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Elisavet Contaxaki's "Classical Bouquet" and Carroll Spence's correspondence: keys to the diplomacy of Cretan revolutions

ABSTRACT

In the second half of the 19th century, Elisavet Contaxaki's *Classical Bouquet*, Carroll Spence's correspondence, and Bayard Taylor's articles in the *New York Daily Tribune* offer insights into their views on the Cretan Question, diplomacy and politics. Both Contaxaki and Spence's opinions align with the portrayal of Veley Pasha as an enlightened leader in the contemporary U.S. press. Taylor's prejudice against Cretans and Orthodox Christians and his Fallemerayer disbelief in the continuity of Greek identity are absent in the correspondence between Veley Pasha, Contaxaki, and Spence, which focuses on political matters.

Contaxaki's ideological shift from anti-Ottoman despotism in her *Classical Bouquet* to supporting Veley's Ottoman administration and opposing the revolutionary Cretans may have been influenced by many factors, including her liberal, yet not democratic, intellectual connections with modernity. The three primary sources examined in this paper criticize democratic practices, as Greek freedom differed from Western liberalism. Greeks prioritized collectivity and self-government, stemming from their political traditions and democratic institutions within the Greek communities. The revolutionary Cretans sought freedom from Ottoman rule, not enlightened despots such as Veley Pasha.

Being culturally shaped by the European political tradition, Contaxaki, Spence, and Taylor despised the directly democratic institutions of the Greek world. Their perspective on Greek civilization was partial, fragmented and eclectic, and drew inspiration from classical antiquity viewed through the lens of Western liberalism. Thus, the learned Western elites could not perceive Greek democracy in the same revolutionary manner as the Cretans, with their deeply rooted historical practices and understanding of freedom.

KEYWORDS: Elisavet Contaxaki, "Classical Bouquet", Carroll Spence, Bayard Taylor, Veley Pasha, Cretan Question, Cretan revolutions

INTRODUCTION

The *Classical Bouquet* is a valuable resource for understanding how the intellectual elites of modernity perceived the ideals of the Greek classical world. It also provides significant insights into the ideological development of its author, Elisavet Contaxaki. More specifically, the work sheds light on Contaxaki's liberal, yet not democratic, intellectual connections with Western elites in the 19th century.¹ In 1853-1854, when she composed her *Classical Bouquet* (1855), Contaxaki

¹ Polyvia Parara (2023), "Klassikê Anthodesmê: Dêmokratia kai Neoterikoteta" in *Epistêmê tês Kosmosystemikês Gno-*

conveyed liberal political viewpoints in opposition to Ottoman despotism on the island of Crete. Additionally, she appeared to hold a favorable disposition toward British influence in Crete. Her *Classical Bouquet* provides substantial evidence supporting these positions. Notably, Elisavet Contaxaki subsequently engaged in correspondence with Carroll Spence, the plenipotentiary Minister of the United States in Constantinople, and initiated Spence's correspondence and friendship with Veley (Veliüddin) Pasha, the General Governor of Crete in 1855-1857. The Contaxaki-Spence correspondence reveals, among other things, their unwavering support for Veley Pasha. This article discusses the representation of Crete in the *Classical Bouquet*, provides a detailed account of Spence's correspondence, and examines how the Cretan Question appears in the US press. Finally, it appraises Contaxaki's liberal perspectives and explores the disparities between Western ideologies and democratic practices in the Greek world and Crete.

The article "The Journey of Elisavet Contaxaki's *Classical Bouquet* from Crete to Washington D.C.: the historical and political context"² was the first scholarly publication to describe Contaxaki's *Classical Bouquet* and the Contaxaki-Spence-Veley Pasha correspondence, and bring her distinctive work to the forefront, elucidating her intermediary role between Veley Pasha and Spence. Additionally, it unearthed the archived correspondence involving Contaxaki, Spence, and Veley, shedding light on the anti-revolutionary diplomatic circles during Veley Pasha's administration and Western policies concerning the Cretan Question. This article explores the subject more deeply, by adding new content and proposing interpretations of Western political stances regarding the Cretan Question.



Fig. 1. The flyer for the first academic event where the *Classical Bouquet* was presented, held in 2016 at the University of Maryland College Park in the United States.

siologias, Akadēmia Kosmosystemikēs Gnosiologias, Athens, 2023, p. 237-262. For a new epistemological approach to democracy and freedom, see George Contogeorgis, (2007), *Dēmocratia os Eleutheria*, Ekdoseis Pataki, Athens, and in French, Georges Contogeorgis, (2023), *La Démocratie comme liberté. Démocratie, représentation et monarchie*, Paris, L'Harmattan, coll. Logiques politiques.

² Polyvia Parara (2018): "The Journey of Elisavet Contaxaki's *Classical Bouquet* from Crete to Washington D.C.: the historical and political context," *Proceedings of the 12th International Congress of Cretan Studies*, 21-25 September 2016, Heraklion, Greece. I first presented my discovery of the *Classical Bouquet* to the public on April 2, 2016, at a conference co-organized by the University of Maryland College Park and the Smithsonian Libraries. Later, in the summer and the fall of 2016 and in the following year, I presented papers on the *Classical Bouquet* at: 1) the 12th ICCS, 21-25 September 2016, Heraklion; 2) the International Association for the Study of the Culture of Cities, "Heritage in Transition" 27-29 July 2016, Ermoupolis, Greece; and 3) the 25th Biennial International Modern Greek Studies Association Symposium, November 2-5 2017, Stockton University New Jersey.

1. THE REPRESENTATION OF CRETE IN CONTAXAKI'S *CLASSICAL BOUQUET*

Contaxaki's work *Classical Bouquet* reveals an impressive, in-depth knowledge of ancient Greek, Latin and Western authors.³ Her meticulous selection of excerpts demonstrates a thoughtful and deliberate approach. In this distinctive literary creation, her *πόνημα*, a closer examination of the four pages devoted to Crete yields valuable insights into her ideological and political perspectives concerning Crete and the Cretan Question. These insights are particularly significant, as they predate Veley Pasha's administration as the Governor General of the island.

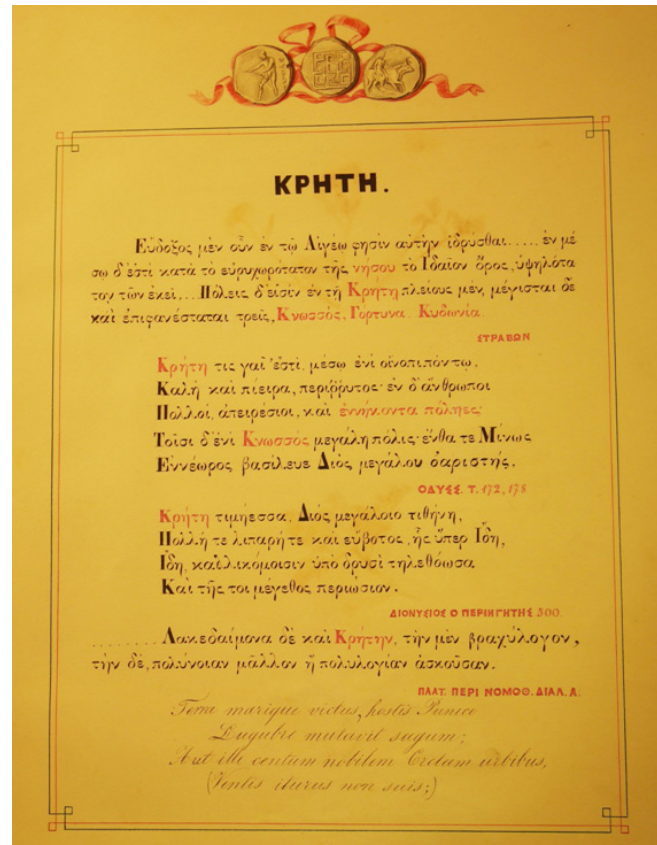


Fig. 2. The initial page of the Crete entry in the *Classical Bouquet* includes excerpts from Strabo, Homer, Dionysius Periegetes, and Plato.

