

Evangelinos Misailidis' Earliest Petition for a Newspaper in Turkish with Greek Letters^{*}

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Context

The document presented here is Evangelinos Misailidis' first known petition to the Ottoman state dated Zī'l-ḩa' de 1260.¹ In this petition signed as "*Vangelinoz, veled-i Misail*,"² Misailidis, who would later become a prominent figure in the Ottoman intellectual world during the second half of the nineteenth century and would have a prolific publishing career spanning nearly half a century, sought permission to publish a newspaper in Turkish using Greek script (*ḩurūfātı Rūmī ve 'ibāresi Tūrķī olmaḩ üzre*).

This document highlights Misailidis' early intellectual and commercial activities, enriching his biography and marking a key milestone in the press pillar of the literary tradition called "Karamanlidika."³ It underscores his pivotal role in its development. This introduction provides context on Misailidis' contributions before analyzing the document's content, examining its linguistic and cultural significance.

1. Evangelinos Misailidis

The tradition of Turcophone Greek publishing, which began in 1718 for religious purposes,⁴ expanded significantly in the late 19th century to cover non-religious subjects,

¹ The Ottoman Archives of the Presidency of the State Archives of the Republic of Turkey (hereafter BOA), A.}MKT.NZD. 21.82, 1. The catalog assigns the date "H-15-02-1267" (Hijri 15 Şafer 1267, corresponding to 20 December 1850) to the document. However, the basis for this date remains unclear. The only date mentioned in the documents within this file is on the order (*buyuruldu*), written in response to Misailidis' petition at the top left corner of the original petition. The *buyuruldu* is dated 18 Zī'l-ḩa' de 1260 [29 November 1844].

² *-idis* (-ιδης) is a suffix used in Greek to form patronymics from proper names of persons, meaning "son of." Therefore, Misailidis translates to "son of Misail," which is exactly as it appeared in the petition signed in Turkish. For patronymics and *-idis* see Herbert Weir Smyth, *A Greek Grammar for Schools and Colleges* (New York: American Book Company, 1916), 179.

³ I avoid the term Karamanlidika, a conventional but imprecise label for texts written in Turkish using Greek script. While it remains common in bibliographic and philological literature, the term tends to obscure the linguistic, regional, and confessional diversity of the communities that produced and circulated these texts. It also imposes a geographic shorthand that flattens a much more complex cultural field. Notably, the term *Karamanli*, from which Karamanlidika is derived, was at times perceived as pejorative or externally imposed by members of the very communities associated with this writing system, particularly in contexts where it implied provincialism or a lack of education. In light of these concerns, I prefer more descriptive and neutral formulations such as "Turkish in Greek letters" or "Turcophone Greek texts," which more accurately reflect the linguistic and scriptural character of the corpus without repeating derogatory or homogenizing labels.

⁴ The earliest known Turkish text printed in Greek letters is the bilingual book titled *Απάνθισμα της χριστιανικής πίστεως - Κιουλζάρι ιμάνι μεσιχί* (*Apanthisma tes christianikes pisteos - Gülzār-ı Īmān-ı*

cumulatively resulting in over 750 publications and various periodicals. A number of intellectuals contributed to this corpus. Among these, one name shines particularly bright: Evangelinos Misailidis (1820-1890). Revered as “Münir-i Asyā-yı Şuğrā”⁵ (the illuminator of Asia Minor), Misailidis made significant contributions in three domains:

1. *Journalism*: Over a remarkable five-decade career, he established Turcophone periodicals, including *Ανατολή* (*Anatoli*, Tr. *Şark*, *Anadolu*),⁶ one of the Ottoman Empire’s longest-running newspapers published in Turkish. His periodicals served as a vital intellectual platform, fostering dialogue and shaping ideas among the empire’s diverse communities.
2. *Publishing and Translation*: Misailidis was a pioneer in establishing printing presses and spearheading ambitious translation and publication initiatives for the Turcophone literary tradition. His work culminated in the creation of what some referred to as the “Anatolian Library,”⁷ a testament to his efforts to disseminate knowledge and culture among the Greek communities scattered throughout Anatolia.
3. *Orthographic Standardization*: Misailidis played a pivotal role in refining the Turcophone Greek writing system. By adapting the Athenian transcription system for Turkish, Misailidis developed an orthographic standard that would become the predominant framework for this literary tradition.

