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## Polish Philhellenes in the Greek War of Independence (1821–1831)



When the Filiki Eteria secret association was founded in Odessa on the Black Sea on 14 September 1814 with the aim of liberating Hellas from Ottoman rule, Vienna was witnessing the arrival of diplomats to attend a congress that would decide the future of post-Napoleonic Europe, including Poland. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, destroyed in the course of three partitions in 1772, 1793, and 1795, seemingly forever split among Russia, Prussia, and Austria, had been revived in 1807, thanks to Napoleon, in rump form as the Duchy of Warsaw and the Free City of Gdańsk. The defeat of the Emperor of the French during his expedition against Moscow and the war with the Sixth Coalition resulted in Polish lands again being wholly occupied by the three partitioning powers. However, going back to the status from 1795 was out of the question; the “Polish cause”, which had been revived through the armed action of Polish legions fighting on republican and imperial France’s side, became a bargaining chip in European diplomacy. The Polish people’s aspirations to statehood could not be completely ignored. Following the Congress of Vienna’s decision, Polish territories ended up within six different states: 1) the Kingdom of Poland with its capital in Warsaw, in a personal union with Russia; 2) the “annexed provinces”, i.e. lands of the former Commonwealth that were directly incorporated into Russia, with their unofficial capital in Vilnius; 3) the Grand Duchy of Posen (Poznań) in a personal union with Prussia, hence sometimes called “Prussian Poland”; 4) lands directly incorporated into Prussia

with Gdańsk and Toruń; 5) the miniature Republic of Kraków, and 6) Galicia with its capital in Lviv, incorporated into Austria.

When Filiki Eteria began its mass-scale recruitment of Greeks in their homeland and among the diaspora in 1818, the Poles seemed completely reconciled to the political situation shaped by the Congress of Vienna. Groups of uncompromising independence supporters did exist, Bonapartists, liberals, and revolutionaries who sought allies among the enemies of the Holy Alliance in the west of Europe, such as the Italian Carbonari, but most Polish people were busy with the development of their “small homelands”, with industrialisation and modernisation, e.g. introducing the new, Humboldtian model of education, which involved setting up secondary schools with classical curricula. The predominant ideological trend of the period was Classicism, but Romanticism was starting to emerge. A synthesis of both these movements was conducive to the development of Philhellenism, and support for the Greek cause.

In the early period of its activity, Filiki Eteria took advantage of discreet support from the Russian government, and in 1820 Alexander Ypsilantis, a former aide-de-camp to Tsar Alexander I, became the organisation’s leader. Ypsilantis had encountered Poles multiple times in his life. He already found himself in former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth lands in 1806, when his father Constantine sought refuge within the Russian state after being ousted from the office of hospodar of Wallachia. Their hosts having included the governor of Volhynia, the Greek Mikhail Komburley,<sup>1</sup> the Ypsilantis family then moved to Saint Petersburg, where Prince **Adam Jerzy CZARTORYSKI** held the office of Russian foreign minister. He soon resigned after the failure of his plans to revive the Polish state with the support of the tsarist empire, and left Saint Petersburg altogether in 1810. In the following years, Prince Czartoryski dedicated himself to his work as the superintendent of the Vilnius education district encompassing eight western Russian governorates, i.e. the “annexed provinces”, a post that he held in the years 1803–1824. Some authors of the Polish literature on this subject believe that Prince Czartoryski became a sworn Eterist around 1820.<sup>2</sup> There is no firm proof of this, although we know that already in his political writings from 1804–1805, Prince Czartoryski advocated for Greece’s independence, and in his role as the Vilnius education supervisor encouraged teachers from the schools he oversaw to hold collections for the Greek insurgents.

<sup>1</sup> G. Malinowski, *Hellenopolonica. Miniatury z dziejów polsko-greckich*, Wrocław 2019, p. 417.

<sup>2</sup> J. Raszewski, “Polacy i powstanie greckie”, [in:] *Filhellenizm w Polsce. Rekonesans*, M. Borowska, M. Kalinowska, J. Ławski (eds.), Warszawa 2007, p. 145.