The entry on Crete, which takes up the final pages of the *Classical Bouquet* and serves as the volume's conclusion, can be viewed as an intriguing "addition" to the book's content. This is because the *Classical Bouquet* primarily focuses on locations within the borders of the Greek Kingdom as of 1855. Crete stands apart, however, as it still remained within the Ottoman Empire.⁴

The characteristic painted emblem above the Greek name of the location ΚΡΗΤΗ details three coins. Starting from the left, the first features an inscription that reads "ΚΥΔΩΝ", and shows the hero Kydon stringing his bow. Moving to the middle, there is a coin that presents a depiction

³ Parara (2018), p. 2-11.

⁴ Parara (2018), p. 2



Fig. 3. Detail. Above the Greek name “ΚΡΗΤΗ” in the *Classical Bouquet*, there is a distinctive painted emblem showing three noteworthy coins and the associated myths from ancient Cretan history.

of the squared labyrinth of Minos in Knossos, a well-known symbol from Cretan mythology. Finally, on the right, there is a coin that narrates the myth of Europa riding the bull, symbolizing the abduction of Europa by the god Zeus. It is worth noting that ancient Cretan coins are also mentioned in the Spence-Contaxaki-Veley correspondence and in articles published in the U.S. press.



Fig. 4. Kydonia, Crete, stater, 320-270 B.C.E. Head of the maenad wearing triple pendant earrings. On the other side, Kydon stands stringing a bow.



Fig. 5. Knossos, Crete, stater, 425-360, B.C.E., with the Minotaur on the obverse and the maze of Minos on the reverse.

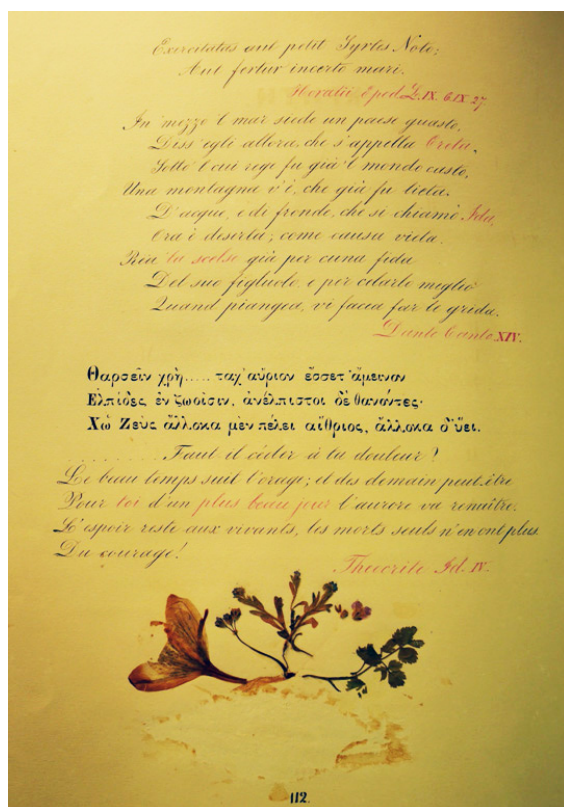


Fig. 6. A silver drachm of the third century B.C., issued in Gortyn, Crete, with the familiar story of Europa being abducted by the god Zeus (inside a dotted border) within a shallow circular incuse.

Elisavet Contaxaki introduces her portrayal of Crete by drawing upon the words of the renowned geographer Strabo, a figure well regarded by contemporary Western intellectuals. The passage in question describes Crete’s location in the Aegean Sea and highlights Mount Ida as the tallest among the island’s peaks, with the greatest and most renowned cities – Knossos, Gortyna, and Cydonia – clustered around it. Contaxaki’s selection of the painted emblem matches the description in the excerpt. Following Strabo, Contaxaki turns to the work of Homer, emphasizing

that Crete is not only geographically significant but also a fair and prosperous land, boasting around ninety cities. She intertwines mythology by referencing King Minos, who in Homeric epic began his reign at the tender age of nine and conversed with Zeus.⁵ The next excerpt, borrowed from Dionysius Periegetes, underscores the island's fertility and impressive size, presenting it as nursed by Zeus.⁶ Contaxaki then transitions to Plato's *Laws*, drawing parallels between Crete and Sparta, and praising their citizens for their laconic and intelligent character, characterized by *βραχυλογία* (conciseness) and *πολύνοιαν* (thoughtfulness/braininess).⁷

Next comes Horace's *Epodes IX*, where the poet speaks of Crete as possessing one hundred cities and touches upon themes of conquered enemies, such as Mark Antony at Actium, and the capricious nature of fortune.⁸ To emphasize Crete as a land of purity, Contaxaki selects an excerpt from Dante's *Divine Comedy* where Virgil speaks to Dante and presents Crete as a pure deserted island that made it "a beloved place for the gods."⁹ In the next passage, taken from Theocritus' *Idylls*,¹⁰ the theme of unworthy misfortunes and that of hope take center stage: "the living people have hope, only for the dead there is no hope. Zeus brings rains one day and sunshine the next." With this excerpt, Contaxaki skillfully introduces a narrative of hope, implicitly urging Crete to maintain hope to transcend its adversities.



Contaxaki's transition to contemporary Crete is marked by the inclusion of William Falconer's (1732-1769) poem "The Shipwreck". This selection signifies a continuity of misfortunes and serves as a vehicle for the anthologist to express her anti-Ottoman sentiments and promote liberalism. In the excerpt, Falconer references the Turkish-Venetian war, a prolonged twenty-five-year conflict that devastated the island. The poet poignantly portrays Great Britain, symbolized as Albion, as touching the island during its voyage. He laments the defeat of Venetian Crete and its subsequent subjugation to

Fig. 7. The second page of the Crete entry in the *Classical Bouquet* showcases excerpts from Horace, Dante, and Theocritus.

⁵ *Classical Bouquet* (1855), p. 111. Homer, *Odyssey* 19.172-177.

⁶ Idem, p. 111. Dionysius Periegetes, *Periegesis*, lines 501-504.

⁷ Idem, p. 111. Plato, *Laws*, A.641e.

⁸ Idem, p. 111-2. Horace, *Epodes*, 9.27.

⁹ Idem, p. 112. Dante, *Divine Comedy*, IV,1.41.

¹⁰ Idem, p. 112. Theocritus, *Idyll* II.