Mesihī, Eng. Anthology of the Christian Faith) published in Constantinople in 1718. See Sévérien Salaville and Eugène Dalleggio, *Karamanlidika: Bibliographie analytique d’ouvrages en langue turque imprimés en caractères grecs (1584-1850)*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Athens: Center for Asia Minor Studies, 1958), 3-10.

⁵ Anastasios M. Levidis, “Οἱ περ φύλλων γενεή, τοίη δὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν,” *Ανατολή*, February 18, 1890, 1-2. Levidis, who served for many years as the headmaster of the school at the Prodomos Monastery in Zincidere, was also a correspondent for *Anatoli*. In his obituary, he called Misailidis the “Illuminator of Asia Minor.”

⁶ The Greek word *Ανατολή* carries a dual meaning when translated into Turkish: it can refer both to *Şark* (the East) and to *Anadolu* (Anatolia). This semantic flexibility is reflected in the newspaper’s varying titles over time. In its early issues from the 1850s, the paper bore the bilingual title *Ḥavādisnāme-i Şarkıyye*, highlighting its reference to the East more generally. By the 1870s, however, it occasionally appeared under the title *Μικρά Ασία γιὰνι Ανατολή* (*Mikra Asia ya’nī Anatoli*) meaning “Asia Minor, that is, Anatoli.” Here, Mikra Asia is the Greek equivalent of Anatolia, underlining a shift toward a more geographically specific identification.

⁷ Iordanis I. Limnidis, ed., *Ιερουσαλήμ* (Dersaadet: Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete Matbaası, 1902), ε’.

Misailidis' multifaceted contributions underscore his profound impact on the intellectual and cultural landscape of the late Ottoman period. His works provide valuable insights into the cultural identity and experiences of the Turkish-speaking Orthodox Christian population of the Ottoman Empire.

His publishing and intellectual efforts preserved his community's cultural and linguistic heritage while reflecting the complexities of Ottoman transcultural cosmology. This makes him an essential figure in understanding the interplay of language, religion, and ethnic identity in the late Ottoman period; he also emerged as a cultural mediator and pioneer during profound social and political transformation.

While Misailidis' time in Constantinople after 1850 as the editor of *Anatoli* and a publisher has been the subject of considerable scholarly attention,⁸ his earlier life in Smyrna remains undocumented, known only through fragments in an interview shortly before his death⁹ and an obituary penned by a protégé¹⁰ as well as references by Christos Solomonidis, a historian and son of Sokratis Solomonidis, editor of *Αμάλθεια* (Amaltheia), the longest-running Grecophone newspaper in the Ottoman Empire.

In his *Η Δημοσιογραφία στη Σμύρνη (1821-1922)* [Journalism in Smyrna (1821-1922)], Solomonidis provides the following information about Misailidis' earliest newspaper *Ανατολικός Μηνύτωρ* (Anatolikos Minytor, lit. Eastern Herald):¹¹

Anatolikos Minytor: On 12 January 1845, the first issue of the Turcogreek (τουρκογραικική) newspaper (*Karamanlidika*), i.e. in Turkish with Greek characters, is published in Smyrna. Its title was *Pelsaret il Masrik* [sic] ("the Eastern Herald"), and Evangelinos Misailidis, who had settled in Smyrna and taught

⁸ For example, a recent study based on the author's 2014 dissertation is Şehnaz Şişmanoğlu Şimşek's *İki Kilise Arasında Binamaz: Karamanlıca Edebiyatta Dil, Kimlik ve Yeniden Yazım* (Istanbul: Metis, 2024).

⁹ Ioannis Polyvios, "Ευαγγελινός Μισαηλίδης," *Τερακκή* 1, no. 4 (June 30, 1888): 53–56.

