and has all things good, but does not have his beloved. Since the only thing he now awaits is the moment when his tormented soul will depart its body, he wants to find time to bid farewell to “the love of his youth”, so he dedicates an elegy born of his soul to her. This he tells her in the last two lines, which act independently, as a brief introductory explanation to the immediately ensuing “Elegy”.

Despite maintaining integrity of meaning, this shorter poem (38 lines) serves as a continuation or extension of the previous one, and thus is not numbered separately in Abidin's collection.³¹ The tormented lover now speaks solely to his departed beloved, complaining to her that the sun and moon will never again encounter a creature like her, and that she herself will be unable to come to the earth and see how she is being mourned not only by his own burning breast, but also by her friends:

*Your friends will seek you, they will chant your youth,
they shall place flowers for you on your bitter grave.
They will say "Orphan friend, dead friend,
white flower of joy, asleep in the tomb,
how come you do not wake up, no longer come to ask for us,
why, as you left your youth, did you leave us too?
and instead of your white breast being adorned with lilies,
it has the earth as a blanket and the dirges of the north wind?"*
(lines 23-30)

At the end of his "Elegy" the poet bids farewell to his eternal beloved, in the hope that he will meet her once more in heaven, and obliquely reminds God that that is what should happen to the souls of human beings who have loved each other.

Lastly, in the "Exile"³² at the close of the collection, the poet returns to quatrain structure to address the wind, which is another migratory bird. When it passes over his homeland, he entreats it to ask whether he is remembered; if the wind sees sad eyes, it should kiss them (stanzas 1-2). He then recalls how happy life was in his youth, when he could never have imagined that separation, uprooting and endless heartache would follow (stanza 3). Now that he is far away from everyone, his mind races to where he met his beloved; he sighs at losing the love and friendship that were the stars in his life, and also because he has not reached the end of that life, even though no hope is now left to him (stanzas 4-6). There come moments when he thinks that the clouds and the sky reflect his own sadness at the separation he is experiencing, and he wonders in dismay whether his beloved is still alive or has now died (stanzas 7-8). At the end of his distraught confession (stanzas 9-10), the poet curses his plight and the separation that has only brought lamentation, and makes the decision to abandon life.

31 "Memories" is given as the eighth poem in the collection, followed by the unnumbered "Elegy". The volume of ten *Poems* ends with "The Exile", listed as number 9.

32 In the Greek title, Abidin opts for the word "Ξενιτευμένος", which has no precise equivalent in English (unlike Turkish, which has close equivalents in the words *gurbetçi*, *gurbetteki*). Of the closest English concepts "expatriate" and "exile(d)" the latter is used here, given that Greek folk songs on the pain of those forced to abandon their native land are usually termed "songs of exile" in English.

5. The Archipelago in Abidin's life. Rhodes

As the imaginary product of artistic material, a poem cannot by nature possibly acquire the value of a historical source on the actual biography of the person composing it. Yet when reading the entire series of Abidin's Greek poems, one is easily tempted to wonder whether the motif of separated lovers at the core of the narrative in seven out of his ten compositions is to be credited solely to the pose of Romanticism. "The Soul-suffering Lover", "The Sorrowful Man", "The Sorrowful Woman", "The Maiden in Love", "Memories", the "Elegy" and "The Exile" and half of "Whether Everything Prays" are full to the brim with the pain of a male or female lover who has long lost the object of their desire along with the joy of life. Could Abidin's incessant moves around the regions of the Ottoman state, on account of successive appointments to various administrative posts, have led to his forced removal from a great love? A letter in French (14.2.1974) from Abidin Dino, a grandson of the same name, informs us that his grandfather, like his great-grandfather, "only entered into one official marriage, but had many free relationships, from which he had illegitimate children in Greece".³³ It would thus appear that what first inspired Abidin to channel his sorrow into his love poems was compulsory distancing from one or more of his lovers. The only explicit indication of when this occurred or the minimum time such a distancing lasted is in the monologue in "The Sorrowful Woman", who has not seen her lover for five years. If we knew for certain that the poem in question was written shortly after "The Sorrowful Man" (*Neologos*, autumn 1885) rather than shortly before the first edition of the *Poems* (autumn 1888), then we could place the actual separation of "sorrowful" Abidin from his "sorrowful" beloved in the five years starting shortly after his dismissal from the post of minister of Foreign Affairs (31.7/12.8.1880), i.e. during the years when he was posted far away from Constantinople to serve as governor general at Adana, then Sivas (for a second time), and then Ankara.³⁴

