



# The Philosopher Pamplekis (1733-1793): The First Witness of Free Thought

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### Commentary

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## His Birth and Life

Christodoulos Pamplekis was born in 1733 in the village of Babini, Etoloakarnania and was the son of Efstathios. He learned the first letters in his village, probably in the Monastery of Agios Georgios, which was a great spiritual center in the 17th and 18th centuries. From an early age he was orphaned by his mother and at the age of 4 or 5 he contracted smallpox, losing his left eye, while his illness left several scars on his face [1,2]. At a young age he went to Mount Athos and studied at the Athoniada Academy, which was headed at that time by Eugenios Voulgaris (1753-1759). He studied at the school next to remarkable young people of the time (Sergios Makraios, Iosipos Moisioudax, Kosmas the Aetolian, etc.) and then became a monk. As an active, restless and learned man he was involved in the internal conflicts of the Kollyvades of Mount Athos that broke out in 1756. Thus, like his teacher, he met the attacks of the conservative establishment of the clergy and was forced to leave the peninsula of Mount Athos. He left Mount Athos probably in 1759 and went to the area of Olympus where he taught for a few years before leaving for Europe [1].

We first find him in Venice, where, in parallel with his studies, he worked as a philosophy teacher and translator. In Venice he published his first book, in 1781, which is essentially an adaptation of the French work then published anonymously entitled *La veritable politique des personnes de qualite* which was published in Paris in 1722 and is attributed to Nicolos Remond des Cours [In 1751 it was printed by Amand Konig in Strasbourg French-Italian version in small size (approx. 14x8 cm, p. 295)]. Pamplekis translated the work from the French-Italian edition of 1752. In addition to the preface written by Pamplekis, there are also extensive footnotes in many chapters. In this work, politics in the modern sense appears for the first time in the

Modern Greek literature.

We know that Pamplekis then visited France and Germany, where he studied the circulating texts on the philosophical systems of the time. We know that he taught Greek letters to young people at the school of the Greek Community in Vienna, where he first settled and then in Leipzig. Leipzig at that time was a large center of studies and Pamplekis devoted himself to the study of philosophy.

In *True Politics* in 1781 Pamplekis writes that the Christian religion is respected, pure, high and divine [3]. While God is a great benefactor of humanity, because with the martyrdom of his only begotten Son he saved the human soul from the bondage of evil [3]. Here Pamplekis expresses his deep religiosity and respect for Christianity, but also his belief that human happiness depends on it and that only with faith can man become good and kind [3]. While Pamplekis was continuing his teaching work and performing his duties as a clergyman of the Orthodox Church in Leipzig in 1793, an insulting book was published anonymously against him with the title *Sequence of one-eyed and antichrist Christodoulos of Akarnania*. This book was the occasion for the explosive response of the philosopher Akarnana with the book *Answer* anonymous to the same foolish accusers named about theocracy [4].

However, Pamplekis did not have time to see this book printed, because he passed away in the hospital of Leipzig on August 15, 1793 and his funeral took place in the orthodox church of the city. The publication of *Answer* was completed by his students and supporters.

The *Answer* begins with the defense of the views of the Enlightenment, excluding Voltaire and Rousseau, and accuses those who criticize their books, while they were not

even claimed to read them, and Pamplekis concludes that they fight them only out of ignorance. In this book, Pamplekis mainly challenges the involvement of the Church in secular affairs and turns against the abuses, exaggerations and entanglement of the clergy with secular power.

He then makes a violent and outspoken critique of the Orthodox clergy and reaches the total and categorical rejection of the basic tenets of the Christian religion. Although in the end it reaches the acceptance of God as an infinite and necessary substance, you are essentially leading to the denial of the Christian faith itself, as it is projected by the priesthood. Due to the persecutions he suffered in Vienna he was forced to leave and settle in Leipzig, while he had already published there Vienna his philosophical work *On the Philosopher, Philosophy, Physics, Metaphysics, Spirituality and Divine Principles* (Vienna, 1786). This work was criticized by his former teacher in Athoniada Academy Voulgaris, who was now bishop in Ukraine, in a letter of 1780 Barbarousis GS, et al. [1]; Annian G, et al. [5]. As is well known, the official Church then turned against every Enlightenment movement and its representatives. Pamplekis was the first Greek to be attacked by the Eastern Church since the time of Methodius Anthracitis, because he expressed some very progressive and radical positions, mainly on the position of religion, and was accused of being an atheist.