Ottoman rule.¹¹ Through the poem, Contaxaki effectively communicates her political views and ideological stance, underlining the shift in the island's fate and the impact of foreign powers on its history. Indeed, the poem vividly portrays Ottoman rule as a rude oppression. Towards the conclusion of the excerpt, the poet expresses a vision of hope for the revival of the free-born spirit. The choice of this excerpt documents that at least until the mid-1850s, Contaxaki saw the Ottoman administration as an oppressive yoke, promoted the idea of liberalism against despotism, and indicated a preference for Great Britain as protector of Crete in place of Ottoman rule.¹²

The concluding excerpt in the *Classical Bouquet*, sourced from Moschus of Syracuse,¹³ carries significant political connotations for the relationship between Europe and Crete. The full version of this passage delves into the myth of Europa and the Bull, where Europa experiences a troubling dream in which she witnesses two continents personified as women in conflict over her: Asia and the Farther Shore, symbolizing Greece. Crete warmly welcomes Europa and treats her as if she were its own child. In this idyllic narrative, Zeus disguised as a bull abducts Europa and

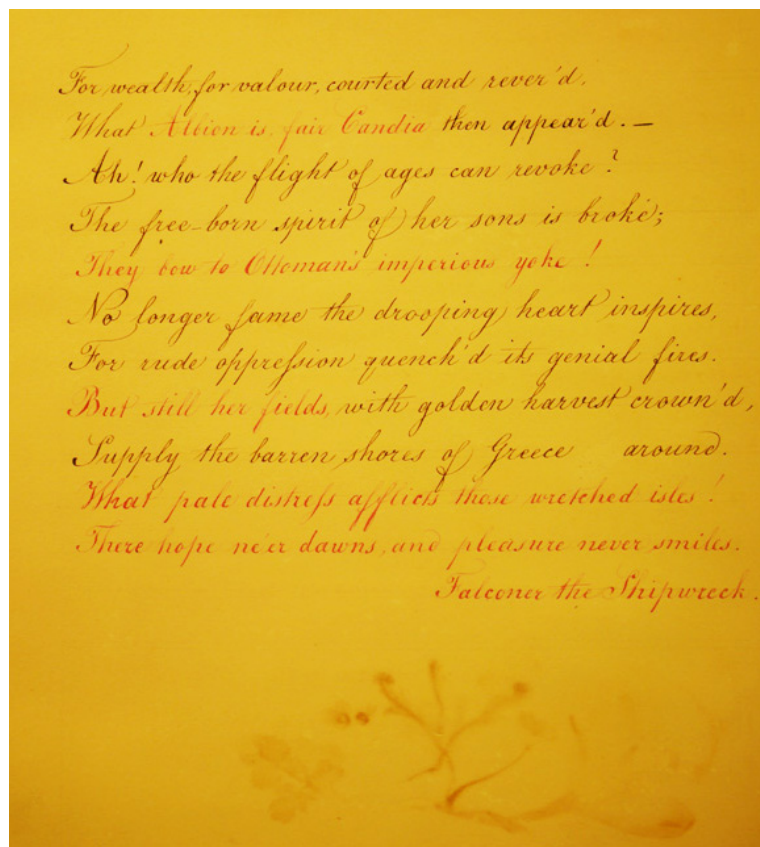


Fig. 8. *Classical Bouquet*, p. 113: William Falconer's poem "The Shipwreck".

¹¹ J. S. Buckingham (ed.) (1833), "The Retrospective Traveler", *The Parliamentary Review and Family Magazine*, vol. 1, January 1, 1833: 553-566.

¹² Eustratios Papamanousakēs (1979), «E taragmenê zôe mias Chaniôtissas tou perasmenou aiôna», *Apo tēn Krêtikē Istoria*, Chania, p. 23-33.

¹³ *Classical Bouquet* (1855), p. 114: Moschus of Syracuse, *Idyll* II.131.

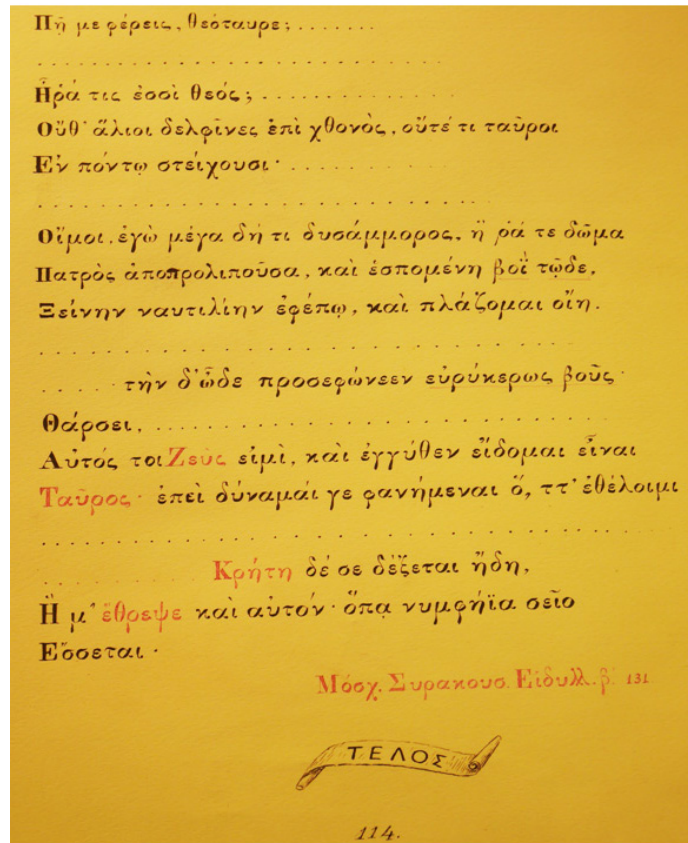


Fig. 9. The last page of the entry on Crete in the *Classical Bouquet*, rounding off the entire volume, introduces the myth of Europa and the Bull.

transports her to the shores of Crete, where they unite. Europa then becomes the bride of Zeus on the island.

By integrating the myth of Europa and the Bull into the emblem and the narrative depiction of Crete, Contaxaki effectively conveys that Europa belongs not to Asia but to Europe, thus reinforcing Crete's identity as Europe's ancestral shore. This reaffirmation of the island's Greek identity and its intimate bonds with Europe is a compelling affirmation of Crete's cultural and historical ties to the European continent. Significant political weight is carried by this last entry, which rounds off the entire volume, explicitly asserting that Greece and Crete share a connection with Europe, not Asia.

To conclude remarks on the representation of Crete in the *Classical Bouquet*, Contaxaki's homeland emerges as a vast and prosperous Greek island with numerous cities. It is described as virtuous, lawful, orderly, and wise. However, it endures undeserved misfortunes while holding onto the hope of reclaiming its former bliss. The resolution of Crete's suffering is contingent upon the cessation of Ottoman despotism, as it is identified as the root cause of the island's woes. Contaxaki employs symbolic, ideological, and political discourse to assert Crete's European identity rather than affiliation with Asia.

A few years after completing her volume, Elisavet Contaxaki formed a strong connection with Governor General Velej Pasha of Crete. To comprehend Contaxaki's shift towards supporting

the Ottoman administration, it is essential to examine her changing viewpoints as they emerge from the archived correspondence she initiated and maintained with Carroll Spence. The letters provide insights into her perspectives concerning Veley Pasha, the Cretans, and the diplomatic intricacies surrounding the Cretan Question.