In 1894, i.e. shortly after being appointed in Rhodes, and almost six years after the *Poems* were first published, Abidin suddenly remembered to dust them off, add four more exclusively on love and lamentation, and reissue them at the Rhodes Provincial Press. Could his move to Rhodes have spurred him to channel the pain of a romantic farewell into poetry once more? Probably yes, since on the basis of the information we have on the first publication of three out of the four new poems, they were composed between late 1893 and the spring of 1894. "Maiden in Love" would seem to have been written immediately after Abidin was posted to Rhodes, as it appeared in the *Yearbook (Imerologion)* published by the Smyrna-based newspaper *Amaltheia* for the year 1894, which managed to include three references to his new appointment: a) in a potted biography; b) beneath a picture

33 Kypriotis, 177. According to unconfirmed rumours from an aged resident of Constantinople with roots in Preveza, (Stylos, 104), one of Abidin pasha's illegitimate children was Kornelia Preveziotou (1878?-1964), a well-known Greek intellectual in Constantinople (at any rate, her surname does link her descent to Preveza, where Abidin originally hailed from).

34 In January 1881 he was appointed governor general of Adana, in September 1885 he moved to Sivas, and in July 1886 to Ankara (*Stamboul*, 24.1.1881, 1.10.1885 and 8.7.1886 respectively). During his tenure in Adana, Abidin helped the Greek historian Pavlos Karolidis carry out historical and folklore research at Comana in Cappadocia. In turn, the latter dedicated the resulting study to Abidin (*Τα Κόμανα και τα ερείπια αυτών*, Athens, 1882).

of him; c) beneath the poem itself.³⁵ In fact, the poem is accompanied by a footnote clarifying that Abidin “presented” it to the publishers of the *Yearbook*. The “presentation” may well have occurred during the brief stop Abidin made in his beloved Smyrna in mid-January 1894, to stay with Hassan Fahmi pasha, his opposite number there.³⁶ The next pair of poems added to the 1894 collection, “Memories” and the “Elegy” were definitely written in Rhodes, as indicated by line 33 in the first one: “Now I am in Rhodes, a charming island”. Besides, once composed they were sent to the *Neologos*, as was Abidin’s wont, and appeared on 23.3/4.4.1894, under the general title “Love Sighs”.

Yet once more, the *Neologos* recommends the two poems as fresh tokens of Abidin’s knowledge of Greek and literary skill: “These elegies contain true poetry, are imbued with great metrical grace and art, and provide new evidence of the sensitive and poetic heart of their eminent creator, who continues to offer up brilliant sacrifices to the Muses, despite the obstacles and natural distractions posed by his remaining serious occupations”, as the newspaper adds in introducing the pair of poems. Is the inference that one of the poet’s new obstacles and natural distractions is his appointment in Rhodes? What we do know is that with the title “Memories” given to the first poem, Abidin urges us to take its content as a personal confession, in which he explicitly implicates his new residence in Rhodes:

Now I am in Rhodes, a charming island,
island like a bride of dawn, decked in lilies.
The sun loved it, gifting its light to it,
which is why it smells sweet and blooms like a rose.
Every spring, winter, summer you think,
you think the island, a bird, like a white dove,
will fly, will soar, will rise into the air.
It has heavenly wings, the wind for a companion.
It has tender twigs, fragrant flowers;
it has all things good, it has all things, all,
but it lacks your sweet, heavenly gaze,
your sad face, your blood-filled tear.