There is no doubt that the formulation of extreme positions, such as those of Pamplekis, was not something unique at that time. Many times in the past some monks of Mount Athos had written texts more insulting than Pamplekis's Answer and there was no similar reaction from the Church. But now the circumstances were different, the atheism, promoted by some Western scholars and the attempt of the French Revolutionaries to impose the religion of theism and other materialistic views in the Ionian Islands, made the Eastern Church react and found Pamplekis's face appropriate. The Church considered this reaction imperative and necessary, because the danger was visible and even at the moment when in Corfu the French desecrated the relics of Saint Spyridon [1]. Pamplekis also writes in the Answer that he was one-eyed, because he lost one of his small eyes due to smallpox [4]. For his disability he was ridiculed by his enemies, who said that he was born with one eye and that the surname Pamplekis comes from complicate, that is, he who mixes, confuses everything. No copy has been saved from the Sequence and her text is known because it is contained in the second edition, which was compiled by Pamplekis together with his Answer. G. Zaviras mentions that Pamplekis "became famous for his piety despite his piety" [6]. After his death, his students erected a monument in his honor in a Rosenthal forest square outside Leipzig with the inscription: "Here is the learned Christodoulos Efstathiou from Acarnania, who devoted himself to the study of philosophy and theory of

beings, born in 1793, died on August 15, 1793". Zaviras GI, et al. [6]; Dimitrakopoulos Andr, et al. [7].

Of course, the official Church could not leave such behavior unpunished, especially of a clergyman, and as a natural consequence, three months (November) after Pamplekis's death, he made his synodal aphorism. The aphorism was directed against all his supporters, the readers of his books and those who continued to spread his views. Pamplekis's book does not characterize it as blasphemous and disrespectful and is generally directed against the Enlightenment. The text of the aphorism was read in all the orthodox churches and he called him a one-eyed Roumeliotis [1]. The persecutions against Pamplekis resumed in 1798 and lasted until 1800 with the publication by Dimitrios Govdelas of his aphorism entitled *Exostracism of the ungodly Antichrist Christodoulos of Monophthalmos from Acarnania*. *Exostracism* was issued to the Vuda in 1800 and is essentially a libel against Pamplekis and is written as an ecclesiastical sequence. Govdelas Dimitrios, et al. [8] Nevertheless, the aphorism of Pamplekis was repeated in 1844 by the Greek Church, as well as the aphorism of Panagiotis Sofianopoulos in the Circular for the aphorism of Theofilos Kairis [21].

It becomes clear that the above reactions of the Eastern Church made all the students and supporters of Pamplekis silent, of course his quick death helped. In the following years his work is covered by a strange silence, at a time when one would expect to be in the spotlight. But Hellenism now, more than ever, needed more love, unity and cooperation between the official Church and its spiritual people, in order to achieve the redemption of the race [9]. Pamplekis was characterized as a persecuted and "first witness of free thought" and it is necessary to clarify that he was not an atheist [10], but a theist and directly influenced by Descartes, Leibnitz and Locke or Wolff. The purpose of Pamplekis, like the Enlightenment, was not the overthrow of the Church, but its restoration to dignity with the revival of the authentic meaning of Christianity. This includes his war against a portion of the clergy. Pamplekis never questioned the existence of God, or the legitimacy of the Church. What she challenged was her involvement in secular affairs and she turned against the abuses, excesses and excesses of the clergy. The important thing in his work is that he affirms the existence in the Greek intellectual space of a thought completely free from the traditional religious teaching. Of course, in addition to the material and atheistic danger, the Church was going through a period of crisis of values, which made it more imperative and necessary to react against any challenge to it, no matter where it came from. But her dealings with the secularly intertwined authorities, the tyrannical Ottoman rule, the opiums and all this hypocrisy around the sanctuaries and shrines of a tyrannical people at the moment led Pamplekis to some extreme positions and the Church could not help but absolve.

Pamplakis was well-educated and well-educated in Greece, and at that time he became a well-known scholar who was among the few writers who were highly regarded by Greek intellectuals. The patriarch Kallinikos III includes him in the list of Greek scholars of the 18th century [11]. Pamplakis became acquainted with the ideas of the Enlightenment and was particularly influenced by the religious views of French materialists due to the ignorance of some clergy he was considered an atheist. In the *Answer* he writes: «the angels and the devils... I have no duty to believe them, but only one infinite and necessary substance... I am no longer the tyrannical yoke of the priesthood... I can not suffer... because I was born free and I want to die free [12]. The uproar that was created around the name of Pamplakis at that time was great, because it expressed the most extreme positions of the Modern Greek Enlightenment towards Christianity. For this reason he met the sharpest criticism of the teacher of Eugenios Voulgaris in 1790 and his name was publicly dragged from the orthodox church of Vienna, where he lived the last years of his life and taught to children of the Greek community. Pamplakis, burning with immeasurable love for philosophy, translated entries from the Encyclopedia of Revelation, revealing the historical dimension of religious institutions and perceptions [12].

