

SAVVAS ALEXANDROS PAVLIDIS studied at the department of Turkish And Mediterranean Studies, University of Cyprus. Having been awarded a J. F. Kostopoulos scholarship through the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), he went on to receive his MA in International Relations (with a focus on Turkish-Greek relations) from Istanbul Bilgi University. He is a founding member of the Rhodes Centre for History and Social Research SCE, and has participated in numerous of its research projects.

“I suffer from an affliction of sorts, a certain overstimulation of the imagination. When I look at an old building, a book, an artefact, I immediately start imagining the people who created them, their habits and customs, their way of thinking, their language and culture. In this specific part of the world, anyone thinking this way will inevitably be affected by a certain melancholy, a sense of void, because so much in our surroundings belongs to peoples that are no longer here. It is my belief that Tarık Tüten - as well as the common friend who introduced us, Prof. Ayhan Aktar - shares this malaise, but he also possesses the drive to act positively upon it. I thank him for the opportunity and impetus, through this book, to finally publish part of my family archive, something I have been putting off for a long time.”

Savvas A. Pavlidis

Theodoros Constantinidis - Savvas Pavlidis

Two Rhodian Statesmen (1908-1912)

Introduction

The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 brought about significant changes to Ottoman public life. Among other things, it forced Sultan Abdul Hamid II to reinstate the constitution and reopen parliament, and general elections were held later that year. Rhodes elected physician Theodoros Constantinidis as its deputy to the Ottoman parliament. In 1911, mayoral elections were held for the first time in Rhodes; the person elected was lawyer Savvas Pavlidis.

During this same period, the Italian crown was trying to extend its influence and establish itself as a colonial power. This resulted in the war over Libya, which broke out between Italy and the Ottoman Empire in late 1911. In May 1912, almost incidentally to the main war, Italian troops led by General Giovanni Ameglio captured Rhodes. Although this was initially seen as a temporary occupation, it eventually led to the Dodecanese being formally ceded to Italy in 1923.

For a brief time they were two of the main political figures in Rhodes, but Constantinidis’ and Pavlidis’ aspirations of playing a role on the main political scene were cut short. They remained influential even during the Italian period; Pavlidis in particular, after initially being deposed and deported by the Italian authorities for supporting unification with Greece, returned from exile and continued being elected president of the Orthodox Community of Rhodes until eventually dying in office in 1933. But in colonial and Fascist Italy, that was the extent of the locals’ involvement in political life. Rhodians were not to participate in either municipal or parliamentary elections again until after unification with Greece.

This contribution focuses on the correspondence between Constantinidis, the MP, and Pavlidis, the Mayor, that is found in the unpublished Pavlidis family archive which is in my possession. The correspondence in question consists of 15 letters sent by Constantinidis to Pavlidis during his tenure as MP between 1908 and 1912, plus one later letter from 1921.

It must be assumed that the extant letters are only a fragment of their total correspondence. It is also obvious that they constitute only one side of what was a dialogue - Pavlidis is only indirectly present and one has to infer his thoughts from the writings of Constantinidis. Even with these caveats, they offer interesting insights.

I should clarify that this is not an attempt to provide a full biography of either of the two. Except for some broader information for context, the focus is exclusively on the information found in this correspondence. Specifically, the aim of this contribution is to explore the relationship between Constantinidis and Pavlidis, their political views and activities, and the political context in which they were acting, as they emerge from Constantinidis’ letters to Pavlidis found in the Pavlidis family archive.

The profile of the two men

It has been suggested that the Young Turk revolution and the 1908 general elections caused a shift in the leadership of the Rum millet. Traditionally, power and influence among lay men of the millets had been held by the landowning classes; these remained the main social group represented in the appointed senate, but the vast majority of the elected members of parliament were representatives

of what Anagnostopoulou calls the “average Greek bourgeoisie”¹, meaning the professional and mercantile classes.

Pavlidis and Constantinidis both fit this profile very well. A lawyer and doctor respectively, originating in relatively small and remote villages in the south of Rhodes. Their families were far removed from the traditional centres of power and without significant landholdings.

Although hailing from Vati, Theodoros’ father was employed as a farm superintendent in Aydin province, and this is where Theodoros was born in 1874. Having received his education and a medical degree in Athens, he returned to his father’s village by choice, working there as a doctor². The correspondence suggests that he had strong political connections and backing in the remote villages. Constantinidis was also a lover of language, having compiled a noteworthy collection of Rhodian idioms³ and applied himself to learning both Ottoman Turkish and, later, Italian. In one of his letters to Pavlidis, he writes:

[...] I can only write to you that whenever I have some leisure time left over I sacrifice this too in front of the lexicon and for learning Turkish [...] for I admit that I have fallen in love with this language [...]; I could not have imagined or known the wealth of terms the vividness and expressiveness of this language since as you know I knew but little Turkish of the demotic Anatolian Turkish⁴.

Later known to his contemporaries as Savvas Efendi or *Savvafendis*, in accordance with Ottoman honorific traditions, Savvas Pavlidis was born in the village of Gennadi in 1860, but left at a young age to seek his fortune in the capital, Rhodes. Although initially a young man of limited means, he managed to study law and married into one of the wealthier Rhodian families, improving his social standing. The correspondence indicates that, although born in one of the island’s villages, he did not have a strong political power base outside the capital; family tradition relates that he had some sort of falling out with his family at an early stage and cut ties with Gennadi.

Both of them seem to have been ambitious and willing to take on responsibility and leadership. Pavlidis in particular appears to have been keen to support his upward social mobility with public offices (most notably, he served as President of the Commercial Court⁵ and Mayor under the Ottomans, and President of the Orthodox Community of Rhodes during the Italian period). His son Victor had been sent to study in Constantinople and at least two more of his sons had been enrolled in schools in various important Ottoman cities. This is a clear indication of his social ambition, but it also places him firmly within the Ottoman-Mediterranean world at this point in time.

Savvas had four sons and one daughter, but they were ill-fated and left him only one grand child, who was left an orphan and raised by his grandparents. This orphan was my grandfather, and I am currently the mayor’s only direct descendant living in Rhodes. Theodoros Constantinidis had three sons and three daughters, leaving 18 grandchildren, and his extant descendants in Rhodes are numerous.

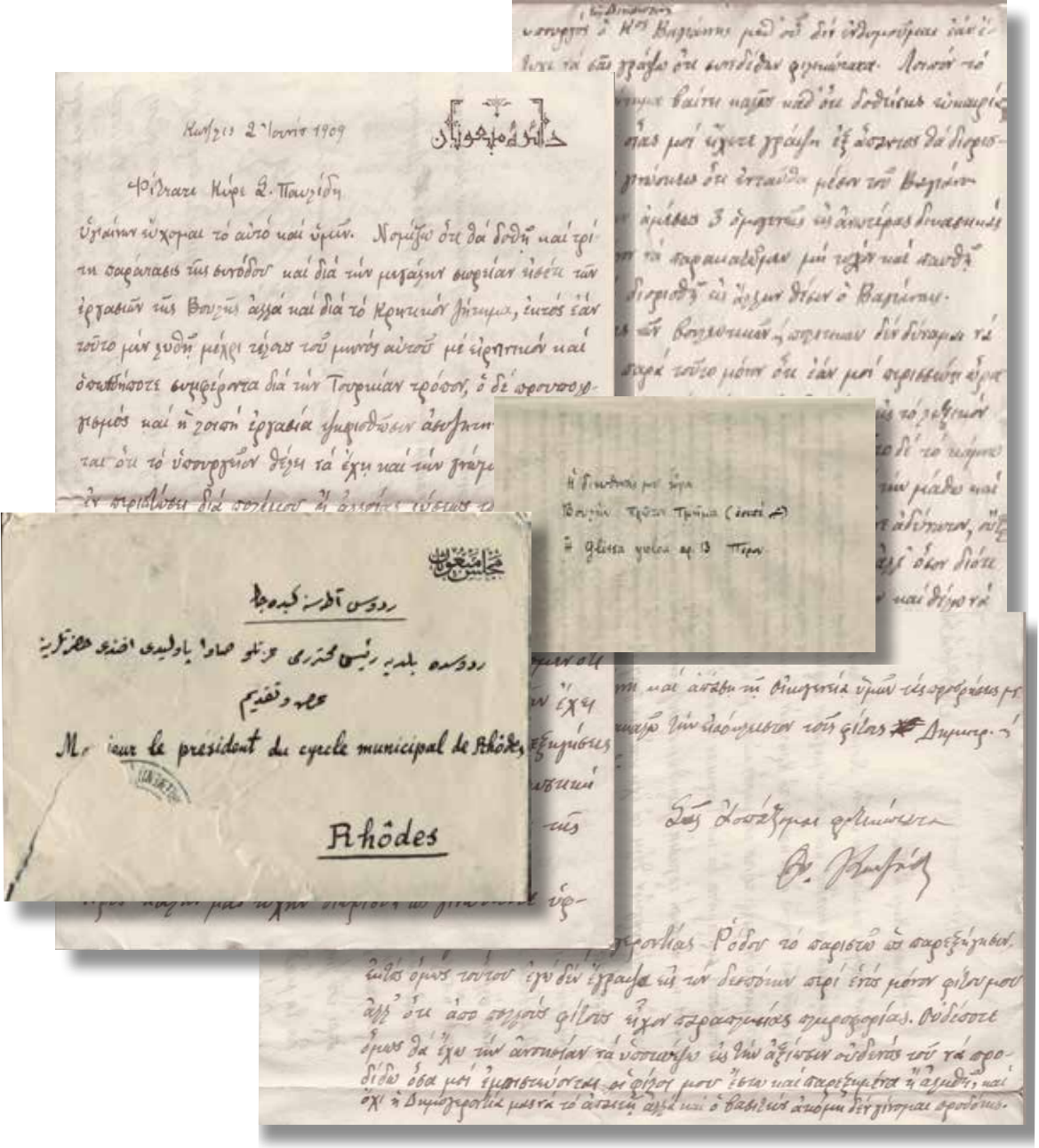


FIGURE 1: Constantinidis’ letter from 2 June 1909.

