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# Greece: The Myth of *Krypho Scholeio* ["Secret School"]. Issues of Historical Understanding and Historical Culture<sup>1</sup>

## El mito de las *Krypho Scholeio* ["Escuelas secretas"]. Aspectos sobre la comprensión y cultura histórica

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### Resumen

Este es un análisis de cincuenta cuestionarios entregados a estudiantes de primer año del Departamento de Educación Primaria de la Universidad de Ioannina, sobre el tema de la 'Escuela Secreta' (*Krypho Scholeio*), y se enfoca en temas de epistemología y cultura histórica (Grever & Adriaansen, 2017; Stathis, 2004). La investigación se apoya en investigaciones empíricas previas sobre la evaluación de narrativas históricas conflictivas por parte de alumnos y estudiantes (Afandi & Baildon, 2015; Chapman, 2016). Los hallazgos favorecen la existencia real de la escuela 'secreta' mientras que los estudiantes/participantes, cuando se les preguntó cómo interpretan la existencia de diferentes puntos de vista sobre este tema, se refirieron más a la existencia de un "sesgo" en relación con el pasado, y a un menor medida, a diferentes "perspectivas", que representan a diferentes grupos e intereses, ya sea en el pasado o en el presente.

### Palabras clave

Identidad nacional, nacionalismo, interpretación histórica, sociología histórica, formación del profesorado.

### Abstract

This is an analysis of fifty questionnaires given to first-year students of the Department of Primary Education of the University of Ioannina, on the subject of the 'Secret School' (*Krypho Scholeio*), and focuses on issues of epistemology and historical culture (Grever & Adriaansen, 2017; Stathis, 2004). The research is supported by previous empirical research regarding the evaluation of conflicting historical narratives by pupils and students (Afandi & Baildon, 2015; Chapman, 2016). The findings favor the actual existence of the 'secret' school while students/participants, when asked how they interpret the existence of different views on this issue, referred more to the existence of "bias" in relation to the past, and to a lesser extent, to different "perspectives", representing different groups and interests, either in the past or the present.

### Keywords

National identity, nationalism, historical interpretation, historical sociology, teacher education.

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<sup>1</sup> Presented on the 17th HEIRNET International Conference, 31st of August-2nd of September 2021, and on the International Congress for the Greek Revolution in Athens, 9-12 December 2021.



## 1. Introduction

As Samuel said, "history is the work of a thousand different hands" (Green, 2028, p. 175), and academia is only one contributor to our knowledge about the past. This paper seeks to highlight the role of popular historical culture in what we know about the past, drawing on theoretical and empirical work that has been published the recent years about historical culture, like, for example, the *Palgrave Volume of Research in Historical Culture and Education* (Carretero et al, 2017). It focuses on a Greek case that refers to a national myth about education in the Ottoman years, the existence of the "Secret Schools".

The secret schools were schools whose existence was not supposed to be known to the Ottomans, founded for the teaching of the Greek language and Christian doctrine, and mostly considered to have been the work of the Greek Orthodox Church in Ottoman Greece between the 15th and 19th centuries. Greek historians today generally agree that there is no evidence that such schools ever existed. The issue of the secret school was selected to serve as a means to this exploration because it is central to current historical consciousness and culture in Greece, recurring in the context of classroom celebrations of the 200th anniversary of the Greek revolution. It is ubiquitous in the popular historical culture, school celebrations<sup>2</sup>, monuments, and museum representations, even history textbooks until the 1980s. There is also a strong debate on the issue, both in the public and academic sphere, in the form of publications in print and digital press and scientific journals. Historians that have commented on issues of public history and popular historical culture and in relation to the *Krypfo Scholeio* and other national myths, have been Efthymiou (2018; 2020), Kremmydas, (2018) and Stathis, (2005; 2016). Usually the press occupies with *Krypfo Scholeio*, and invites academics to comment on the issue, every March, because of the national flag day which is the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, commemorating the 1821 war.