(lines 33-44)

The poet makes a threefold attempt to assure us that Rhodes has “all things good”, excepting of course his beloved, who is absent. But perhaps we should not rush to believe him; his assertion looks more like subterfuge than a genuine establishment of fact, since “all things good” on Rhodes only relates to the wonderful nature there, not to its inhabited space, i.e. the place which he must first acclimatize to and which he will, essentially speaking, have to administer as governor.³⁷ It is said that

35 The picture shows Abidin from the waist up. It was drawn by the engraver Michail Nikolaidis, who worked with many publications in Smyrna and Constantinople.
36 *Stamboul* newspaper, 17.1.1894.
37 According to census data collected by Catholic delegates of the Sacred Congregation “de Propaganda Fide” in Rhodes, the population in Abidin’s time was estimated at between 30,000 and 35,000 (Daniela Fabrizio, “Politica e missione: Rodi (1897-1928)”, *Nuova Rivista Storica* 89.2 (2005) 350, 362, 415).

from the Ottoman conquest onwards, Rhodes was traditionally a place of exile for those who had to be removed from Constantinople after falling into disfavour with the sultan.³⁸ Historical sources relating to Abidin’s stay there confirm this; he really did experience Rhodes as an exile, and made desperate attempts to return to Constantinople.³⁹

This sense of exile is very vividly depicted quite early on in relation to Abidin’s lengthy stay on Rhodes, in his last know poem. Eloquently entitled “The Exile”, it rounds off the 1894 edition of the *Poems*. Yet again, the lover laments the fact that he is separated from his beloved and wonders what has become of her and whether she remembers him. Yet his unwanted exile is more emphatically highlighted here, as it now takes up the greater part of the poem, or six out of ten stanzas – the first four and the last two, given in translation below. Note that the second line of “The Exile” makes use of the “migratory bird”, a common motif in Greek folk song, also used earlier in the second line of the “Sorrowful Woman”:

The Exile

Wind[,] sweet-voiced bird, day and night you race
like me, you too are a migratory bird,
At times with the clouds you rain a tear of sadness,
At times you move languishing on the waves.

Whenever you pass by my homeland ask
if my friends remember me or if they’ve forgotten me,
If dirges are heard then do not ask,
if you see eyes in mourning, hurry and kiss them.

With the bitter waves I have an old friendship
they saw my first years, my first joy,
Who thought of separation, of so long in foreign parts,
who thought the tears in my heart would be endless.

I sit alone, doleful like a languishing tomb
without familiar faces, relatives, without joy and hope,
My eye sheds the bitter blood of my heart,
and my mind races far off, to the place I saw her.

[...]

38 Edouard Biliotti - L’Abbé Cottret, *L’île de Rhodes*, Rhodes, 1881, p. 355-358. Biliotti was of a Levantine family that had long served the British consulate in Rhodes. The work was simultaneously published in a two-volume Greek translation.
39 See Abdülhamit Kırmızı, “Abidin Pasha in Ottoman Rhodes (1894-1906)” in the present volume; also, Yasin Özdemir, “Writer Abidin Pasha, an Ottoman Governor of Rhodes”, *Turkish Culture in Rhodes and Kos*, Mustafa Kaymakçı - Cihan Özgün (ed.), Konya, Eğitim Yayınevi, 2020, p. 395-410 (Turkish version of the same study: “Rodos Osmanlı Valilerinden Yazar Abidin Paşa”, p. 364-376, in *Rodos ve İstanköy Türk Kültürü*, issued simultaneously with the English volume, remaining publication details as above).

*A curse on you, separation, a curse on you, fate
you have burned me to the core, my soul has caught fire,
And now I have taken the bitter decision
to abandon my doleful life altogether.*

*Separation is no joy, night has no sunbeams,
hell has no cool, and winter no lilies,
My heart does not have those flourishing
joys of early life, but always has lamentations.*