1 Αναγνωστοπούλου (2013)

2 Κωνσταντινίδης (2019).

3 Κωνσταντινίδης (2022).

4 Constantinidis (1909-06-02): [...] δεν δύναμαι να σας γράψω παρά τούτο μόνον ότι εάν μοι περισσεύη ώρα τις αναψυχής και ταύτην την θυσιάζω εις το λεξικόν και εις την εκμάθησιν της Τουρκικής, [...] διότι ομολογώ ότι ηγάπησα την γλώσσαν αυτήν [...]· δεν ήλπιζον ποτέ και δεν εγνώριζον τον πλούτον των όρων την γλαφυρότητα κ’ εκφραστικότητα της γλώσσης αυτής καθ’ ότι ως γινώσκετε εγνώριζον ολίγα μόνον τουρκικά της δημόδους Ανατολικής τουρκικής.

5 It is not clear whether this was a judge’s position or an administrative one.

The personal relationship

Although hailing from two neighbouring villages in the south of Rhodes, their biographies suggest that they were not likely to have been familiar with each other as youths. Nonetheless, the Pavlidis surname is present in Vati, indeed associated today more with that village than with Savvas’ birthplace, Gennadi, so some sort of family connection or acquaintance cannot be ruled out. Still, the origins of the personal relationship between the two are unclear. What is certain is that by the time of the 1908 elections, they had a close personal relationship. This is confirmed both by the style of address in the correspondence (“My beloved friend, mr. Savvas Pavlidis”), the use of the familiar singular, but more importantly by the content. Constantinidis acts as a liaison between Pavlidis and his son Victor, who was studying in Constantinople⁶, and on a number of occasions he checks on him and reports his well being and progress back to his father. He also seems to have kept a close eye on him and supported him actively:

PS. During the coming holidays I shall be visiting father Hierotheus and if I do not meet Victor there I may travel to Chalki in order to introduce him to the teachers.⁷

In one letter he reports meeting Savvas Efendi’s other two sons Pavlos and Constantinos - what they were doing in Constantinople is not explained⁸. On a particularly somber occasion, having been informed of the untimely death of Pavlidis’ very young daughter Aspasia in early 1911, Constantinidis takes on the responsibility of personally informing her brother in Constantinople:

Honoured friend Mr. S. Pavlidis

It is with great sorrow that I have read the news concerning the death of your beloved daughter, which occurred in Athens. I express to you my deepest condolences and hope that you and your Lady shall receive consolation from above.

I will be seeing Victor tonight and I shall prepare him appropriately and announce to him the lamentable news.

With love and respect

Th. Constantinidis⁹

6 Constantinidis mentions going to Chalki to speak to Victor’s teachers, which suggests that he might have been studying at the Chalki Seminary. An inscription in a book found in the Pavlidis family archive, however, indicates that he was enrolled in the Lycee GrecoFrancaise HadjiChristou at an unspecified date.

7 Constantinidis (1910-12-19): Υ.Γ. Κατά τας επικείμενας εορτάς θα μεταβώ παρά τω πατρί Ιεροθέω όπου εάν δεν συναντήσω τον Βίκτωρα πιθανόν να μεταβώ εις Χάλκην όπως τον συστήσω εις τους καθηγητάς”.

8 Constantinidis (1911-11-11).

9 Constantinidis (1911-03-03): Αξιότιμε φίλε Κύριε Σ. Παυλίδη, Μετά μεγάλης λύπης αναγνούς τα του θανάτου της προσφιλούς υμών θυγατρός του επισυμβάντος εν Αθήναις εκφράζω υμίν βαθύτατα τα συλλυπητήριά μου επευχόμενος την εξ ύψους παρηγορίαν εφ’ υμών και της Κυρίας σας. Τον Βίκτωρα θα ιδω απόψε και καταλλήλως θα προδιαθέσω και θα αγγείλω αυτόν την θλιβεράν είδησιν. Διατελώ μετ’ αγάπης και εκτιμήσεως Θ. Κων/νίδης.

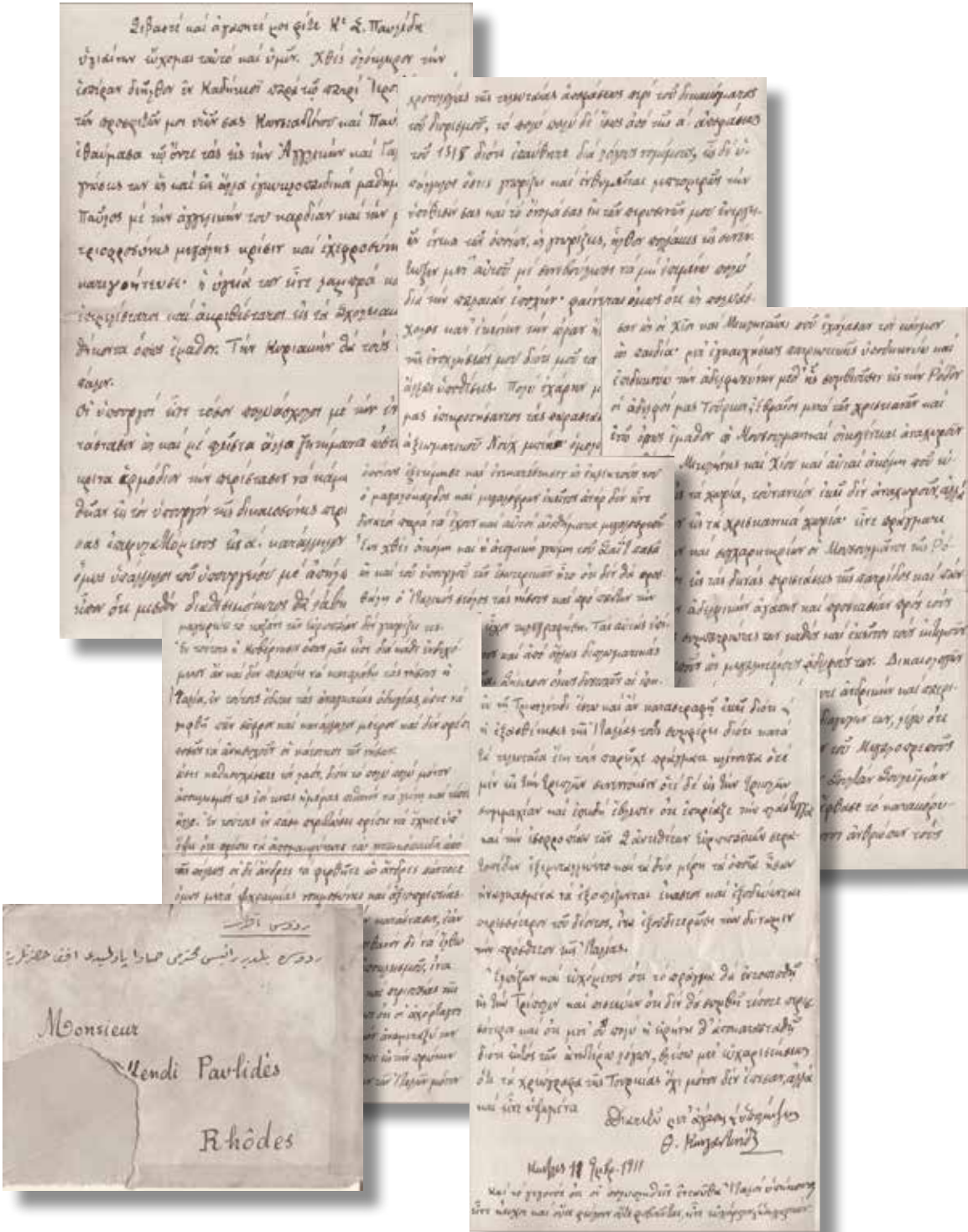


FIGURE 2: Constantinidis’ letter from 11 November 1911

In March 1911, He reports that Victor is leaving his school, under instructions from his father. The reason for this is not explained, but he does not seem to have moved permanently to Rhodes, as other sources place him in Constantinople until 1912-1913¹⁰:

Concerning Victor I heard from Stroumbis that he is well and that he is preparing to come to Rhodes, leaving the School entirely in accordance with your wishes.¹¹

The “personal affairs”

A significant part of the Constantinidis-Pavlidis correspondence is dedicated to their respective “personal affairs”. Constantinidis’ issue concerns legal aspects of his marriage, which Pavlidis, as a lawyer, is trying to help with. The problem, as it emerges from the letters, is that Constantinidis cannot legally leave inheritance to his children as they are the result of an “obstructed” marriage (κωλυόμενος γάμος). The reason for this legal obstruction to his marriage is not sufficiently explained. In the letter through which he announces that he is forced to run for MP again (discussed in more detail later in this text), Constantinidis also makes the curious claim that the solution to his problem is somehow related to his status as MP:

[I was hoping] that the people would not be willing to reelect me, which would excuse me in the eyes of the party, but above all in the eyes of my wife and family who think that it is my fault that my marriage has not been recognised and that I do not wish to be elected in order to prevent it from being recognised [...] I can only hope and pray that my personal affair will be arranged in a timely manner, allowing me to resign long before the conclusion of the four year tenure¹².