Alexander Ypsilantis joined the Russian army in 1808, and on 6 June 1813, now a lieutenant colonel, transferred to the Grodno Hussar Regiment, a unit where many Poles served. With his new regiment, he fought against the Napoleonic forces in the Battle of Dresden (26–27 August 1813), in which he lost his right arm. It was not until Polish inventor Józef Bożek made him the ideal artificial limb that he was able to shine in high society during the Congress of Vienna and then, on 1 January 1816, become Tsar Alexander's aide-de-camp.<sup>3</sup> As the leader of Filiki Eteria, he resigned from the army, launched a semi-official recruitment of soldiers for the “Sacred Band” and prepared to set off across the River Prut to the Danubian Principalities. With the silent consent of the authorities, Greek diaspora centres in the Russian state organised collections to support the war expedition. In the Dnieper Ukraine former provinces of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, “voluntary compulsory” collections – as Michał Czajkowski joked – for Philhellenic expeditions were organised among the Polish gentry. These donations were collected during charity balls, and the proceeds were given to the Eterists. Plotting and holding collections before his expedition to the Danubian Principalities, Alexander Ypsilantis once again stayed within the former Commonwealth, specifically in Kiev. At a ball that took place at the residence of a marshal of the Kiev gentry, Walenty Rościszewski, Alexander Ypsilantis met Julia Wąsowicz, daughter of a member of the Confederation of Bar, who became his fiancée. Later, after ending up in an Austrian prison, Ypsilantis would send back the engagement ring and release Miss Wąsowicz from her promise.<sup>4</sup>

When Alexander Suțu, hospodar of Wallachia, died on 19 (31) January 1821, the Eterists started preparing for an expedition against the Turks. On 21 February (5 March), Alexander Ypsilantis set off from Kishinev as an ordinary traveller, holding a Russian passport issued by the Russian foreign minister, Karl Robert Nesselrode. He was accompanied only by two of his brothers, Nicholas and Georgios, and a few of his closest friends, who crossed the border River Prut near Skulyany (Sculeni) in a small boat the next day around five o'clock. This group included Georgios Lassanis from Kozani, Gerasimos Orfanos, a British subject, Constantine Karavelopoulos, Ypsilantis' aide-de-camp, and **Więńczysław GARNOWSKI**,<sup>5</sup> a Pole and the only non-Greek

<sup>3</sup> G. Malinowski, *Hellenopolonica*, p. 422.

<sup>4</sup> M. Czajkowski, *Dziwne życia Polaków i Polek*, Lipsk 1865, pp. 47–55.

<sup>5</sup> *Русский биографический словарь: Ибак — Ключарев*, Изд. под наблюдением председателя Императорского Русского Исторического Общества А.А. Половцова, vol. 8, Санкт-Петербург 1897, pp. 127–128.

allowed within the inner circle of the Filiki Eteria leader's associates. He thus became the first Polish Philhellene soldier, and in fact the first Philhellene, to fight in the 1821 uprising.

Garnowski (?–1835?) was born in Krāslava, where the River Kraslavka joins the Daugava, in the former Dyneburg county of the Livonian voivodeship, which the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth lost as early as 1772 in the first partition of Poland and which was later part of various governorates, including Vitebsk Governorate from 1802; hence sometimes one can find information that Garnowski came from Vitebsk. The son of a landowner,<sup>6</sup> he served in the Grodno Hussar Regiment, where Alexander Ypsilantis was his comrade in arms between 1813–1815. Garnowski resigned from the military with the rank of colonel of uhlans in 1820 and voluntarily joined the Greek expedition. The Eterists contacted Garnowski while still in Mogilev, where he was sworn in. In early 1821, he left Mogilev directly for Kishinev where he joined up with Ypsilantis.<sup>7</sup> Garnowski was the first but not the only Pole among the Eterists.

In early spring 1821, the ideas of Philhellenism became an inspiration to students of the University of Lviv, Poles from Jassy and Bucharest, such as painter **Emilian SZYMANOWSKI**, as well as regular soldiers, e.g. a certain **ŻUROWSKI** (maybe Antoni, a second lieutenant in the 8th Line Infantry Regiment in 1819).<sup>8</sup> In mid-March, Garnowski gathered them, as well as Germans living in the Danubian Principalities, into a Polish troop of uhlans numbering 38 soldiers, with himself as commander. The troop became famous for being the first Eterist unit to enter Bucharest at the end of March.