2. CARROLL SPENCE'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH ELISAVET CONTAXAKI AND VELEY PASHA

Carroll Spence served as United States Ambassador in Constantinople, assuming duties in August 1853 and serving for a period of four years. Throughout his tenure, particularly in his correspondence with Elisavet Contaxaki and Veley Pasha, Spence consistently demonstrated his alignment with liberal political principles, advocating for individual liberties, adherence to international norms, and ethical conduct in diplomatic affairs. Part of his correspondence was published in my earlier work on the *Classical Bouquet*.¹⁴ The collection comprises six archived letters that touch on crucial matters relating to the Cretan Question and diplomatic practices in 1857; they address various topics, including reforms, religious affiliations, confidential information, exchanges of gifts, the activities of the opposition leaders (revolutionary Cretans), the discreet transmission of information through intermediaries, and opinions regarding officials who played pivotal diplomatic roles within the counter-revolutionary party.

Elisavet Contaxaki's acquaintance with Carroll Spence was pivotal in bringing her work, the *Classical Bouquet*, to the United States.¹⁵ Furthermore, Contaxaki cultivated close relationships with foreign authorities in Constantinople and Crete, establishing herself as a prominent figure with influence and political weight. Her house was situated next to the bishop's residence in Chania and functioned as a significant political center.¹⁶ Based on what she states in her letters, the Greek Consul in Crete, consuls of other foreign countries, and Bishop Ioannikios were essential members of the Christian circle that backed Veley Pasha's governance.¹⁷ Furthermore, she was instrumental in initiating the correspondence and friendship between Spence and Veley Pasha. In her letter to Carroll Spence dated October 2nd, 1857,¹⁸ Contaxaki describes the pasha as an excellent and refined leader, capable of implementing reforms to better the life of the Christians in Crete. She saw him as an enlightened governor, who would create a socially and economically progressive multicultural Crete that could appeal to all Ottoman citizens regardless of religion.¹⁹

In her letter to Spence dated July 28th, 1857, Contaxaki mentions receipt of a letter dated July 4th and delivered by Mr. Mountfort, the American Consul in Crete. Contaxaki recounts Mr. Mountfort's eloquent conversation on the occasion and mentions that the American

¹⁴ Parara (2018), p. 1-21.

¹⁵ Parara (2018), p. 12-14.

¹⁶ During the Veley Pasha administration, Elisavet Contaxaki helped her fellow Cretans, who asked for her mediation, see Konstantinos Fournarakês (1930), p. 42.

¹⁷ Eustratios Papamanousakis (1979), p. 25.

¹⁸ *Carroll Spence Papers Georgetown University Manuscripts*, Georgetown University Special Collections Research Center, document number 47660: Correspondence: Elizabeth B. Kontaxaki to Carroll Spence July 28, 1857, October 2, 1857.

¹⁹ Parara (2018), p. 16-20.

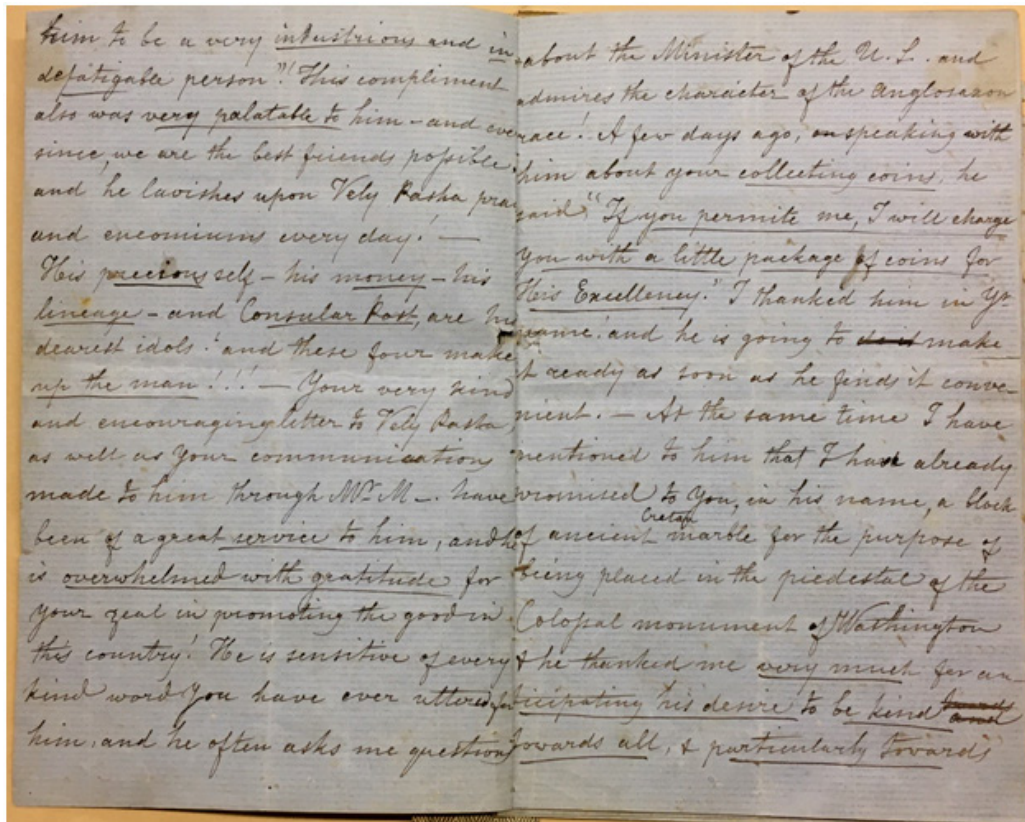


Fig. 10. Contaxaki's letter of July 28th, 1857, pages 2-3.

Consul was making efforts to rectify past misunderstandings. Mr. Mountfort's keen interest in Spence's opinion of him and his ideas about the land are highlighted. Contaxaki adds that Mr. Mountfort was pleased to learn that Spence had expressed pride in him, which prompted multiple acknowledgments from Mr. Mountfort. Further inquiries about Spence's opinion led Contaxaki to share that Spence had remarked on Mr. Mountfort's industrious and indefatigable nature based on his letters and communications. This compliment was also well received by Mr. Mountfort, establishing their strong friendship. Contaxaki concludes that Mr. Mountfort held his self-worth, wealth, lineage, and consular post in high regard, constituting his identity.

Contaxaki continues that Spence's encouraging letter to Veley Pasha and communications conveyed through Mr. Mountfort greatly benefited the governor, who was immensely grateful for the ambassador's zeal in promoting good in the country. Contaxaki conveys that the pasha valued every kind word Spence had written about him, often inquiring about the U.S. Minister and admiring "the Anglo-Saxon race." Reference is made to a conversation about Spence's coin collection, during which Veley Pasha offered to send a package of coins on his behalf. Contaxaki accepted this offer on Spence's behalf; Veley Pasha's intention to provide a piece of ancient Cretan marble for the pedestal of the Washington Monument is also mentioned.

Contaxaki adds that an extract from Spence's conversation with Moustafa Pasha has been sent to Veley Pasha, who is currently traveling to encourage road development. The governor recently hosted a feast for the workmen and delivered a speech emphasizing paternal sentiments toward

peasants. Contaxaki notes that Lord Stafford is actively involved in local matters, that the French Consul's imminent departure is being talked of, and arrangements are being made to improve the island.