What is certain is that at this point, Constantinidis is despairing with the situation. In the very next letter, having consulted the legal books sent by Pavlidis from Rhodes to Vati, the MP makes the following poignant remark:

Thank you for the books by Karavokyros, but what can I say my friend, I was filled with despair when I saw an article according to which children from an obstructed marriage may neither receive inheritance from their parents through will nor through intestate succession and therefore a will is entirely redundant.

There remains only *تبن* [tebeni - adoption] or rather in my case *داليتسا* [istilad (misspelt in the original) - legalisation] in other words the legalisation (not adoption) of my natural children while *تبن* [tebeni] is for children of unknown father or for children who are not one’s own.

If neither having my wedding recognised ecclesiastically, nor *تبن* [tebeni] or *داليتسا*

[istilad] succeed, there remains nothing for me but to have my life insured in the name of my children which the companies accept and then either I pay my yearly installments or if I am not able to then I shall commit suicide and that’ll solve the matter; for my health now does not allow me to perform doctor’s duties in the villages and moving to the capital with my family to practice medicine there is challenging.¹³

Pavlidis’ “personal affairs”, that Constantinidis is trying to help solve, are the most commonly recurring theme of the correspondence. Up until his election as mayor, Pavlidis’ “personal affair” is simple enough: he is trying to get appointed to public office. The background to this is mentioned in a letter written a few years later by Savvas Pavlidis to Greek Prime Minister E. Venizelos, found in the Venizelos archives:

In the year 1897, accused due to my Greek sympathies of collecting funds in support of Greece I was discharged from the position of president of the Commercial Court of Rhodes and only after three years was I able to relieve myself of this persecution with great difficulty. Since then the doors of government positions have been closed for me and I was forced to turn to practicing law in the courts of Rhodes [...]¹⁴

So Constantinidis is apparently trying to influence various parties in Constantinople to overcome this silent ban and get Pavlidis back on his career path. Savvas Efendi is also fairly particular: he is interested in a decent position in the Aegean provinces, preferably in a place with a significant Orthodox presence; he is not interested in some remote post in the depths of Anatolia¹⁵. In April 1909, Constantinidis gives a long report of his efforts in this direction - one gets the feeling that Pavlidis might have complained about the lack of progress, prompting him to write the full details. Although Constantinidis’ narrative is too long to quote in its entirety, I shall relate the main points as it reads rather like a late Ottoman political sitcom with a backdrop of famous figures and events.

Constantinidis had spoken about the matter to the Minister of Justice, Manyasizade Refik Bey, who had promised to look into it. Constantinidis attempted to visit him at home, but Refik Bey had been taken ill and he was not allowed to meet him. Refik bey died soon afterwards and with him both a report by Pavlidis to the ministry and a letter of recommendation from the *vali* of Rhodes, Hilmi bey, were lost. Constantinidis then had to start anew with the new minister, Mustafa Nazim Pasha. Nazim Pasha expressed a positive opinion and instructed Constantinidis to coordinate in this matter with a certain ministry official - a *müşeşar* - who was present at the meeting. Having left the meeting, Constantinidis realised that he had not noted the name of this official; rushing back to the

13 Constantinidis (1912-03-16): Σας ευχαριστώ δια τα βιβλία του Καραβοκυρού, αλλά τι να σας πω φίλε μου; απελπισία με κατέλαβεν όταν είδον εν άρθρον καθ’ ο τα εκ κωλυομένου γάμου τέκνα ούτε εκ διαθήκης ούτε εξ αδιαθέτου δεν κληρονομούσι τους γονείς αυτών και επομένως περιττή όλως η διαθήκη. Δεν μένει ή το [tebeni - υιοθεσία] ή μάλλον δια την εμὴν περίπτωσιν το [istilad (ανορθόγραφο στο αρχικό) - νομιμοποίηση τέκνου] ήτοι η νομιμοποιήσις (κ’ ουχί υιοθέτησις) των φύσει εμών τέκνων ενώ το [tebeni] εἶνε δια τα αγνώστου πατρός τέκνα, ή τα ξένα τέκνα. Εάν ούτε η αναγνώρισις εκκλησιαστικώς του γάμου μου, ούτε το [tebeni] ή [istilad] επιτύχη, δεν μοι μένει ειμή να ασφαλίσω την ζωήν μου επ’ ονόματι των τέκνων μου όπερ δέχονται οι εταιρείαί και κατόπιν ή πληρόνω τας ετησίας δόσεις μου, ή εάν δεν δύνωμαι αυτοκτονώ κ’ ξεπερδευεί το ζήτημα· διότι και τον ιατρόν πλέον εις τα χωρία δεν μοι επιτρέπει η υγεία μου να εξασκώ και να μετακομισθώ οικογενειακώς εις πρωτεύουσαν προς εξάσκησιν αυτόθι της ιατρικής μοι εἶνε δύσκολον.

14 Παυλίδης (1914).

15 Constantinidis (1909-04-04)

office, he was told that both men had left and he was not able to verify the identity of the official. He intended to pay the minister another visit shortly and get the necessary information, but on the 31st of March 1909, in the midst of political turmoil and an army mutiny, Mustafa Nazim Pasha was murdered¹⁶.

Whether due to the disheartening survival rate of Ottoman justice ministers or due to other reasons, Constantinidis does not seem to have been able to secure the appointment of Savvas Efendi to public office. His election to the position of Mayor of Rhodes in March 1911 eventually signalled the beginning of a new “personal affair” that Constantinidis was called upon to champion. Apparently, as mayor, Savvas was precluded from practicing law, even though the position was *pro bono*¹⁷. Constantinidis describes a new round of meetings, but notices a certain recalcitrance in the administration, which he suspects might be due to machinations by the local organisation of the Committee of Union and Progress¹⁸ in Rhodes to undermine their efforts. Commenting on the ineffectiveness and obscurity of the governmental process, the disgruntled MP writes the Turkish proverb *eski tas eski hamam*¹⁹; in other words, “same old story”.

In November 1911, Constantinidis informs that he has been promised that the issue will soon be resolved and that both the *vali* of Rhodes and a certain “officer Nuh Bey” had acted in support of Pavlidis’ complaint²⁰; less than two weeks later he reports that the issue should soon be resolved²¹. There is no indication in the archive on whether or not the resolution was achieved, but this would soon be irrelevant, as the Italian conquest in May 1912 put an end to all this.

It should be noted that, although from our modern point of view it is tempting to look at this in terms of a corrupt MP trying to do favours for his friend, this personal brand of politics seems to have been very much the expected norm; Constantinidis is not exclusively acting on behalf of his friend Savvas Efendi, but mentions various countrymen whose “personal affairs” he is attending to. Indeed there seems to be a specific code of conduct in these matters. Constantinidis mentions an occasion on which the minister of the interior, Talaat Pasha, informed him that a certain doctor Karavokyros, having served as municipal doctor in Rhodes for 25-30 years, had approached Yemen MP Ahmed Said Efendi with such a “personal affair” (either to request a pension or a new appointment, Constantinidis is not sure). Talaat Pasha gave a positive opinion concerning the doctor’s request, but expressed his bemusement that Karavokyros had elected to not go through his constituency’s MP, Constantinidis, who was also a fellow Christian, but rather a Muslim MP from Yemen. Constantinidis relays this discussion with thinly veiled reproach for the *faux pas* and informs that he will most likely

be the one handling the issue going forward²². On another occasion he notes:

All MPs, even the personal friends of ministers, are complaining about the ministers because they do not process any of their cases even though they always make promises and never say no. But in my opinion the ministers also have a point because they are at a loss as to whom they should first please, the extraparliamentary CUP members making demands or the MPs, while those in the pursuit of positions and particularly good ones add up to hundreds.²³

It is well documented that the efforts that started in the Tanzimat period to modernise and rationalise the Ottoman bureaucratic administration had generally mixed results²⁴. Constantinidis’ descriptions give the impression that the role of the MP at this time was to act as an intermediary between his constituents and the central government and to promote their requests, even (or perhaps especially) when they were fair and legal. The express blessing of the relevant minister seems to have been a prerequisite to get anything processed through the vast Ottoman bureaucracy and the various government offices, and politicians would act as lobbyists of sorts.