At the conclusion of “The Exile”, the poet makes the “bitter” decision to give up on his “doleful” life, without clarifying whether he has it in mind to commit suicide or to permanently abandon seeking the joy of life. In Abidin’s real life, things did of course work out differently (and at times not in the least romantically). From early on he had to roll up his sleeves, willingly or not, to carry out his duties in the Archipelago region. It has been written that during his term the construction of new public and private buildings increased (including his personal mansion, and the so-called “Konak” or island’s administrative headquarters), many drinking fountains were erected, most of the cemeteries were moved outside of the city and a community pharmacy was established.⁴⁰ From despatches on the first year of his tenure on Rhodes, published in the French-language newspaper *Stamboul* in Constantinople, among other things we learn that in February 1894 he decided to convert a building donated by a generous islander of Greek descent into a municipal hospital/poor house, and to that end sought an increase in the state aid received by the island, to be used in its entirety on the new foundation.⁴¹ At the same time he urged the islanders to take advantage of the soil’s suitability and take up viniculture, even transporting a large quantity of vines from Kos (İstanköy/Kos Adası) for the purpose, and asking the Sublime Porte for a ten-year tax exemption on vine growing.⁴² At the end of the same year, a laconic report by the newspaper that Abidin had sent antiquities from excavations on Rhodes to the imperial palace⁴³ – in all likelihood those found at the site where he planned to build his mansion⁴⁴ – is worth further investigation, in the first place on the nature of his personal involvement regarding the island’s antiquities, and secondly on any possible interest or indifference he showed towards preventing the illegal excavations that occurred during his tenure, aided and abetted by the local population.⁴⁵

40 Kypriotis, 150-154.

41 *Stamboul*, 15.2.1894 and 23.3.1894. The following year, according to the same newspaper (29.5.1895), Netherlands Consul Henri Ducci donated his house on Rhodes for conversion into a hospital.

42 *Stamboul*, 26.2.1894.

43 *Stamboul*, 14.11.1894 (according to the piece, in its turn the palace forwarded the antiquities to the Museum of Constantinople).

44 Yasin Özdemir, “Writer Abidin Pasha, an Ottoman Governor of Rhodes”, p. 403 (or p. 371 in the Turkish version of the same study).

45 See, e.g., Maria Chiara Monaco, “Ρόδος 1899-1912: παράνομες ανασκαφές και συμβολή στη μελέτη του υλικού. Στοιχεία αρχείου και κεραμική από το Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο της Φλωρεντίας”, in D. Damaskos (επιμ.), *Χάρις χαίρει: μελέτες στη μνήμη της Χάρης Κάντζια*, Athens, 2004, p. 75-77. Regarding modern historical monuments on Rhodes, traveller Guy Sommi Picenardi records his irritation at the fact that Abidin and his subordinates did not permit him to study them (*Itinéraire d’un chevalier de Saint-Jean de Jérusalem dans l’île de Rhodes*, Société de Saint Augustin, Lille, Desclée, de Brouwer et Cie, Imprimeurs des Facultés Catholiques de Lille, 1900, p. 13).

In any event, if one follows how Abidin divided up his activity within the geographical limits of his administrative region via the dispatches in the *Stamboul* newspaper, it soon emerges that it would not have been easy for him to monitor everything going on in Rhodes; from the very first year of his term, he left the island for lengthy periods, preferring Chios and especially Lesbos, on the pretext that he had to tour the other islands in the Archipelago.⁴⁶ He was usually away from the end of spring until autumn, mainly using Austrian Lloyd steamships, and often took advantage of their routes to make a short stop in his beloved Smyrna. Some of the lengthier despatches in the *Stamboul* newspaper from 1898 onwards appear to have been written at Abidin’s suggestion, whether explicitly or implicitly, so as to argue positively for the requests he made on occasion to Abdülhamid II.⁴⁷ Thus, the special interest Abidin showed in Lesbos is reflected in a targeted dispatch conveying the inhabitants’ wish for Abidin’s stay on their island to be extended, so he could help them solve the problem of reduced soap production.⁴⁸ Later on, at the time he sent complaints to the palace about the humidity on Rhodes, a new dispatch advocated the Lesbians’ wish to have their island redesignated as the administrative capital of the Archipelago: everything worked better when their vali was there, and their homeland was better than Rhodes in every way.⁴⁹ The dispatches in *Stamboul* also draw an association between unpleasant events in Abidin’s life and his prolonged stay in Lesbos: first a problem with his eye, which he tried to deal with by seeing a doctor he called there from Constantinople,⁵⁰ then the worsening of his wife’s health and, finally, her death on Lesbos in June 1904, after four months’ suffering from stomach cancer.⁵¹