### The attitude of the Church against the Modern Greek Enlightenment

The people of the Church, always having the Ecumenical Patriarchate as a stronghold and supporter, did not stop for a moment against turning against philosophy and philosophers, accusing them, sometimes as atheists and sometimes issuing circulars that defined its teaching as more necessary and useful. The Sciences Psimmenos, et al. However, the purpose of Pamplakis, as well as of the Modern Greek Enlightenment, was not the overthrow of the Church, but its restoration to dignity with the revival of the authentic meaning of Christianity. This includes his war against a portion of the clergy [9]. Pamplakis was the first Greek intellectual from the time of Anthracitis to be attacked by the Church and to renounce his religious views in 1793. The later attack (1806) of the work *Greek Prefecture* against the Church focused on the clergy and essentially the controversy. With the Church in Greek society was political and not religious. But the Greek followers of the Enlightenment proclaimed their religiosity and their war was directed only against the corruption of a portion of the clergy. Their purpose was to restore the Church to dignity and to revive the authentic meaning of the first centuries of Christianity. The Greek scholars were divided into two factions and it is true that the most daring came from the ranks of the Church itself and they faced its strongest reaction and war.

In two cases the fundamental tenets of Christianity were challenged. These cases, although they can-not be considered representative, are characteristic indications of the scope of the ideological quests of the Modern Greek Enlightenment. The first case appeared with the work of Anonymous in 1789. Dimaras KTH, et al. [13]. Anonymous of 1789 was a provocative work that scolded the corruption of the clergy, reaching as far as mocking the doctrines of the Christian faith.

The second case is related to Pamplakis' reaction to the persecution of him by the Church for his philosophical views. In these two cases the positions expressed are extreme and in essence equate to a rejection of religious belief. In the case of Pamplakis, it was not possible for the official Church not to react, since the philosopher expressed views that were in essence equivalent to a denial of Christianity. The whole Western Enlightenment was condemned with him. The Church has now officially taken a stand against the atheism and terrorism of the French Revolution.

The Church was bothered by Pamplakis' clear position on certain issues that theology considered, from a dogmatic point of view, to be exclusively its own. Such as the problem of the uncle, the emergence of religion, the relations of the Church with the state, etc. The fact that the philosopher freely expressed his views in the Greek parish of Vienna and taught the children could not be traced back to the Church. In addition, his criticism focused on the clergy and especially the bishops who undertook the command to lead their flock to salvation. The reaction of the clergy came with the publication of the *Sequence*, which presents Pamplakis as driven by dark motives, as a man demonized and motivated by the devil. Even in his disability, they imitate and indicate to the faithful the attitude they should follow Psimmenos, et al.

### Epilogue

Texts, such as the works of Pamplakis, but also the *Anonymous of 1789* that turned against the mysteries and others later, such as Rosanggallos (+1805), the Greek Prefecture (1806) and the Thoughts of Kriton (1819), could not be let the Church pass them without reaction. At that time the works that were intended to pass on to the public the latest ideas of the Enlightenment were anonymous. The only eponymous work was Pamplakis' *Response* to his accusers (1793). After all, Adamantios Korais also published the Doctrinal Teaching anonymously at that time and he, as a representative of the progressive faction, embodied the conflict that prevailed among the scholars of the nation.

However, in the older works of Pamplakis there are no elements that could be characterized as a station for the

course of Greek thought. His works are written in an ancient language and his views reflect the theories of conservative Western philosophers. In general, his works do not seem - until 1793 - to express any spiritual reaction, which was said to have provoked. In *True Politics* [14,15], the philosopher begins with the principles and rules of good governance that are taught to us by the law of nature and ethics and are not applied by politics at all. *On Philosopher, Philosophy, Physics, Metaphysics, Spirituality and Divine Principles* (Vienna, 1786) is his main philosophical work, which, however, does not convey the views of conservative Western philosophers, but the views of French encyclopedists (Voltaire, Diderot, D'Holbach et al.) And is an introductory work in philosophy and science. Pamplekis adopts the positions of the Enlightenment against archeology and Aristotelianism and presents the positions of modern philosophers (Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Leibniz, Berkeley, etc.). The book was published in Vienna in 1786. *The Answer, Anonymous to his foolish accusers of so-called theocracy* [4], as mentioned above, was the reason for his persecution and finally to be absolved after death.

Many studies and articles have been written about the work of Pamplekis by scholars, philosophers and philologists in the later period. Most works, however, focused on his conflict with the Church. He is characterized by modern philosophers as an important spiritual figure of the pre-revolutionary period, modernist and radical, mainly in terms of his religious views. In recent years, his work has emerged from the darkness and is being explored. It is possible that Pamplekis wrote other works which may not have survived or been identified. The systematic study of his work will fully enlighten the work and the "enigmatic" form of the Akarnana philosopher.

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