A final example of this is the following quote:

It is a stroke of luck that as you know Mr Vagiannis has been appointed deputy minister of Justice [...] you may be aware that here through Vagiannis three of our Greek Orthodox brethren were immediately appointed to higher judicial positions. Let’s just hope that Vagiannis doesn’t get discharged anytime soon or appointed to another position.²⁵

The political relationship

Pavlidis family tradition has long related that there had been a deal between Savvas Efendi and Theodoros Constantinidis: even though both of them wished to stand for MP in the 1908 elections, they decided that it was best not to split the Christian vote. They reached the compromise that Constantinidis would stand in 1908, leaving Pavlidis to stand in the next elections, scheduled to be held in 1912.

This story is corroborated, indirectly but clearly, by the correspondence. In his second letter from Constantinople, after relating his early impressions from Parliament and the Greek MPs, Constantinidis writes to the effect that Pavlidis would have been more suitable for the job: *As a member of parliament I am often reminded of you and wish that you were in my place or at least that I*

16 Constantinidis (1909-04-04).

17 Constantinidis (1911-04-18). There is some confusion, however, as the letters from 1911-11-11 and 1911-11-23 indicate that the issue might have been slightly different; perhaps a matter of recognising his previous years in public service and the concomitant pay grade. These might even be two different issues, raising the total of Pavlidis’ “personal affairs” to three.

18 The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) was the most powerful segment of the wider and looser Young Turk movement. It had a leading role in the Young Turk revolution and was the most powerful faction in the parliament formed in 1908.

19 Written in Greek letters: *εσκή τας εσκή χαμάμ*. Constantinidis (1911-04-18).

20 Constantinidis (1911-11-11).

21 Constantinidis (1911-11-24)

22 Constantinidis (1910-12-19).

23 Constantinidis (1911-01-21): Όλοι οι βουλευταί και αυτοί οι ατομικοί φίλοι των υπουργών έχουνσι παράπονα κατά των υπουργών διότι δεν ενεργούσι καμμίαν υπόθεσίν των αν και τους υπόσχονται πάντοτε και ουδέποτε τοις λέγουσιν όχι. Αλλά κατ’ εμέ έχουνσι δίκαιον και οι υπουργοί διότι εσάστισαν ποίον να πρωτοϊκανοποιήσουν, τους έξωθεν κομιτατικούς απαιτητάς ή τους βουλευτάς, οι δε θηρεύοντες θέσεις και ιδίως καλὰς συμποσούνται εις εκατοντάδας.

24 Weiker (1968).

25 Constantinidis (1909-06-02): Προς καλήν μας τύχην διωρίσθη ως γνώσκετε υφυπουργός της Δικαιοσύνης ο Κος Βαγιάννης [...] ίσως γνώσκεις ότι ενταύθα μέσον του Βαγιάννη διωρίσθησαν αμέσως 3 ομογενείς εις ανωτέρας δικαστικές θέσεις. Μόνον να παρακαλώμεν μη τυχόν και παυθή γλίγορα ή διορησθή εις άλλην θέσιν ο Βαγιάννης.

would have your qualifications²⁶. Given the context, it seems that the qualifications he has in mind are Pavlidis’ knowledge of Ottoman law and superior command of the Ottoman language.

Savvas Pavlidis became mayor of Rhodes while Constantinidis was already in Constantinople. His reception of the news of the candidacy was enthusiastic and supportive:



FIGURE 3: Savvas Pavlidis, probably 1910s.

Turkish MPs from the CUP have indicated that they would be unhappy if he stepped down in favour of “his lawyer friend”; he is under continuous pressure from friends and family to run again; he

Please write to let me know if it is true that you have submitted candidacy for mayor of the Capital, when are the elections to be held? and whether the villages will participate? If so, whether you would like me to write to the villagers. It would be a most fortunate event for Rhodes and I hope for your success.²⁷

Constantinidis’ reception of Pavlidis’ eventual electoral success was naturally even more enthusiastic²⁸. It is clear throughout that the two have a shared understanding of politics and consider each other allies. Regarding their agreement to collaborate in the parliamentary elections, however, the ultimate corroboration comes in the letter dated 1912-03-08, which is probably the most tense of all. Constantinidis must have informed Pavlidis in a previous letter, not found in the family archive, of his intention to run for MP again, in spite of the agreement. Constantinidis’ defensive tone suggests that Pavlidis did not take very kindly to this change of plan - one gets the feeling that he is trying to convince himself with his arguments, not only his friend in Rhodes. His arguments are numerous: the Christian parliamentary group has decided to support the incumbent MPs and there is considerable pressure on him from his peers;

has it on good authority that Pavlidis’ candidacy is not favoured in the villages, a weakness that would be crucial in the event that the vote would be split by the participation of another Christian candidate, as was apparently likely. Last but not least, he fears that he would be branded a coward and deserter, a permanent blemish on his reputation. Throughout, Constantinidis stresses that he would rather abdicate and be with his family, but is forced by the circumstances to rise to the occasion:

[...] before the sinister machinations to bring about the success of a third party besides you and me and especially you, before the uncertainty of your success and before the present danger of a division, before my wife’s persistence as well as my friends’ that I should stand as candidate and before the latest urgings and requests, which I have received in writing, by my friends in the Capital and abroad and by my former colleagues... etc. I am forced to stand as candidate for the sake of our fatherland and in order not to appear a recreant and may the Lord help me.²⁹

This letter was not sent from Constantinople, but from Constantinidis’ home village of Vati. The reason for his visit is not mentioned, but the new elections were coming up and it is reasonable to assume that he was there precisely for this reason. In any case, the way he puts it, the discussions he had during this time back home are what finally pushed him to participate in the elections rather than stepping down in favour of his friend. According to his description, he resisted the pressure from his political peers in Constantinople, intending to honour the agreement with Pavlidis, but the urgings of his family and the perception he formed about the current situation in Rhodes outweighed his reservations. Remarkably, the letter ends with the following request:

[...] I am sending you separately for your reading my application for candidacy, which I ask you to please read and if there is no formal or essential error, present it officially to the committee that you preside over, otherwise return it with instructions for additions or corrections, so that I may send another or leave it to the villagers as they are considering nominating me themselves through 300 signatures. If the application only has a grammatical or syntactical error and not a legal one, present it.³⁰

Pavlidis was apparently president of the electoral committee, not surprising given his position as mayor and his legal profession. Nonetheless, this request to personally take care of his application, coming at the heels of his announcement that he is (unwillingly) reneging on their agreement, does seem bold. Is it a test and a defiant challenge? A display of faith in Pavlidis’ integrity? Confidence that their relationship was stronger than the rift that had appeared between them? It is hard to say.

26 Constantinidis (1909-01-15): Ως βουλευτής πλειστάκις ενθυμούμαι σας και ήθελον ή σεις να ήσθε εις την θέσιν μου, ή τουλάχιστον εγώ να είχον τα προσόντα υμών.

27 Constantinidis (1909-02-06): Γράψατέ μοι εάν είνε αληθές ότι υπεβάλατε κάλπην δημάρχου Πρωτευούσης, πότε θα γείνωσιν αι εκλογαί; και εάν θα συμμετάσχωσι τα χωρία; Εν τοιαύτη δε περιπτώσει, εάν θέλητε να γράψω εις τους χωρικούς. Θα ήτο κάλλιστον ευτύχημα το τοιούτον διά τον τόπον και εύχομαι επιτυχίαν σας.

28 Constantinidis (1909-02-06). The full text is related later in this text.

29 1912-03-08 [...] προ των καταχθονίων ενεργειών προς επιτυχίας τρίτου πλην σου και εμού και προ πάντων σου, προ της αβεβαιότητος της επιτυχίας σας και προ του βεβαίου κινδύνου της διασπάσεως, προ της επιμονής της συζύγου μου ως κ’ των φίλων μου να εκθέσω επισήμως υποψηφιότητα και προ των τελευταίων, ας έλαβον γραπτώς, συστάσεων και παρακλήσεων των εν Πρωτευούση φίλων και έξωθεν εκ των πρώην συναδέλφων .. κ’ τλ. Αναγκάζομαι να θέσω υποψηφιότητα χάριν της πατρίδος και δια να μη φανώ ρίψασπις και ο Θεός βοηθός.