¹⁰ Iordanis I. Limnidis, "Ευαγγελινός Μισαηλίδης," in *Μικρασιατικόν Ημερολόγιον ο "Αστήρ" 1914* (Constantinople: "Papa Georgios" Cemiyeti, 1913), 170–72.

¹¹ Christos Sokr. Solomonidis, *Η Δημοσιογραφία στη Σμύρνη (1821-1922)* (Athens: Mavridis, 1959), 142. In a series of articles on the history of *Anatoli*, published in 1982 in *Προσφυγικός Κόσμος* (Refugee World), Petros Pl. Misailidis—Evangelinos Misailidis' grandson—divides the history of *Anatoli* into five periods. For the first period, spanning 1843–1850, which corresponds to Misailidis's years in Izmir, Petros Pl. Misailidis mentions only the Turcophone newspaper *Σιάρκ* (Şark). See Petros Pl. Misailidis, "Ιστορικές Εφημερίδες του Περσμένου Αιώνα 'Ανατολή' - 2," *Προσφυγικός Κόσμος*, August 7, 1982, 1. Also see Manouil Io. Gedeon, *Αποσημειώματα Χρονογράφου: 1800–1913* (Athens: Τύποις Φοίνικος, 1932), 14.

Turkish, was its director and editor. The aim of the newspaper was to disseminate political news to the Turkish-speaking Greek populations of the provinces of Anatolia. “*The Anatolikos Minytor*,” writes *Amaltheia*, “The aim of the *Anatolikos Minytor* is the dissemination of news and knowledge among the numerous inhabitants of Anatolia and other regions, who are ignorant of Greek but usually write in the Turkish language with Greek letters; therefore, it seeks to fill a real gap.” *The Anatolikos Minytor* was published until the end of 1847.

The title of the newspaper, which Solomonidis records as *Pelsaret il Masrik* (Πελσαρέτ ιλ Μασρίκ), should more accurately be *Beşâret il-Maşrık* based on its intended meaning. This misspelling has been repeatedly cited in the literature without being questioned.¹²

Solomonidis’s chronology suggests that Misailidis applied for a license for *Beşâret il-Maşrık*. Though the petition’s single-page response indicates rejection,¹³ such denials were not uncommon, and publishers often appealed. While documentation is lacking, Misailidis likely challenged the decision, reapplied, and ultimately secured authorization. *Beşâret il-Maşrık* began publication on January 12, 1845. This petition is crucial for understanding his early career and the Ottoman media landscape. The text is briefly analyzed below.

2. The petition

Evangelinos Misailidis’ petition constitutes a significant and distinctive primary source, offering valuable insights into the intricate socio-cultural dynamics of the Ottoman Empire. Transcending its function as a mere bureaucratic request, it underscores

¹² While the most accurate rendering of the title would be *Beşâret el-Maşrık*, I have retained the form *il* as it appears in the Turcophone Greek transliteration cited by contemporary Greek and Turkish sources. I am grateful to Prof. Gisela Prochazka-Eisl, a member of the editorial team, and to Prof. Stephan Prochazka (Professor of Arabic Linguistics, University of Vienna) for their guidance. They noted that although *il* is incorrect in formal Arabic, it occurs frequently in colloquial usage, which likely accounts for its adoption in the Turcophone rendering. This philological detail can be understood as highlighting the oral-literate interplay and translational flexibility that characterized cross-script representations in the Ottoman context. Turgut Kut, a renowned researcher and bibliophile, wrote the first modern Turkish biography of Misailidis. He meticulously compiled scattered information, providing a detailed account while avoiding persistent errors and more correctly identifying the newspaper’s name, not as *Pelsaret il Masrik* but as *Beşâret il-Maşrık*. Turgut Kut, “Temaşa-î Dünya ve Cefakâr u Cefâkeş’in Yazarı Evangelinos Misailidis Efendi,” *Tarih ve Toplum* 48 (1987): 22–26, especially fn. 27.

¹³ BOA, A.}MKT.NZD. 21..82, 2.

the Empire's efforts to grapple with the challenges of multilingualism and accommodate the needs of its diverse constituent communities. As the earliest known instance of Misailidis advocating for a Turcophone Greek newspaper, this document provides crucial evidence for reconstructing the early trajectory of his life, a period largely shrouded in historical obscurity. It serves as a rare beacon, illuminating previously uncharted aspects of his biography and shedding light on the intellectual and commercial endeavors that characterized his early career.