We thought of combining an issue of historical knowledge, whether the secret schools existed or not, with an enquiry about students' perception of conflictual accounts of the past. Thus, we hoped to learn about the origin of students' historical knowledge, popular historical culture, school, academia, and others, and at the same time about students' strategies when facing multiple and conflicting sources about the past. Conflicting sources about the past has been a common phenomenon nowadays, since first, there is accessibility to all sorts of knowledge, via the web or digital media in general. Second, exactly because of the web, people cannot only access historical content but also produce history and communicate it (Woodard, 2013).

Fifty undergraduate first-year university students from the University of Ioannina Department of Demotic (i.e., Primary) Education were asked how they would navigate among conflictual information on a historical issue bearing national significance. This took place amidst numerous public history events and celebrations about Greek history under the Ottoman Empire, because of the national celebration for the two hundred years since the Greek war for independence happening at the same time. Hopefully, their answers might allow us to contemplate school history in a world increasingly dominated by the web and historical events taking place in public.

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of performances about the "Secret School", in and out of school in 2021: <https://www.markopoulo.gr/2021/07/07/i-epeteiaki-paidiki-theatriki-parastasi-to-kryfo-scholeio-sto-anoichto-theatro-saras-markopouloy/>, [https://www.athinorama.gr/theatre/performance/to\\_krufo\\_scholeio-10072279](https://www.athinorama.gr/theatre/performance/to_krufo_scholeio-10072279)



## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Greek popular historical culture and the secret school.

This paper is supported by previous research, first on historical culture and popular historical culture and second on how students make sense of conflicting historical accounts. The term historical culture is often defined as the environment in which historical representations are articulated, or as the “external side of historical learning” (Erdmann, 2008, p. 31). “The outer [side] concerns [...] school, governmental bureaucracy, guidelines, schoolbooks, museums, exhibitions, the whole business of culture that involves history, nationally organized commemoration services, mass media and the like” (Erdmann, 2008, p. 31). If we follow Grever and Adriaansen’s (2017, p. 78) differentiation of historical culture into three levels of analysis, “historical narratives and performances of the past”, “mnemonic infrastructures”, and “underlying conceptions of history”, what would myths like the “secret schools” of the Ottoman years belong to?

As regards “performances in the past”, literally speaking, we have school performances of sketches that depict secret schools; if one just googles *krypho scholeio*, several announcements of performances will come up, especially in primary education schools. *Krypho Scholeio* functions as the synecdoche for the bad times of Greek-speaking Christians’, *Romioi* in the Ottoman Empire. As explained above, the very existence of secret schools supports the assertion that Ottomans were intolerant and that and that they forbade education for the subordinate groups of the people included in the empire.

The myth of the secret school, and despite contemporary historiography work, is ideal to use in primary school, since it offers a narration of the Ottoman years from the children’s perspective, focusing also on common situations between now and then, one of them being school. This is the reason non historiographically informed teachers, insist on using it, especially in celebrations of the flag day, which is the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, the date the Greek Revolution is commonly used to mark the start of the Greek Revolution. We have not had narratives of the Greek-speaking secret schools in history schoolbooks since 1979 (Bouzakis & Kantartzi, 2019; Stathis, 2005).

With that in mind, there are also ‘narratives,’ or representations of the secret schools in museums, the most famous being the Vrelis Wax Museum in Ioannina. Pavlos Vrelis, a sculptor and a teacher himself, opens his wax exhibition with a presentation of a secret school scene. The museum, (in which all the human figures are made by Vrelis himself), focuses on moments of Greek history, mostly from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Bringing Claxton’s minitheories in the discussion, we could say that secret schools for the subordinates in the Ottoman empire, function in students’ minds as a synthesis of “lay” and “school science” minitheories (Husbands, 1996, p. 80). School minitheories are not constructed by history textbooks but by the hidden curriculum: pictures decorating classrooms walls copying pieces of art that with the theme of the secret school, school performances, and school visits to museums like the Vrellis Museum at Ioannina. “Lay” minitheories are derived from those with whom children come into contact, from the media, from books”, (Husbands, 1996, p. 81). In our case, family visits to museums, tourist locations where secret schools are said to have existed, family or friend conversations, and finally TV serials and movies.