30 1912-03-08 [...] αποστέλλω υμίν ιδιαιτέρως προς ανάγνωσιν αίτησιν υποψηφιότητος την οποίαν σας παρακαλώ αναγιγνώσκετε και εάν μεν δεν έχη τυπικώς και κανονικώς σφάλμα, την παρουσιάζετε επισήμως εις την υφ’ υμάς επιτροπήν, άλλως την επιστρέφετε και μοι γράφετε τας προς προσθήκην ή διόρθωσιν οδηγίας, ίνα στείλω άλλην, ή αφήσω τους χωρικούς όπως σκέπτονται να αποταθώσιν εκείνοι δια 300 υπογραφών . Εάν η αίτησις έχει γραμματικών ή συντακτικών μόνον λάθος και όχι νομικών παρουσιάσατέ την.

What is clear is that already in the immediately following letter, four days later, the tone is once again calmer and more familiar, even warm. Pavlidis has duly obliged and sent his suggested corrections to Constantinidis’ application and also sent him some legal books concerning his personal legal problem (discussed in the relevant segment). But Pavlidis has apparently also shared that he is considering running for MP regardless of Constantinidis’ candidacy and the further splitting of the vote. In spite of this, Constantinidis obviously still considers the two of them a political unit, using the first person plural (“us”, “we”) and indicating that, in spite of appearances, they will not be in opposition to each other. It is also apparent that powerful circles in Rhodes were promoting another candidate:

Even though we find ourselves, as I perceive, before a *fait accompli* of a third party’s success, since that is the will of today’s powerful and influential, even though I was of the opinion that in light of these illegal and tendentious events I should even withdraw my candidacy, if it were predetermined, I have nonetheless decided to apply, following urgings and requests by others.

[...]

If you too stand as a candidate anyway I believe that even in case of failure it is not detrimental to you nor would it be worthy of umbrage from me or anyone else, although I believe that presently many of yours will beg you to withdraw it, but they will do this without careful thought.

I have been so bold as to express my view, but it is up to you to adopt it or not. Firstly who knows what the future might bring; secondly, failure is no capital offence nor is standing as candidate without certainty of success, and thirdly it will give the impression that the two of us will be opposing each other and foster hope that we may splinter and therefore those opposed might not spend nor play all their trump cards to win.³¹

The exact meaning of Constantinidis’ insinuation about the mayor’s circle (*many of yours will beg you to withdraw*) is not known; nor are the details of the *sinister machinations* against the duo. In the letter from 8 March 1912 he makes mention of a Mr. Malliakas who is apparently vying for the nomination, whom he calls an “instrument of fragmentation”³²; but the follow-up letter does not clarify the identity of the person whose victory is deemed a *fait acocmpli*.

31 Constantinidis (1912-03-16): Αν και βρισκόμαστε, ως βλέπω, προ τετελεσμένου γεγονότος επιτυχίας τρίτου, διότι ούτως έδοξε τοις σήμερον ισχυροίς κ’ ιθύνουσιν, αν και εγώ ήμην της ιδέας ότι προ των γεγονότων τούτων των παρανόμων και μεροληπτικών έπρεπε και να αποσύρω την υποψηφιότητά μου, εάν ήτο δεδομένη εκ των προτέρων, εν τούτοις κατά σύστασιν και παράκλησιν άλλων αποφασίζω να δώσω αίτησιν. [...] Εάν θέσητε και υμείς υποψηφιότητα εν πάση ενδεχομένη περιπτώσει νομίζω ότι και εν περιπτώσει αποτυχίας δεν είνε κακόν δι’ υμάς ούτε παρενηγήσεως άξιον εκ μέρους μου ή άλλου τινός, αν και ως νομίζω αμέσως πολλοί εκ των η μ ε τ έ ρ ω ν θα σας παρακαλέσωσι να την αποσύρητε, αλλά ουχί βαθέως σκεπτόμενοι θα κάμωσι τούτο. Εκ θάρρους εκφράζω απλώς την γνώμην μου ταύτην εναπόκειται όμως υμίν να την υιοθετήσητε ή όχι. Πρώτον τις οίδε πώς έρχονται τα πράγματα· β! Η αποτυχία δεν είνε έγκλημα καθοσιώσεως και η υποβολή υποψηφιότητος άνευ βεβαιότητος, και Γ! θα νομισθή ότι ημείς αντιπολιτευόμεθα αλλήλους και θα ελπισθή ότι θα διασπασθώμεν, οπότε δεν θα εξοδεύσωσι και δεν θα παιξωσιν όλα των τα ατού δια την νίκην των οι αντίθετοι.

32 Constantinidis (1912-03-08): Επίσης θα εμάθετε ότι ο Κοs Μαλλιάκας προαλείφεται διδασκόμενος την Τουρκικήν ενώ εγώ του παρήγγειλα ρητώς ότι ουδείς γίνεται λόγος περί αυτού εν τοις χωρίοις και ότι δεν έχει ουδεμίαν ελπίδα επιτυχίας; πού λοιπόν; βασίζεται; δυστυχώς όργανον διασπάσεως και ούτος. Δυστυχώς είνε και άλλοι τοιούτοι χριστιανοί και ο θείος αυτού κτλ.

As fate would have it, none of this would make a difference in the end, as the Italian conquest of the islands, only a couple of months after the letters in question and the deliberations and machinations they concern, rendered any discussion of elections for the Ottoman parliament quite irrelevant. The final letter of the collection, however, proves that Constantinidis and Pavlidis remained on good personal and political terms long after the political landscape went through this dramatic transformation.

The letter was written on 17 May 1921, long after the Italian conquest and much later than the rest of the collection. It has been written in Vati, and concerns local politics within the framework of the Greek Orthodox Community - the entity created by the Italian administration as a successor to the Rum millet - as well as the price and quality of local butter in the villages of Rhodes, of which Constantinids’ opinion is not favourable³³. The tone indicates that Constantinidis still considered Pavlidis very much a political ally. It ends with a request to “give a kiss to Savvas”, obviously referring to the former mayor’s young grandson, a tender touch that further proves their strong personal relationship.³⁴



FIGURE 4: Entry of Theodoros Constantinis in the Ottoman Parliament’s, *Meclis-i Mebûsan*, album. It says “Rodos Mebusu (representative) Teodor Konstantinidi Efendi, Aydın, Nazilli 1874” indicating his birthplace as Aydın province. It also states that Constantinidis is a graduate of the medical school in Athens who served in making of policies related to general health and medicine laws. He was elected in October, *Teşrinievvel*, 1908 with 18 votes in Rhodes. He lived in Beyoğlu, Pera.

33 For butter they still demand 50-60 francs, whereas I hear that in the Capital there is butter from Anatolia sold much cheaper [...] after all, even at the exact same price, butter from Anatolia is preferable since it is much more fatty and much healthier and much more fragrant than the local one, which is only suitable for sweets. Constantinidis (1921-05-17): Δια τον βούτυρον απαιτούσιν ακόμη 50-60 φράγκα, ενώ ως επληροφορήθην εν Πρωτευούση πωλούνται βούτυρα της Ανατολής κατά πολύ ευθηνώτερα [...] άλλως τε και εις την αυτήν ακόμη τιμήν εάν πωλήται είνε προτιμότερος ο βούτυρος της Ανατολής διότι είνε μάλλον λιπαρός και μάλλον θρεπτικός και μυρωδάτος από τον εντόπιον, όστις είνε μόνον δια γλυκύσματα κατάλληλος.

34 Constantinidis (1921-05-17): Φιλήσατέ μου τον Σάββαν και δεχθήτε τους ασπασμούς μου.

The political situation

Constantinidis did not belong to a party in the strict sense of the word, at least not to start with. After all, multi-party politics were difficult during this period of Ottoman parliamentarism, and many parties that had been formed after the reinstitution of the constitution were banned in 1909. The politics that brought him to power seem to have been mostly personal and local, not necessarily in the sense of lack of ideology or political affiliation, but in the sense that there was no central party providing support or strict direction. Upon taking up his duties in the parliament, Constantinidis naturally allied himself with the Christian MPs, but they were not a homogeneous group³⁵. Plenty of infighting and intrigue ensued, but sooner or later a parliamentary group was formed that Constantinidis aligned himself with; this eventually seems to have taken on some characteristics of a party, in the sense of agreeing on certain internal procedural matters³⁶ and later on guidelines for the upcoming elections in 1912³⁷. It should be noted that this is in line with the characteristics of *elite based parties* according to the typification of Duverger³⁸.

Constantinidis does report on various issues concerning politics on the central scene in Constantinople, particularly in his early letters. Political dynamics within the Rum millet, relations with the Muslim MPs, and certain larger political issues are briefly touched upon. He also conveys his personal impressions of various Christian MPs. He is most impressed with Georgantzoglou³⁹, the Smyrna MP who eventually came to lead the parliamentary group; he is greatly disappointed with Carolidis, a university professor in Athens with a high profile; and he nearly gets into a physical altercation with Choneos (Χωναίος) from Salonica⁴⁰.

Mention of current events is, however, not detailed. On a couple of occasions he mentions that there is no need to give details about things that have been widely reported in the newspapers, which explains the matter. Here we shall not go into details concerning the political dynamics and events in Constantinople; after all, the information is fragmentary. Rather, we shall be focusing on the material concerning Rhodes and the relationship between Constantinidis and Pavlidis.