One of the most compelling aspects of Misailidis' petition is its focus on language. The request centers on the creation of a newspaper written in Turkish using Greek letters. This combination is emblematic of the transcultural interactions within the diverse social formation of the Ottoman Empire that led to linguistic amalgamations and graphic syncretisms, as some Greek Orthodox Christians spoke Turkish as their primary language but retained Greek script for writing. By acknowledging the need for such a publication, Misailidis highlights the linguistic and practical challenges faced by these communities, particularly in Anatolia, who were unable to fully engage with either existing Greek-language newspapers or Turkish ones in Arabic script.

The petition shows careful consideration of political and administrative sensitivities. Misailidis assures that the publication would avoid offensive content and adhere to regulations, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of the Ottoman state's censorship and social order priorities.¹⁴ By proposing measures like admonishment mechanisms and reputable guarantors, the petition aligns with the state's broader objectives, thereby enhancing its likelihood of approval.

Moreover, the petition's pragmatic nature stands out as Misailidis emphasizes the newspaper's benefits—trade information, current affairs, and general knowledge. His awareness of merchants' needs highlights the press's role in economic integration and

¹⁴ In 1840, private individuals were granted the freedom to print books and other publications, provided they applied to the state printing house and covered the associated costs. By 1841, prior authorization from the Porte became mandatory, marking the beginning of stricter control and censorship over publishing activities in the Ottoman Empire. Hasan Refik Ertuğ, *Basın ve Yayın Hareketleri Tarihi*, vol. 1 (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1970), 192-93.

empowerment, reflecting its growing importance during the Ottoman Empire's modernization.

The petition's significance extends beyond its immediate context. It represents an early attempt at publishing a Turcophone Greek newspaper, forming a foundational link in a long-lasting tradition that became instrumental in preserving the cultural and linguistic heritage of the Turkish-speaking Orthodox community, not only within the Ottoman Empire but also in Greece following the 1923 Greco-Turkish population exchange.

In conclusion, Misailidis' petition is both a product of its time and a catalyst for cultural mediation. It mirrors the multi-faceted identity of Ottoman society, where communities sought innovative ways to navigate and manage the vast linguistic and cultural diversity of the empire while the state worked to structure and govern this diversity to maintain order and cohesion. This petition not only underscores Misailidis' deep commitment to the Turcophone Greek community but also reflects his ambition to establish a newspaper serving their linguistic and informational needs, embodying a vision for a dynamic literary tradition that traces its roots back to his formative years in Smyrna. As such, it remains a valuable historical document, providing insights into the interplay between language, commerce, and governance in a diverse imperial setting.

Transcription

- i *Taḳvīm-i vaḳāyi 'ḥāne-i 'āmire nāzırı sa 'ādetlü efendi*
- ii *nizāmına nazaran ī'cāb ve iḳtizāsını bi'l-muṭāla 'a i lām*
- iii *ve ifādeye himmet eyleyeler deyü*
- iv *buyruldu.*
- v *fī 18 za [zī'l-ka 'de] sene [12]60*