Similar targeted dispatches from Rhodes extol Abidin’s administrative skills,⁵² remind readers of his significant work improving the island’s road network⁵³ and praise his positive insistence on retaining its quarantine station.⁵⁴ Of especial interest is a lengthy feature article from 1902, which looks back in time in order to acclaim Abidin’s effectiveness in dealing with difficult situations. The article relates how when he was governing Sivas, despite the terrible weather he managed to get to Thessaloniki in time to co-ordinate the release of Savva pasha’s nephew, who had been abducted by bandits in the area around Mt. Olympus.⁵⁵ This random trip down memory lane was obviously written at Abidin’s suggestion, probably so as to obliquely bring to mind that his loyalty to Abdülhamid remained firm, in contrast to that of other officials – in this case Savva pasha, who hastened to

46 At least 39 dispatches in *Stamboul* between 1894 and 1905 were exclusively concerned with Abidin’s movements between Rhodes, Chios and Lesbos.

47 Adequately investigated by Abdülhamit Kırmızı and Yasin Özdemir (see note 39).

48 *Stamboul*, 27.5.1898.

49 *Stamboul*, 21.3.1899. The piece reminds readers that Lesbos was the capital of the vilayet up until the earthquake of 1867, and cites the number of ships docking in its port over the previous year as tangible evidence of its superiority to Rhodes.

50 *Stamboul*, 25.7.1900.

51 *Stamboul*, 21.6.1900. The death announcement for Abidin’s wife was written on 16.6.1900.

52 *Stamboul*, 16.6.1900. Extensive mention is made of his effectiveness in managing all sectors of the administration, his ability (in contrast to previous governors) to encourage his subordinates to produce results, his trust in laws and dislike of sycophants and favouritism.

53 *Stamboul*, 16.6.1900, 2.9.1901. In a dispatch dated 30.12.1904, Abidin is praised for taking interest in improving the rural road network on Rhodes, showing awareness of the difficulties villagers faced when travelling.

54 *Stamboul*, 9.12.1903.

55 *Stamboul*, 5.5.1902.

abandon the country in October 1900 and take refuge in France.⁵⁶ Indeed, if Abdülhamid’s memory was good, he could easily have recalled that around the same time Savva pasha escaped to France, Abidin celebrated the sultan’s jubilee in full pomp, and offered him a present of his mansion in Ankara for conversion into a School of Arts and Professions.⁵⁷

6. Rhodes takes revenge

The above targeted despatches in the *Stamboul*, taken together with Abidin’s prolonged escapes to Chios and chiefly to Lesbos, indicate that, ultimately, “all things good” on Rhodes did not suffice either to comfort him for being in foreign parts or to secure him a trouble-free term on the island with a more promising future after it ended. Abidin did not love Rhodes, and it more or less reciprocated. In September 1895 he only narrowly survived two accidents that occurred two days apart: on the first occasion his horse threw him when a rein broke, and on the second the horses drawing his carriage bolted on seeing some empty sacks by the road, and landed the carriage in a ditch as he sat inside, holding his sleeping grandchild in his arms.⁵⁸ Some while later, in 1904, “all things good” on Rhodes found themselves under water, demolished and washed away by a heavy, extremely destructive cloudburst, including some of the walls of Abidin’s house;⁵⁹ then a few months later his wife died.

In any event, it appears that the exiled vali tried to contend with his intolerable posting to Rhodes by engaging in cultural pursuits. According to testimony by locals recorded three years after his death (1909), because Abidin was a devotee of the theatre, he would force his employees to pay him 150 liras to bring a troupe to Rhodes for two months every year.⁶⁰ Though not in intimate detail, there is greater certainty about his initiative to bring the first flatbed printing machine to the island, which was used to print the bilingual weekly newspaper *Αἰγάιον* (*Egeon/Bahr-i Sefid*) from 1896; the paper ran to four pages per edition (two in Ottoman Turkish and two in Greek), and created “the initial core of printers and journalists” on Rhodes.⁶¹ Yet it still remains unclear whether Abidin used the newspaper in place of the *Neologos* to publicise whatever writing he produced during his term on Rhodes.⁶² While we do know what the Ottoman Turkish part of that work was,⁶³ it remains to be seen whether “in the multi-volume, full series of his works” he gifted the German Kaiser in 1898 in his capacity as Ottoman vali,⁶⁴ he thought it worthwhile to include his Greek poems in addition to