The primary affiliation of both men is to the Rum millet, their “brethren” (ομογενείς) which is natural given the social organisation of the late Ottoman Empire. They are also both against the Committee of Union and Progress, placing them in the political opposition. Constantinidis refers to Unionists (in other words, members of the CUP) in a tone not exactly derogatory, but implying a certain distaste⁴¹. He unequivocally states that he does not support the ruling party, when he writes: *after all, some government reshuffle cannot be ruled out in which case persons positively disposed towards us in the opposition would come to power*⁴² Pavlidis in particular seems to have been a *persona non grata* to

35 Constantinidis (1908-12-23); Constantinidis (1909-02-06).

36 Constantinidis (1909-01-15).

37 Constantinidis (1912-03-08).

38 As quoted in Ελευθερίου (2023).

39 Constantinidis (1908-12-23); Constantinidis (1909-02-06).

40 Constantinidis (1909-02-06).

41 eg Constantinidis (1911-04-18)

42 Constantinidis (1911-04-18): Άλλως τε δεν είνε απίθανος και υπουργική τις κρίσις οπότε θα έλθουν εις τα πράγματα πρόσωπα μάλλον καλώς διακείμενα προς ημάς τους αντιπολιτευόμενους

the Unionists⁴³. The exact reasons may be found in Pavlidis’ letter in the Venizelos archives:

When the constitution was proclaimed, the Young Turks established a club of the young Turk committee in Rhodes as well, which not only did I not accept to join, but I managed to sway many important Turks with whom we established a club of the Liberal party in order to counter the machinations of the young Turks, and of which I was elected vice president, but as a result of the events of 31st March 1909 the members of the board of this club were accused as reactionaries and we were forced to close it as was the case in other parts of Turkey.

Furthermore, in 1911 I was elected Mayor of Rhodes with the support of our fellow brethren and the old Turks and I am (the first elected Mayor since the fall of Rhodes to the Turks)⁴⁴.

The reason for the Unionists’ ire is then obvious: not only did Savvas Efendi stand up to them and establish a rival association, but he actually managed to snatch the mayorship from them. Constantinidis’ letters confirm the establishment of Pavlidis’ local committee of the Liberal party, and interestingly he also mentions the creation of a third political organisation:

Firstly, I cordially congratulate you on the establishment of an association which I too wished and suggested, namely an international one, whose vice presidency you have assumed, and I hope for its success.

As for the other association, the progressive one, I fear it might fall on its face as it started not only with confusion and irregularities concerning the composition of its board, but also with an egotistic and isolationist outline [...] I beg you to persist steadfastly with your association which will have the most beneficial of results for the island⁴⁵.

The term “international” must surely be read in the context of the Ottoman millets; he is almost certainly referring to the same thing that Pavlidis later mentioned to Venizelos, namely the participation of both Christians and Muslims in the Liberal association. Indeed it would seem that the third faction, the Progressives, might have been a purely Greek political association⁴⁶ - at

43 Furthermore, I have it on good authority that the Turks of the Capital and especially the Unionists will oppose you more actively should you stand as candidate than they would against me. Constantinidis (1912-03-08): Επίσης θετικώς έμαθον ότι και οι Τούρκοι της Πρωτευούσης και προ πάντων οι κοιματαικοί περισσότερον θα ενεργήσουν καθ’ υμών εάν εκτεθήτε παρά κατ’ εμού.

44 Παυλίδης (1914).

45 Constantinidis (1909-02-06): Εν πρώτοις από καρδίας συγχαίρω υμάς διά την σύστασιν συλλόγου οίον και εγώ επεθύμουν και επρότεινον τουτέστι διεθνούς, ου και την αντιπροεδρείαν ανελάβητε· ελπίζω και εύχομαι περί της κατευοδώσεως αυτού.

Όσον αφορά τον άλλον σύλλογον τον προοδευτικόν φοβούμαι μη ναυαγήση καθ’ ότι ήρξατο με όχι μόνον αταξίας και παρατυπίας περί την συγκρότησιν του συμβουλίου του, αλλά και με εγωϊστικόν και απομονωτικόν διάγραμμα· είχαν δίκαιον οι Λίνδιοι και άλλοι να μη μετάσχωσι, διότι ως έγραψα και εις τον ίδιο πρόεδρον Μαλλιάκαν έπρεπε να προταθή παρακλητικώς και η συμμετοχή των άλλων, η δε κατάρτησις του συμβουλίου εγένετο απολυταρχικώς και αυταρχικώς τω τρόπω χωρίς να γείνωσι τυπικάι τουλάχιστον εκλογαί. Σας παρακαλώ όπως εμμένητε σταθερώς εις τον υμέτερον σύλλογον ου τα αποτελέσματα θα ώσι κάλλιστα δια την νήσον.

46 Although the term “Progressives” could be taken to refer to the Committee of Union and Progress, Constantinidis does not use such a term for the CUP anywhere else in the correspondence; he consistently prefers the term κοιματαικοί (*komitatiki*), deriving from Italian *comitato* for “committee”. Further evidence against such

least that is how I read Constantinidis’ accusation of an “isolationist” agenda. That would mean that in 1909 there would have been (at least) three different political organisations in Rhodes: a Turkish “national” one, adhering to the CUP; a Greek “national” one, the Progressives; and one “international”, the Liberals. Constantinidis clearly agrees with Pavlidis that collaboration between the millets is the way forward.

Significantly, this strategy paid off in the 1911 mayoral election, with Pavlidis succeeding in splitting the Turkish vote as mentioned in his letter to Venizelos. Constantinidis was elated, not only for his friend’s success, but also for the support of his Turkish countrymen.

Honourable Mayor of Rhodes
And dear friend Mr. S. Pavlidis

While cordially congratulating you on your election as Mayor of the capital of Rhodes, at the same time I also deeply congratulate my fellow Rhodian countrymen, Mohammedan Jews and Christians, for through this fortunate choice they have proven most constitutionally that in favour of progress and the common good of our fatherland they know how to unite and to value virtue and merit in full impartiality and regardless of religion, nation or home town.

Wishing you health from god and collaboration from the Rhodians in your work.

With respect,

Th. Constantinidis⁴⁷

Continuing, he further adds:

If you approve, my dear friend, I would like you to publish my congratulatory message on the previous page in the “Aegean” because I believe it shall have a positive effect on our Turkish cohabitants whose spirit of fellowship and collaboration is growing stronger.⁴⁸

an interpretation is that Constantinidis mentions that a mr. Malliakas is president of the organisation and that *the Lindians refused to participate* due to some disagreement, all indicating that this was an organisation made up mainly of Greek Orthodox members. Whether or not this is the same mr. Malliakas who is later mentioned as an “instrument of fragmentation” is unclear(see the segment concerning the discussions about the upcoming 1912 elections).

47 Constantinidis (1911-03-20):
Αξιότιμε Δήμαρχε Ρόδου
Και αγαπητέ φίλε Κύριε Σ. Παυλίδη
Επί τη εκλογή υμών ως δημάρχου της πρωτευούσης Ρόδου συγχαίρων υμάς από καρδίας συγχαίρω εν ταυτώ ενδωμύχως και τους επαρχιώτας μου Ροδίους Μωαμεθανούς Εβραίους και Χριστιανούς, διότι εν τη επιτυχεί των εκλογή ταύτη απέδειξαν συνταγματικώτατα, ότι προς χάριν της προόδου και του κοινού της όλης πατρίδος συμφέροντος γινώσκουσι να συναδελφώνται και να εκτιμώσι την αρετήν και την αξίαν εν πλήρει αμεροληψία και ανεξαρτήτως θρησκευματος, έθνους ή ιδιαιτέρας πατρίδος.
Ευχόμενος υμίν υγείαν παρά θεού και συναρωγήν παρά των Ροδίων επί τω έργω υμών.
Διατελώ μεθ’ υπολήψεως
Θ. Κωνσταντινίδης
Βουλευτής Ρόδου

48 Constantinidis (1911-03-20) Επεθύμουν, φίλτατε, ίνα αν και υμείς το εγκρίνητε, δημοσιεύσητε το απέναντι συγχαρητήριόν μου εις την “Ρόδον” και κατά μετάφρασιν εις το “Αιγαίον” διότι, ως φρονώ, θα επιδράση καλώς ιδίως επί των συνοίκων μας Τούρκων, ων ενισχύται το πνεύμα της συναδελφώσεως κ’ συνεργασίας.