Garnowski was affiliated with Ypsilantis for better and for worse. He took part in the assassination of Tudor Vladimirescu, a Pandur leader who proclaimed himself *hospodar* of Wallachia and negotiated with the Turks to get rid of Greek Phanariots from the Danubian Principalities. Turned in by hostile *boyars*, Vladimirescu was judged by an Eterist tribunal in Târgoviște and sentenced to death for treason. On the night of 26/27 May (6/7 June), Ypsilantis' confidants Orfanos, Karavelopoulos, and Vasilis Karavias, a former major in the Russian army and commander of the Moldavian stronghold of Galați, and Garnowski, Ypsilantis' aide-de-camp, led the prisoner outside the

<sup>6</sup> Г.Л. Арш, *Этеристское движение в России: Освободительная борьба греческого народа в начале XIX в. и русско-греческие связи*, Москва 1970, p. 292.

<sup>7</sup> И.Ф. Иовва, *Южные декабристы и греческое национально-освободительное движение*, Москва 1963, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> M. Wojecki, *Polacy i Grecy: związki serdeczne*, Wolsztyn 1999, p. 87.

walls, south of the town. Earlier, at their commander's orders, Karavias and Garnowski supposedly tortured Vladimirescu before his death.<sup>9</sup>

The elimination of the threat from Vladimirescu's Pandurs did nothing to improve the situation of the Eterists, who left Târgoviște under pressure from the Turks. The decisive Battle of Dragashani took place on 7 (19) June; the cavalry under Karavias' command was dispersed and the Sacred Band, deprived of the cavalry's protection, was annihilated. After that the Eterists defended themselves at two monasteries, Secu and Cozia, but there was nothing else Ypsilantis could do but seek refuge in Habsburg territory. Trusting the Austrian authorities' assurances, together with his brothers as well as Lassanis, Orfanos and Garnowski, he crossed the border on 15 (27) June.

Shortly afterwards, he was imprisoned in Temesvár (Timișoara) with his companions at the order of Chancellor Metternich. From there they were taken to Arad, where they spent 10 days. The place chosen for their imprisonment was Theresienstadt (Terezin), from which Ypsilantis was not released until November 1827. Garnowski shared his time in prison until February 1825, when he was deported to Russia thanks to the efforts of Tsar Alexander I. As soon as he was back in Poland, he was arrested in Warsaw at the tsar's orders for "wilful desertion abroad and complicity with Ypsilantis in illegal activity".<sup>10</sup> After Tsar Alexander's death, the next ruler of Russia, Nicholas I, released Garnowski from prison but commanded that he remain under house arrest and strict police supervision. In 1837, King of Greece Otto granted him, *in absentia*, the Order of the Redeemer, the highest Greek decoration. Garnowski was most probably already dead by then.<sup>11</sup>

After the uprising in the Danubian Principalities failed, in summer 1821 part of Ypsilantis' defeated army took refuge back on the Russian bank of the River Prut, where they were interned by the tsarist authorities in Orgeev (Romanian: Orhei) in Moldavia. A list of 1,002 names of Eterists crossing the border River Prut, together with their ethnic origin, has been preserved at the archive in Odessa.<sup>12</sup> It includes four Poles. One Polish soldier, undoubtedly from the troop of uhlans formed by Garnowski, managed to make his way across the Balkans to Greece. He was a man called **BILIŃSKI**, a student of the University of Lviv who had joined the Eterist units in early spring. After

<sup>9</sup> I. Φιλήμων, *Δοκίμιον Ἱστορικόν περί της Ἑλληνικῆς Ἐπανάστασεως*, vol. 2, Αθήναι 1859–1861, p. 167; Δ. Φωτιάδης, *Ἡ Ἐπανάσταση του 1821*, Αθήναι 1971, p. 106.

<sup>10</sup> В.И. Виноградов, *Они сражались вдали от Родины*, Москва 1969, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Е. Калубович, *Восемь волн белорусской эмиграции*, Неман 1992 (2), pp. 136–150.

<sup>12</sup> Н. Тодоров, "Новые данные о сербских добровольцах в греческом восстании 1821 г. в дунайских княжествах", *Balkanica* 1977, No. 8, pp. 245–256.