Contaxaki explains that despite initial suspicions, the Greek Consul has aligned with their ideas, and she remains actively engaged in various matters concerning the country. Veley Pasha consults Contaxaki extensively and seeks advice on improving conditions for his subjects. The Archbishop of Crete's delayed return to his diocese is noted, and Contaxaki conveys the governor's desire for the Archbishop to cooperate in improving the country. She requests that Carroll Spence invite the Archbishop to his home, to communicate Veley Pasha's message to him.

Contaxaki concludes her letter by expressing anticipation over the delivery of coins and admiring Spence's kindness as a U.S. minister and a friend. Spence's plans for staying or leaving need to be clarified in the letter. Contaxaki assures Spence that the package from Veley Pasha will be sent via Mr. Mountfort, sends regards to Mrs. Spence and the little girls, and signs off as "His sincere friend, Eliz. B. Kontaxaki."

Contaxaki's letter of October 2, 1857, addressed to Ambassador Spence, expresses regret for the prolonged silence from herself and Veley due to activities related to gathering information on the progress of their work, and other engagements linked to implementing the Hatt-i Humayun. Their absence prevented them from promptly acknowledging the kind letters from the ambassador on August 28th and September 5th. She conveys deep appreciation for the positive impact of the ambassador's encouraging letters to both herself and Veley Pasha. Contaxaki notes that Veley Pasha is grateful for the ambassador's kind sentiments.

Contaxaki describes Veley Pasha's emotional response to her reading of excerpts from Spence's letters, including the suggestion that Commodore Breeze visit the island as a compliment to the governor. The pasha admires Spence's benevolence and considers himself fortunate to be his friend. This outpouring of gratitude then led to discussions on the exceptional nature of the American people. Contaxaki perceives a transformation in the governor since their acquaintance, as he was previously surrounded by individuals driven by self-interest. She shares with Spence that Veley Pasha has experienced a change in perspective due to their association.

A significant conversation with Veley Pasha reveals his dependence on consultations with Contaxaki on how to improve the island. The governor recognized the importance of Spence's support and expressed gratitude for the ambassador's efforts. Contaxaki's commitment to American perseverance in the face of obstacles was conveyed to Veley Pasha, who valued this dedication. She reassured Veley Pasha of their unwavering principles and trust in God's guidance. Veley Pasha's thoughts on religion were discussed, and he emphasized that the principles of the gospel should guide those governing the Ottoman Empire so as to bring about reform. In this context, Contaxaki expresses her intention to gift Veley Pasha a Bible in French, and requests Spence's assistance in obtaining the best large-print edition. She attributes Veley Pasha's trust in herself and Spence to the divine, and describes their conversations as being rooted in Christian principles. She expresses a desire for a farewell conversation with Spence and hopes that Commodore Breeze will become involved in supporting the country.

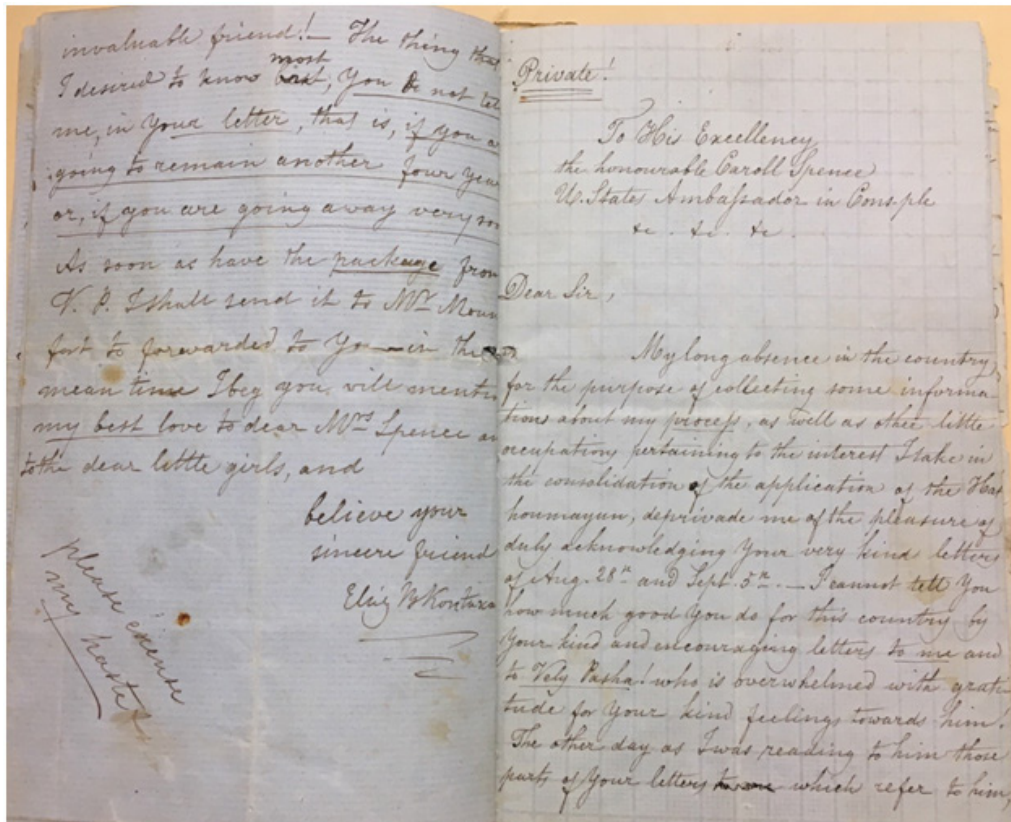


Fig. 11. The last page of Contaxaki's letter of July 28, 1857, and the initial page of her letter of October 2, 1857, organized by Spence in booklet format.

Contaxaki reports positively on the Metropolitan Bishop's conduct and collaboration. Plans for education and the distribution of Bibles are noted. She mentions the bishop's response and his positive impression of Veley Pasha.

Contaxaki acknowledges that political support is crucial due to the presence of detractors. Veley Pasha's efforts to counter newspaper persecution against her are mentioned. Contaxaki's suggestions have led to the selection and support of promising young Cretans for European education to benefit their homeland. The governor's enthusiasm for this idea is highlighted, and belief is expressed in his potential as an instrument of the will of God in the Turkish Empire. Veley Pasha's travels to promote road development and educational initiatives are discussed, and his anticipated meeting with Commodore Breeze are seen as beneficial for the country.

Lastly, Contaxaki addresses Spence's upcoming departure from Constantinople. She anticipates that Veley Pasha will appreciate Spence's gifts and displays of kindness. Efforts to help the pasha recover from past missteps are mentioned, and Contaxaki details their discussions on American greatness and philanthropy. She concludes by expressing hope for positive developments and looks forward to sharing news of more progress in subsequent communication.