- 1a efendim sultânım
- 1b devletlü, 'ināyetlü, übbehetlü, merḥametlü ḥazretleri devlet ü iḳbāl-i ebedī ile saḡ olsun
- 2 'arz-ı ḥāl-i kullarıdır ki Der-Sa 'ādet ve İzmirde ṭab' ü neşr olınan gazetalar egerci ḥurūfāt ve 'ibāresi Rūmī ise de Rūm milletiniñ Anaṭolı re 'āyāsı kulları
- 3 kırā'atinde ifāde-i me'āl ve istifāde-i meḳāl olamadıklarından yine ḥurūfātı Rūmī ve 'ibāresi Türkī olmak üzere ticāret ve ifāde-i ḥāl ve keyfiyyet ve ma'lūm-ı eshel
- 4 olacak vechle bir gazetaniñ İzmirde ṭab' olunmasını ḥ'āhiş-ger olub bu kulları ise keyfiyyet-i mezbūruñ icrā'sını ve ez-her-cihet ḥavādisāt-ı sâ'ire-i bolitikaya
- 5 ferden ferdā ile yazılmamak ve İstanbul gazetaları ile sâ'ir İzmir gazetalarından emr-i ticārete dā'ir me'ḥūz olmak üzere bir maḥall-i maḥşūşa ittiḥāz ve 'ibāre-i
- 6 mezkūr ile ma'lūmu'l-efḥām evrāḳıñ İzmir cānibinde ṭab' olunması tüccārān ṭarafından daḡı iltimās bulmuş olub ve bu vādide sāye-i mekārīm-vāye-i ḥazret-i veliyyü'n-ni'amilerinde
- 7 geçinmek ve du'ā-yı deymūmiyet-i 'ömr ü iḳbāl ü 'āfiyetlerinde olmaḳlıḡımı niyāz veistirḥām itmekde oldıḡum muḥāt-ı 'ilm-i 'ālem-şümül-i veliyyü'n-ni'amileri buyuruldukda baḡr-i elṭāf
- 8 ve-ilā nihāyelerinden mutezarrı'dır ki keyfiyyet-i mezbūrun tecessüs ve taḡarrisi ve bir vaḳtde ṭoḳunaḳlu kelimāt yazılmamak ve töhmet-i mūcib olacak ḥālāt ve ḥavādisāt yazılmamak
- 9 ve yazıldığı taḳdīrce 'itāb buyurulmak üzere mu'teberātdan kefil irā'e olunmak üzere taḳdīm ve vakāyi'-ḥāne-i 'āmire nāzırı devletlü efendi ḥazretlerine ḥavāle birle
- 10 tensīb buyurulduğu ḥālde cānib-i seniyy'ül-cevānib-i 'ālilerinden ruḡşat ve müsā'ade-i 'ālileri bī-dirīḡ ü erzān buyurulmak niyāzım bābında ve her ḥālde
- 11 emr ü fermān 'ināyet ü iḡsān lutf-i bī-pāyān merḥametlü efendim ḥazretleriniñdir.
- 12 bende
- 13 Vangelinoz
- 14 veled-i Misail
- 15 kullar
- 16 1

Translation

It was decreed that, in accordance with the regulations, the esteemed Superintendent of the Official Imperial Gazette is to review the matter and report on its suitability and requirements with due diligence.

On the 18th of Zī'l-ka'de, in the year 1260 [November 29, 1844]

My esteemed, gracious, majestic, and merciful Master, my Sultan, may you live forever in eternal prosperity and fortune.

This is the humble petition of your servant: Although the newspapers printed and published in the Gate to Prosperity (Istanbul) and Izmir use Greek letters and expressions, the Greek subjects in Anatolia are unable to comprehend their meaning or benefit from them. Therefore, they desire a newspaper to be printed in Izmir, written in Greek letters but employing Turkish expressions, in a manner that would make trade, current affairs, and general information easily comprehensible.

Your servant humbly requests the implementation of this matter. The proposed newspaper would refrain from reporting political news and other events in excessive detail or on an item-by-item basis, and would instead derive commercial content from the newspapers of Istanbul and other Izmir publications. This initiative has also been requested by merchants who support the publication of such accessible documents in Izmir.

In this regard, I beseech you to live under the gracious shadow of Your Excellency and pray for the continuity of your life, prosperity, and well-being. When this matter is brought to the all-encompassing wisdom of Your Excellency, it is humbly hoped that the aforementioned matter will be investigated and examined. It should be ensured that no offensive words or news that might lead to accusations are ever written. Should this occur, accepting admonishment and providing a reputable guarantor, the matter would be submitted to the esteemed Superintendent of the Imperial Gazette.

If deemed appropriate, I humbly request that permission and approval for this matter be generously granted by your noble side. In all matters, the command, favor, kindness, and boundless mercy belong solely to my merciful lord.

Your subject,

Vangelinoz, son of Misail,

Your humble servant

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