the Ottoman volumes. Or whether he also wrote prose pieces in Greek, as the editor of the *Stamboul* wished to believe when writing Abidin’s obituary the day after he died.⁶⁵

Lastly, it has not been established whether he continued to compose new Greek poems in Rhodes. We can be sure that he intended to do so, since the Rhodes edition of the *Poems* concludes by announcing itself as the “first issue”; nevertheless, there is no evidence that a second one ever appeared. In other words, with the information to date, it could be said that Rhodes sapped Abidin of all his poetic vigour, blighting his artistic inspiration, as if taking revenge on him for regarding it as a place of exile. Then again, on Rhodes Abidin may have had his fill of using the Greek he so longed for while serving in the farthest reaches of the East, and the magical effect of the language that propelled him along the road of poetry may have worn off. In retrospect, at any rate, it seems that the eleven years he lived “in exile” on Rhodes were less fateful than the mere one year he managed to survive after leaving to move urgently to Constantinople.⁶⁶ Right at the end of the same year he met his end, unexpectedly and inexplicably, according to official accounts, while drinking his coffee in Yıldız Palace on the invitation of Abdülhamid II. But that is another story, and a separate “conversation in the library”.



56 On Savva pasha’s hurried departure from roads and possible reasons for it, see, e.g., the French newspapers *Le Temps*, 18.10.1890 and *Gil Blas*, 20.10.1890, and the Greek *Εφημερίς*, 4-6.10.1890, *Επιθεώρησις*, 5-6.10.1890 and *Νέα Επιθεώρησις*, 5-6.10.1890.

57 *Stamboul*, 25.9.1900. An earlier example of Abidin’s generosity was the offer of 150 Turkish liras to the Relief Committee for the Muslims of Crete (*Stamboul*, 31.3.1897).

58 *Stamboul*, 26.9.1895.

59 *Stamboul*, 19.1.1904.

60 Alexandros Pallis, *Μπρουσός*, Athens, 1923, p. 77-78 (with a photograph of Abidin on p. 78).

61 Antonis Aggelis, “Ο τύπος στα Δωδεκάνησα”, *Ο ελληνικός Τύπος 1784 έως σήμερα. Ιστορικές και θεωρητικές προσεγγίσεις*, Athens, Modern Greek Research Institute - National Hellenic Research Foundation, 2005, p. 308-309. Also, Kypriotis, 155-157.

62 The newspaper encouraged contributions on topics concerning science, literature and the general public (see the relevant announcement in the first issue on the Osmanlıca Mahalli Gazete ve Mecmu’alar website, <https://www.osmanlicagazeteler.org/Sayfa.php?il=Rodos&GazeteID=Bahr-i%20Sefid>).

63 Şimşekler, 123-126. Abidin’s Ottoman oeuvre was the focus of the symposium *Bütün yönleriyle Abidin Paşa Sempozyumu*, Ankara, 4.5.2023.

64 *Stamboul*, 22.11.1898 and 23.11.1898. Abidin had prepared a sumptuous welcome for the German Kaiser, but as the latter never disembarked from the ship carrying him, he was forced to offer the gifts including his written works via a representative.

65 *Stamboul*, 10.5.1906 (front page obituary for Abidin).

66 According to dispatches in *Stamboul* in May 1905, Abidin received orders to depart for Constantinople, although he was intending to travel from Rhodes to Lesbos. He left with his grandchildren and son, and Chukri Bey was appointed his substitute; his leave in Constantinople is described as being “indefinite” (*Stamboul*, 10.5.1905, 12.5.1905, 20.5.1905, 30.5.1905, 6.9.1905, 30.10.1905).