Contaxaki's views on Veley Pasha are shared by Spence. In his correspondence with the governor on May 1st, Spence characterizes him as a philanthropist and liberal statesman interested in the promulgation of the *Hatt-i Scheriff*, ensuring that civil and religious equality are afforded to the

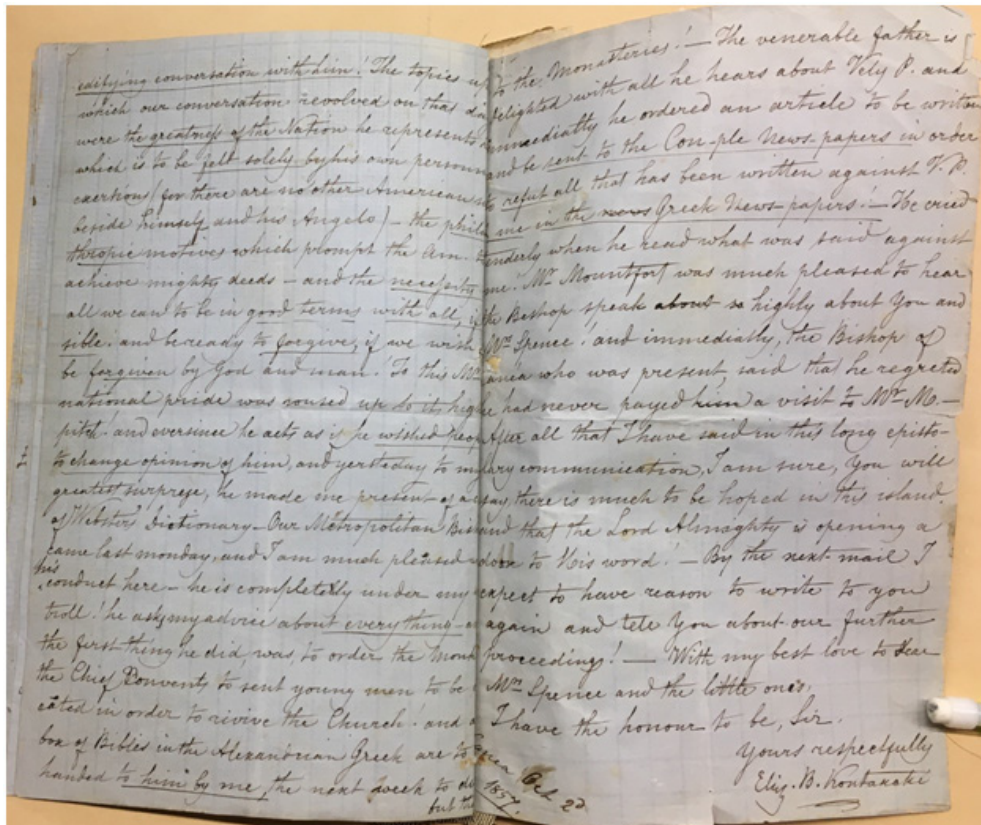


Fig. 12. Contaxaki's letter of October 2, 1857, last pages (8-9).

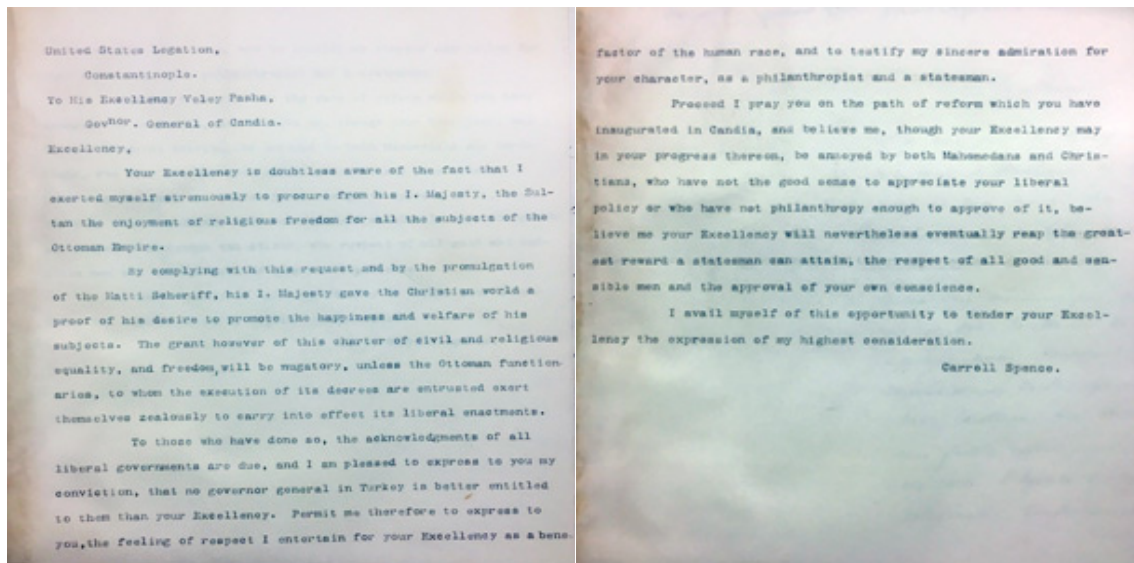
Christian population of Crete.²⁰ In this same letter, Spence draws a distinction between Veley's intentions as a governor to introduce the reforms and the responses from Ottoman functionaries on implementing the Hatt-i Scheriff. He criticizes ordinary people for lacking the discernment to recognize and value Veley's liberal policy.²¹

Speaking about Elisavet Contaxaki, in an autograph note to himself, the American diplomat regards her as the most remarkable and best-informed woman he has ever encountered.²² In this note, Spence asserts that under Miss Contaxaki's influence, the governor became a reformer who faced opposition from certain members of the Christian court and fellow citizens opposed to reforms. In support of Veley Pasha's commendable endeavors, as perceived by Spence, both Carroll Spence and the English ambassador took it upon themselves to advocate his cause before the Parl , countering the efforts of revolutionary actions: "Influenced by Miss Contaxaki he became a reformer obnoxious on other accounts to some of the Christians Court who were

²⁰ Parara (2018), p. 16-18.

²¹ Letter of May 1st, 1857, to His Excellency Veley Pasha Governor of Candi, by the United States Legation in Constantinople, signed by Mr. Carroll (Charles) Spence. Legation, in *Carroll Spence Papers Georgetown University Manuscripts*, Georgetown University Special Collections Research Center, Box 1 Folder 22.

²² Parara (2018), p. 18-19: Spence adds that Contaxaki spoke several languages with fluency and devoted herself to advancing her political and educational interests, and that she came to Constantinople for that purpose, eliciting the sympathies of officials and himself on behalf of her people. Spence admits that at her request, he opened correspondence with Veley Pasha, describing Veley Pasha as one of the most enlightened Turks in the empire.



Figs 13 and 14. Carroll Spence's letter to Veley Pasha, May 1st, 1857, pages 1-2.

opposed to reforms, and also to many of his countrymen. To encourage him in his praiseworthy efforts and reforms [engaged] the English ambassador and myself to advocate his cause with the Parlé [pencil: and to oppose these efforts to [twelve] revolutionaries]."²³

In his letters of response to Carroll Spence, dated March 26th, 1857, and August 3rd, 1857, Veley Pasha expresses appreciation for Spence's support and approval for his implementation

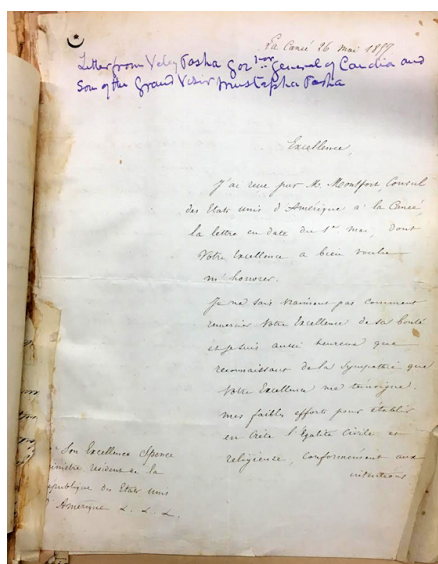


Fig. 15. Veley Pasha's letter to Spence,
May 26, 1857, page 1.