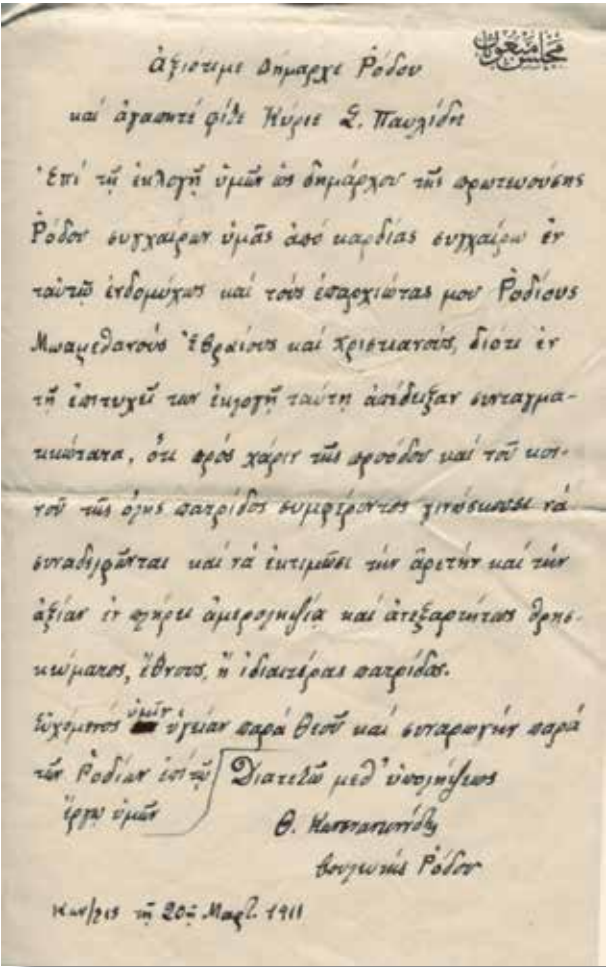


FIGURE 5: Constantinidis’ congratulatory letter 20 March 1911

This stance of Constantinidis is apparent in numerous comments throughout the correspondence: at no point does he seem to have an *a priori* negative stance towards Muslim politicians or officials; rather, he judges by the merits or shortcomings he perceives. In his very first letter, he reports his early impressions from the parliament, noting that *concerning the parliament, things are not pleasant, not so much from the side of the Turkish colleagues most of whom are most polite and prudent, but more from our own side*⁴⁹. Later on, he notes a completely different atmosphere in the parliament and a sense of hostility towards his parliamentary group⁵⁰. He had taken a liking to Minister of Justice Manyasizade Refik Bey, but of a later successor at that post he comments that the *current minister of justice is most barbaric*⁵¹.

On a purely social level, Constantinidis’ letters also reveal an extension of trust towards certain Muslim individuals, which proves the existence of mutual trust relationships in Rhodian society beyond the confines of the millet:

Please find policeman Hamdi efendi and tell him that I was visited by his son-in-law Enver bey who almost weeping begged me for two Ottoman liras which I gave him in the presence of Tselepidis and Tsouvallas and he assured me that he would write to Hamdi efendi to repay them to any friend that I indicate. So please suggest it to him and if he recognises this debt he may give them to you also by virtue of the enclosed receipt. I didn’t want to give them but he swore a thousand oaths to me that he was even suffering from hunger. If Hamdi refuses to recognise it please write to inform me and I shall have a drink of cold water to get over it [...]⁵²

Interestingly, what is conspicuously absent from the letters is any clear mention of promoting interests of the Greek state. He does make mention of the “Macedonian issue” for instance, in reference to a statement by Hilmi bey that was “most favourable for us”⁵³ rather than the Bulgarians. Constantinidis’ letters are filled with allegiance to his “brethren” (ομογενείς), but there is certainly no indication of any secessionist aspirations or any activities such as coordination with the Greek embassy.

Constantinidis uses the term “patriotism” and related words on a number of occasions. My impression is that he mostly conceives of Rhodes as the fatherland and object of his patriotism, but he may just as well be referring to the Ottoman Empire. One way or another he certainly does include Turks in his concept of patriotism:

49 Constantinidis (1908-12-23): Τα την βουλήν αφορώντα εισίν ουχί ευχάριστα ουχί τόσον εκ μέρους των Τούρκων συναδέλφων ων οι πλείστοι ευγενέστατοι κ’ φρονιμώτατοι όσον εκ μέρους ημών αυτών [...]

50 Constantinidis (1911-01-21).

51 Constantinidis (1909-04-04): Ο νυν υπουργός Δικαιοσύνης είνε βαρβαρότατος, αλλ’ ίσως αλλάξη.

52 Constantinidis (1909-02-06): Σε παρακαλώ όπως ανταμώνης τον αστυνόμον Χαμτή εφέντη και τω είπης ότι ήλθε παρ’ εμοί ο γαμβρός του Εμβέρ μπέης και κλαίων σχεδόν μοι εξήτησε δύο λίρας οθωμ. τας οποίας τω έδωκα ενώπιον του Τσελεπίδου και Τσουβαλλά μοι είπε δε ότι θα γράψη εις τον Χαμτή εφ. ίνα τας δώση εις όντινα φίλον τον διατάξω. Πρότεινε το λοιπόν αυτώ και εάν αναλαμβάνει το χρέος αυτό ας σας τας δώση δυνάμει κ’ της εγκλείστου αποδείξεως. Δεν ήθελον τω δώση αλλά μοι έκαμεν χιλίους όρκους ότι υπέφερε και από πείναν ακόμη. Εάν δεν παραδεχθή κατ’ ουδένα τρόπον ο Χαμτής γράψατέ μοι το δια να πίνω ένα κρύο νερό [...]

53 Constantinidis (1909-02-06): την ευμενεστάτην δι’ ημάς δήλωσιν του Χιλμή επί του Μακεδ. ζητήματος

I was most pleased with the actions of our Vali who endorsed your complaint as well as the good officer Nuh bey; one does admittedly feel elated with such state functionaries and sacrifices oneself under their truly patriotic and legal orders.⁵⁴

When the Italian threat becomes imminent, in late 1911, Constantinidis is unequivocal regarding his position in this conflict - and there is no indication that Pavlidis is in any sort of disagreement on this matter:

I shall be observing the situation carefully, if I perceive any danger I shall send you a telegram, I might possibly even come in person if I make it there before the blockade, in order to participate in the defence of the honour and property of the fatherland and the Rhodians. I do, however, hope that the insatiable and grasping Europeans will stand by their original decision for fear of war and strife among themselves, and confine the Italians’ actions to Tripolitania⁵⁵.

This stance poses a problem insofar as it clashes with later accounts of the two men’s trajectory and particularly their adherence to Greek national ideals. It is well documented that both of them got into trouble with the Italian authorities very soon after the conquest, for supporting unification with Greece. Theodoros Constantinidis was a key figure in organising the Conference of Patmos, which in July 1912 issued a declaration asking for unification of the Dodecanese with Greece. Soon thereafter, acting as one of three elected representatives of the Conference, he visited Rome, Vienna, Paris, and London to promote the cause⁵⁶.

Savvas Pavlidis, on the other hand, in his official capacity, was a signatory of a similar petition sent to various European state officials in December 1912⁵⁷. As a result, on 27 February 1913 Pavlidis was deposed from his office as Mayor of Rhodes by decree of General Giovanni Ameglio, and very soon afterwards he was deported to Athens along with his sons. He too made further efforts to attract international attention to the Dodecanesian issue, as attested by his interview in the Italian “Messagero” newspaper only a few days after his deposition and deportation, where he described the Greek sentiments of the Rhodians. It is accompanied by a telegram addressed to the Mayor of Rome asking for his support as one mayor to another⁵⁸.

Furthermore, both men have later attested to having been involved in pro-Greek activity even

54 Constantinidis (1911-11-11): Πολύ εχάρην με την πολιτείαν του Βαλή μας επικροτήσαντος τας παραστάσεις σας ως και του καλού αξιωματικού Νουχ μπέη· ομολογουμένως ενθουσιά τις με τοιούτους λειτουργούς του κράτους και θυσιάζεται υπό τας πράγματι πατριωτικές και νομικάς διαταγάς των.

55 Constantinidis (1911-11-11): Παρακολουθών βήμα προς βήμα την κατάσταση, εάν ίδω κίνδυνον θα σας τηλεγραφήσω, πιθανόν δε να έλθω και ο ίδιος εάν προκάμω τον αποκλεισμόν, ίνα συμμετάσχω στην άμυναν της τιμής και περιουσίας της τε πατρίδος και των Ροδίων. Ελπίζω όμως ότι οι αχόρταγοι και πλεονέκται Ευρωπαίοι φοβούμενοι τον αναμεταξύ των πόλεμον και αλληλοφαγωμόν να εμμένωσιν εις την πρώτην απόφασίν των όπως περιορίσωσι την δράσιν των Ιταλών μόνον εν τη Τριπολίτιδι

56 Παπαχριστοδούλου (1972), p. 534-536.

57 Παπαχριστοδούλου (1972), p. 539

58 Il Messagero 03/03/1913

during the Ottoman period. We have already mentioned Pavlidis' letter to Eleftherios Venizelos, where he stated that already in the 19th c. he had got in trouble with the authorities and lost his position as President of the Commercial Court due to his Greek sympathies⁵⁹. Constantinidis has later claimed to have been involved in secret talks that led to the creation of the Balkan League in 1912, challenging Ottoman power in the region⁶⁰.