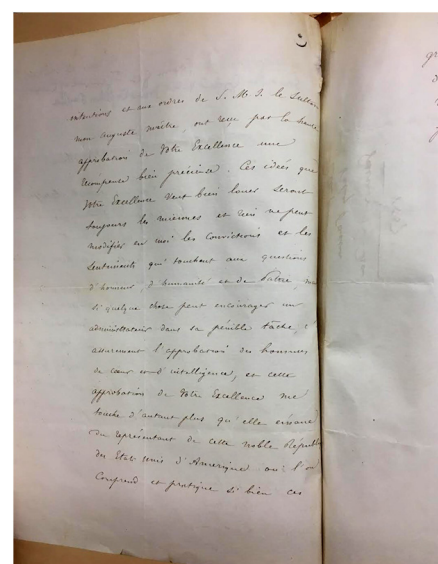


Fig. 16. Veley Pasha's letter to Spence,
May 26, 1857, page 2.

²³ Carroll Spence Papers Georgetown University Manuscripts, Georgetown University Special Collections Research Center, document number 47660.

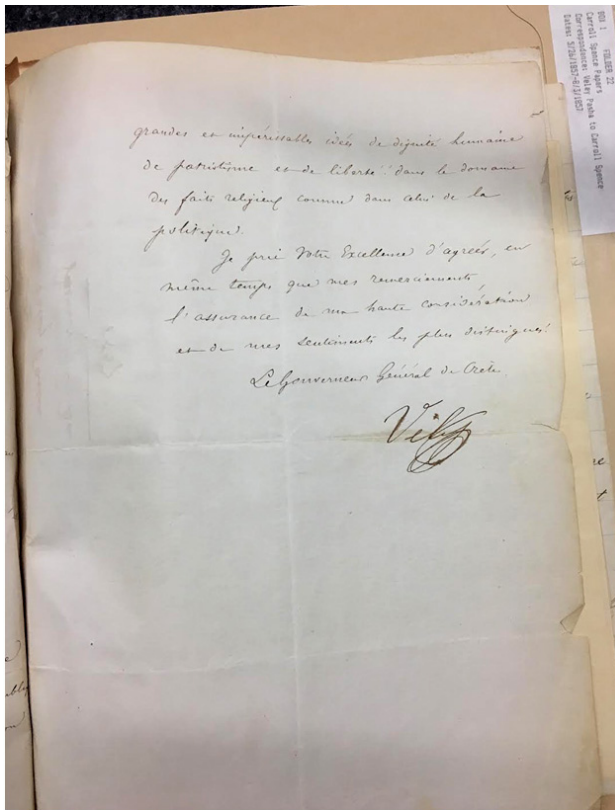


Fig. 17: The last page of Veley Pasha's letter, May 26, 1857.

of new laws regarding civil and religious rights for Christians, along with the hope that he can implement further liberalization of his domain.²⁴ He adds that by complying with their request and the promulgation of the *Hatt-i Scherriff*, the Sultan has given the Christian world proof of his desire to promote the happiness and welfare of his subjects.²⁵

To answer the initial question about the transition from exalting liberalism to supporting the Ottoman administration, particularly in her closeness to General Governor Veley Pasha, Contaxaki seems to have pragmatically shifted and adapted her stance to prevailing

political realities. She appears to have seen cooperation with Veley Pasha and the Ottoman administration as a pragmatic way of influencing and improving the situation in Crete. The compiler of the *Classical Bouquet* reassessed her stance towards supporting Veley's Ottoman administration in 1855-7. Her close relations with Veley Pasha played a significant role in shaping her political orientation and influenced her perspective on the Ottoman administration in Crete. She presents herself as advocating for the interests of Cretans from within the system rather than from an oppositional stance. Furthermore, she engaged with Western diplomats who favored Veley Pasha in promoting reforms in Crete. Lastly, personal motivation, such as survival and personal security, cannot be excluded, since many factors can influence political positions and alliances. Contaxaki remained powerful as long as Veley Pasha and Spence held high office.²⁶

3. THE CRETAN QUESTION IN THE U.S. PRESS

The views of both Spence and Contaxaki on Veley Pasha and Cretan politics align with what appeared in the U.S. press over the same period. In the *New York Daily Tribune*, Bayard Taylor, an American protestant journalist,²⁷ published articles about Crete.²⁸ In "A Cretan Journey",

²⁴ Parara (2018), p. 16-20.

²⁵ *Carroll Spence Papers Georgetown University Manuscripts*, Georgetown University Special Collections Research Center, document number 47659.

²⁶ On the setback she suffered later on, see Polyvia Parara (2018), p. 19.

²⁷ Bayard Taylor was also a poet, literary critic, translator, travel author, and diplomat who traveled in Southern Europe and the Levant, and visited Greece and Crete in 1858.

²⁸ These articles are later gathered in his volume Bayard Taylor (1859), *Greece and Russia with an Excursion to Crete*,



Fig. 18. New York Daily Tribune: Melidoni, Island of Crete, February 23, 1858. Bayard Taylor in Southern Europe: "Our Imprisonment at Rethymnos", published on May 25th, 1858".

dated May 11, 1858, Bayard Taylor presented Veley Pasha as "an enlightened and political mind, the rarest apparition among the Governors of the East."²⁹ In his second article titled "Our Imprisonment at Rethymnos", dated May 25th, 1858, Bayard Taylor explicitly laid out his political beliefs: "Nothing but an enlightened despotism can accomplish any good with such a population (the Cretans)."³¹ He appeared convinced that the Cretans needed an enlightened governor to rule them. He employed derogatory language about the Cretans.³² In a later article, "Two Days with the Archbishop", published in the same newspaper on June 3, 1858, Bayard Taylor discusses church politics, mentioning that the bigoted Greek party hated Crete's Metropolitan (Archbishop). He confirms the connections between Contaxaki, Veley and Ioannikios by stating that he handed the Metropolitan a letter from Veley Pasha and a few lines of greeting from "Elizabeth of Crete."³³ Being a Protestant who had adopted Fallmerayer's theory,³⁴ Bayard Taylor

New York, G. P. Putnam.

²⁹ New York Daily Tribune, May 11, 1858, p. 6, and Bayard Taylor (1859), p. 102.

³⁰ Report in New York Daily Tribune: Melidoni, Island of Crete, February 23, 1858. Bayard Taylor in Southern Europe: "Our Imprisonment at Rethymnos", published on May 25th, 1858.

³¹ New York Daily Tribune, May 25th, 1858, p. 6, and Bayard Taylor (1859), p. 119.