FIGURE 6: Photo from the Pavlidis family archive. In his book *Niohoritika*, Vratsalis writes the following about the picture: Athens 1915? The first exiled Rhodians following the Italian occupation. From right to left: Maliakas (doctor), Kefalakis, D. Anastasiadis (Headmaster of Ventoklion school), Savvas-Efendi Pavlidis (mayor of Rhodes), - (?). The unidentified man on the left may possibly be Theodoros Constantinidis.

One explanation for this discrepancy is the fragmentary nature of the correspondence surviving in the Pavlidis archive - there may have been relevant references proving Constantinidis' pro-Greek sentiment in the letters that have not survived. It may also be a matter of discretion: it seems perfectly reasonable to assume that, if an MP was involved in secessionist activities and harboured pro-Greek sentiments, he would avoid mentioning this in writing for fear of being discovered. The abovementioned quotes, however, concerning patriotism, relations with Rhodian Muslims, and the political factions of Rhodes, cannot readily be attributed to such self-censorship. Did their ideology change? Were they simply opportunists? Or pragmatic statesmen who, although supporters of unification with Greece, sought to achieve this only when they perceived that the time was right, and not to the detriment of the Rhodian population be it Christian, Jew or Muslim?

My personal understanding, from the evidence of these specific documents, is that pragmatism is the key here, as well as an honest sense of respect and kinship with their Muslim fellow countrymen - much more so than with the Italian newcomers. As the Italian-Ottoman war over Libya broke out in 1911 and the Italian fleet started spreading terror among the population of the Aegean islands Constantinidis wrote:

59 Παυλίδης (1914).

60 Κωνσταντινίδης (2019).

Also, I am very pleased and boastingly make mention wherever I go, even to MPs and ministers, of my Rhodian compatriots who have on this occasion displayed composure and prudent bravery and were not alarmed like the inhabitants of Chios and Mytilene who caused a commotion like little children; it is with patriotic pride that I indicate and demonstrate the brotherhood with which our Turkish and Jewish brothers cohabitate with the Christians in Rhodes while, as I have learned, the Muslim families are departing Mytilene and Chios in droves, even the ones residing in the villages, whereas there to the contrary they are not departing but seek refuge in the Christian villages; the Muslims of Rhodes are indeed worthy of praise, having always during times of difficulty displayed brotherly love and stewardship towards their Christian compatriots who in turn value and love them as older brothers. In seeking to explain this their generally prudent and verily manful and patriotic comportment full of brotherly love, I say that they are descendants of those chosen and trusted by the Magnificent and most chivalrous and most just Sultan Suleiman in whose time Turkey reached the apex of her glory, and therefore descendants of persons valued and established as the select of this magnanimous and noble-minded man can only be expected to also have magnificent feelings.⁶¹

Alas, in the very next letter he was forced to note that he had been wrong:

I shouldn't have boasted that Rhodians, as opposed to those in Mytilene and Chios, showed composure and bravery and that not a single one of them departed from Rhodes. To my disappointment I now hear that the Rhodians too are unfortunately departing with their families any which way, and that they are scared. In light of other nascent major political events it seems to me laughable to think that the war will spread to our insignificant islands, as it seems to me laughable that the Rhodians would be gripped by such fear as if the matter concerned Rhodes and as if there were any thought about Rhodes.⁶²

Barely half a year would go by before his estimation of the chances of Rhodes' involvement in the conflict would also be proven wrong.

61 Constantinidis (1911-11-11): Επίσης πολύ χαίρω και καυχώμενος κάμνω λόγον όπου τύχω και εις βουλευτάς και υπουργούς με τους πατριώτας μας Ροδίους, οΐτινες απέδειξαν εις αυτήν την περίστασιν ψυχραιμίαν και μετά σφροσύνης ανδρείαν και δεν εθορυβήθησαν ως οι Χίοιοι και Μιτυληναίοι (sic) που εχάλασαν τον κόσμον ως παιδιά· μετ' εγκαυχήσεως πατριωτικής υποδεικνύω και επιδεικνύω την αδελφосύνην μεθ' ης συμβιούσιν εις την Ρόδον οι αδελφοί μας Τούρκοι κ' Εβραίοι μετά των χριστιανών και ενώ όπως έμαθον αι Μουσουλμανικά οικογένειαι αναχωρούν σωρηδόν εκ Μιτυλήνης (sic) και Χίου και αιταί ακόμη που ευρίσκονται εις τα χωρία, τουναντίον εκεί δεν αναχωρούν, αλλά καταφεύγουν εις τα χριστιανικά χωρία· είνε πράγματι άξιοι επαίνων και συγχαρητηρίων οι Μουσουλμάνοι της Ρόδου οι οποίοι εις τας δεινάς περιστάσεις της πατρίδος και πάντοτε έδειξαν αδελφικήν αγάπην και προστασίαν προς τους Χριστιανούς συμπατριώτας των καθώς και εκείνοι τους εκτιμούν και τους αγαπούν ως μεγαλύτερους αδελφούς των. Δικαιολογών δε την εν γένει σώφρονα και πράγματι ανδρικήν και πατριωτικήν και φιλάδελφον στάσιν και διαγωγήν των, λέγω ότι είνε απόγονοι εκλεκτών και εμπίστων του Μεγαλοπρεπούς και ιπποτικοτάτου και δικαιοτάτου Σουλτάν Σουλεϊμάν εις ούτινος την εποχήν η Τουρκία έφθασε το κατακόρυφον της δόξης, και επομένως απόγονοι ανθρώπων τους οποίους εξετίμησε και ενεκατέστησεν ως εκλεκτούς του ο μεγαλόκαρδος και μεγαλόφρων εκείνος ανήρ δεν είνε δυνατόν παρά να έχουν και αυτοί αισθήματα μεγαλοπρεπή.

62 Constantinidis (1911-11-24): Κρίμα που εκαυχώμην με του Ροδίου ότι εξαιρετικώς από τους Μυτιληναίους κ' Χίους αυτοί εφάνησαν ψύχραιμοι και γενναίοι μη αναχωρήσαντος μηδενός έξω της Ρόδου. Μετά λύπης μου δε τώρα μανθάνω ότι και οι Ρόδιοι δυστυχώς αναχωρούν οικογενειακώς τήδε κακήσε, και ότι είνε πεφοβισμένοι.Ενόπιον τόσων άλλων αναφυέντων μειζόνων πολιτικών γεγονότων μοι φαίνεται γελοίον το να νομίζωμεν ότι ο πόλεμος θα μεταφερθή εις τα ψωρονήσια μας όπως γελοίον μου φαίνεται το να κατέχονται υπό τόσον φόβον οι Ρόδιοι ως να ήτο ζήτημα δια την Ρόδον, κ' ωσάν αν υπήρχε σκέψις δια την Ρόδον.

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The third *Meclis-i Mebûsan* (1908-1912), the Ottoman parliament, where Theodoros Constantinidis served as the representative of Rhodes, then part of *Cezayir-i Bahri Sefid* (Mediterranean islands) province, was congragating at the *Çifte Saraylar*, the twin palaces, built by the period’s imperial architect Garabet Amira Balyan in *Fındıklı* at the shores of the entrance of the Bosphorus for Abdülmecid’s daughters Cemile and Münire Sultans. Cemile moved into her palace in 1858 when she married Mahmud Celaleddin Pasha. Mahmud Celaleddin was the son of Ahmed Fethi Pasha and Şemsinur Hanım. He was born in 1836. He served as a minister of trade twice during the reign of Abdülmecid (r. 1839-1861) and was involved in the coup d’état against Abdülaziz (r. 1861-1876) in 1876 together with Mithat Pasha. Mahmud Celaleddin and Mithat Pasha were later tried by Abdülhamid II, Cemile’s brother, and sentenced to death after a three day trial in 29 June 1881. Upon the sentencing, Şemsinur Hanım suffered a stroke and died on July 4th. The death penalties were converted to prison sentences and the pashas were sent to Jeddah for imprisonment in Taif. The journey was on the Imperial yacht “İzzeddin”. Mahmud Celaleddin and Mithat Pasha traveled in tight cells adjacent to the vessel’s steam boilers. The two men died the same night, on 8 May 1884 in prison in Taif. They were both strangled by their guards and executioners sent from Istanbul. Cemile and Mahmud Celaleddin’s palace, once the Ottoman Parliament where Constantinidis has represented Rhodes, serves as part of the Mimar Sinan University’s Faculty of Arts and Architecture today.



Before the trials of Yıldız, the first Ottoman Parliament, 1. *Meclis-i Mebûsan*, was elected in March 1877 and consisted of 115 representatives. The first representative of Rhodes in the Ottoman Parliament was **Hacı Vasilaki Efendi**. His photograph is dated 1876 and is from Abdulhamid’s private collection called *Yıldız Albümü*, Hamidian Album, preserved in Istanbul University’s rare books library.