³² "They are violently opposed to improvement of any kind, and the road, especially, excited their bitter hostility. ... The Cretans, he (Mr. Woodward, the English Engineer) stated, are conceited and disputatious in their character to an astonishing degree".

³³ New York Daily Tribune, March 13, 1858, p. 3, and Bayard Taylor (1859), p. 139.

³⁴ In chapter 9 of this book entitled "An Excursion to Crete", Bayard Taylor explicitly questions the Greekness of the Cretans: "Our destination was Crete, the least visited and the most interesting of all the Grecian islands. (I use "Grecian" in the ancient, not the modern sense. Crete has been since 1669 subject to Turkey)." In the preface to his travel book,

calls the Archbishop a man of “Slavonic, not Hellenic blood, because he was a native of Epirus.”³⁵ He also mentions that the ultra-Greek party derisively referred to Ioannikios as the “Turkopolite”, because he worked closely with Veley Pasha to implement the *Hatt-i humayun*.

A year later, Bayard Taylor published all his newspaper articles about Crete in a book titled *Travels in Greece and Russia, With an Excursion to Crete*. In chapter nine of this book, titled “An Excursion to Crete,” like Spence, Bayard Taylor speaks of Contaxaki with great admiration: “Her profound scholarship, wit, enthusiasm, and energy are the characteristics of the rarest kind among the Greek women of the present day and have therefore given her a wide celebrity.” He rounds off his account of Contaxaki by referring to her controversial reception from the Cretans: “Consequently, she has many enemies and is assailed at times by the meanest slanders and intrigues.” Bayard Taylor does not explain where this controversy stems from, concludes that she would be an exceptional woman in any country and adds: “I was interested at finding in her the same quickness and acuteness of mental perception for which the old Greeks were famous.”³⁶

Having examined journalism and diplomacy contemporary to 1858 and related correspondence on Cretan politics on the same topics and people, we conclude that many items mentioned in the Contaxaki-Spence-Veley correspondence are confirmed by Bayard Taylor’s articles in the *New York Daily Tribune*. This series of reports contributed to shaping American public opinion about the Cretan Question. They served as primary sources for many topics, including Veley Pasha’s administration and personality, Contaxaki’s role in Cretan politics and the Cretans’ criticisms of the role played by her, Veley and Ioannikios as seen by Westerners. Furthermore, the journalist identified the anti-revolutionary circle supporting the pasha’s administration in the same terms as Spence’s correspondence with Contaxaki, yet failed to understand the character and nature of the Cretan people.

CONCLUSION

Contaxaki’s *Classical Bouquet*, Spence’s archived correspondence, and Taylor’s newspaper articles in the *New York Daily Tribune* provide valuable insights into their views on the Cretan people and politics during the mid-19th century. Both Spence’s and Contaxaki’s opinions align with how Veley Pasha was portrayed in the U.S. press at the time, particularly in articles by Taylor. Namely, Veley Pasha is portrayed as an enlightened and politically astute leader, a rare figure among the governors of the East. However, Taylor holds anti-Hellenic views, describing the Cretans in derogatory terms. His prejudiced views against Orthodox Christians and his belief in the discontinuity of Greek identity are absent in the correspondence between Veley Pasha, Contaxaki, and Spence. Their correspondence focuses on political matters, relationships, and the Cretan question, without discussing anything similar to Taylor’s contentious beliefs.

Taylor Bayard expresses his complete conviction “of the views entertained by Fallmerayer, that the modern Greeks are a mongrel race, in which the Slavic element is predominant, and that the pure Hellenic blood is to be found only in a few localities.” In addition to modernity’s incomplete understanding of the classical world, Fallmerayer’s anti-hellenic theory led to Western elites scorning Modern Greeks and, in Taylor’s case, the Cretans.

³⁵ *New York Daily Tribune*, March 13, 1858, and Bayard Taylor (1859), p. 142.

³⁶ Bayard Taylor (1859), p. 93-94

Regarding Contaxaki's ideological formation and political stances, her *Classical Bouquet* and Spence's archived correspondence demonstrate her shift towards Ottoman administration and the Cretan Question. Like modernity, Contaxaki favored liberalism, yet against democracy, showing that her principles are often based on the ideological considerations of monarchical or liberal constitutionalism in Europe and the United States.³⁷ All three primary sources, *Classical Bouquet*, Spence's correspondence, and Taylor's articles in the *New York Daily Tribune*, speak against the democratic practices of assemblies. Greek freedom differed in substance from the liberalism of the West, which had taken a different trajectory.³⁸ Western citizens' political identity focused on individualism and individual liberties, whereas the Greeks focused on collectivity and participation in self-government. The political experiences of the Greeks and their revolutionary projects derived from political education and practices in their communities in the Ottoman Empire, vehicles of anthropocentric societies in freedom.³⁹ The individuality of the Greeks is enriched with institutional collectivity, becoming a political individuality that assumes responsibility for its collective destiny. The Western narrative of liberalism did not include Cretans' understanding of freedom and sociopolitical practices. In other words, the Cretans were not looking for enlightened despots or governors to implement individual rights such as those Velei Pasha wanted to implement. Rather, they sought freedom from Ottoman subjugation.

Contaxaki, Spence, and Taylor were culturally molded by European political tradition, where large populations were obedient to absolute monarchs and later to constitutional monarchs or presidents. Being shaped by the ideologies of modernity,⁴⁰ they failed to differentiate and understand the long-lived traditions within the Greek communities under the Ottomans, where the Greeks had their democratic assemblies and managed affairs in their own communities. The eclectic perspective learned Europeans and Americans adopted when looking at Greece's classical past gave them artistic inspiration and liberal ideals absent in the political landscape



Fig. 19. *Classical Bouquet* in the Smithsonian Institution's Rare Collections Library.

³⁷ On the ideology of modernity and the Greek world, see George Contogeorgis (2021), *To Hellêniko Kosmosystêma*, volume 6, Ekdoseis Sideri, Athens.

³⁸ Polyvia Parara (2021), "The War of Independence and the Freedom of the Greeks" in *International New York Times/Kathimerini*, March 24, 2021, and online *ekathimerini*:<https://www.ekathimerini.com/opinion/1157742/1821-the-war-of-independence-and-the-freedom-of-the-greeks/> and Polyvia Parara, (2021), "To Eikosiena kai è Eleutheria ton Ellênon" in *Revue Hellénique Des Droits de l'Homme*, volume 89, p. 663-666, Sakkoulas Publications, S.A., Athens.

³⁹ For a detailed account: George Contogeorgis, (1982), *Koinonikê Dynamikê kai Politikê Autodioikêsê, oi ellênikes koinotêtes tês Tourkokratias*, Athens, Ekdoseis Nea Synora.

⁴⁰ Parara (2023), "Dêmokratia kai ta Epitheta tês Neoterikotêtas" in *Revue Hellénique Des Droits de l'Homme*, volume 95, p. 141-148, Sakkoulas Publications, S.A., Athens.



Fig. 20. The University of Maryland College Park, USA, hosts the inaugural and exclusive presentation of the *Classical Bouquet* to faculty, students, and the general public.

preceding modern Europe. However, Greek democracy remained outside their political realities and practices, making it challenging for them to comprehend it in the same revolutionary manner as the Cretans, who passionately articulated and envisaged it.

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