Also, popular history magazines and graphic novels involve myths or non-historiographical aspects of the past. In Greece, there used to be a series of popular magazines, called *Klassika Iconografimena* [Classic Authors Illustrated], that included classic literature, mythology and history, abbreviated and in a comic-book format, and not written or edited by experts. Millas, in his book about several aspects of popular historical culture in Greece, children's books, and comics among them, speaks about "Innocent Nationalism" (Millas, 2019, p. 77). Innocent nationalism refers to several popular cultures relevant to the past, which disseminate stereotypes, apart from children's books, football, bank notes, and TV shows, most of them belonging to the entertainment genres.

Returning to Grever and Adriaansen's levels of analysis, and as regards mnemonic infrastructures that support the myth, we might refer for once more to all tourist places in Greece advertised as having hosted in the past secret schools. Overall, for a country like Greece which depends on internal tourism too, one can note many stereotypes and myths preserved to attract visitors. Even when there is research in the relevant topics, locals advertise non-accurate versions of the past. In the same way secret schools are included in several tourist itineraries, while historians have for long supported that education was free in the Ottoman empire, necromancy areas are also advertised in places where archaeologists have revised their interpretation of the material remains (Kotjabopoulou, 2018). It is not surprising that Ioannina in Ipiros, which attracts mostly Greek tourists, is known for the existence of both, necromancy areas and Ottoman secret schools, elements of a Greek historical canon that includes the glorious ancient period and a medieval, Ottoman, period with a lot of suffering for the locals.

Speaking of the Greek history canon, we may pass to the third level of analysis, that of "underlying conceptions of history" (Grever & Adriaansen, 2017, p. 78). From that point of view, and because the myth of secret school belongs to the traditional narrative versions of the Greek struggle for liberation from the Ottomans, a "passeist" (Grever & Adriaansen, 2017, p. 82) regime of historicity might be implied: modern Greeks, especially children ought to learn, and imitate their predecessors that endangered their lives to participate in the secret schools and thus preserve the Greek language and possibly prepare themselves for the national uprising.

## 2.2. Students' understanding of conflicting accounts

The preceding was an effort to explain secret school as an element of Greek popular historical culture. This section offers a short account of research on how students make sense of conflicting historical accounts. Before presenting the several models, we ought to note that one of the most important problems of history education is how students perceive the past and the discipline of history. As Husbands notes, it is most important for students to understand the difference between the past itself and history which accounts for the past, the past, and the people of the present "who are now living and can give a 'meaning' to the past" (Husbands, 2001, p. 66). According to Lee students perceive of the past accounts as "copies of the past" (Lee, 2005, p. 60; 2007, p. 51; 2009, p. 218). They, therefore, do not recognize the possibility of multiple accounts referring to the same events, nor the provisional character of historical interpretations, which are dependent on available evidence and questions: the latter questions may change from historian to historian and from period to period.

The latter assertions of Lee are also supported by the research of Barton and Levstik who explain that students "Rather than seeing any particular historical narrative as one way of making sense

of a period in history, it is tempting -for children and adults – to regard the narrative as history itself,” (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 137). The same problem seems to exist in teachers’ training: Wansink et al discuss what they call the “certainty paradox” as regards prospective history teachers, who while accepting the interpretational character of history, nevertheless, they do not teach the lesson as such. The authors give an account of a variety of restrictive factors that prohibit teachers from applying their disciplinary principles in the classroom, like the curricula, the books, the exams, students’ expectations or their lack of experience (Wansink et al, 2016).

In this context, it is only to be expected that students would seek final answers in the historical accounts and that they would feel uneasy when facing conflicting ones. A well-known typology with insights into how students’ understanding of the nature of historical accounts develops, is that of Lee, who sees students moving from depending on the account of sources, the account being perceived as information, to depending on the account of the historian, whose questions structure the accounts (Lee, 2004).

Chapman’s typology of why historical accounts differ presents stances as regards accounts that attribute decisive power either to the archive or the author/historian. This typology also includes the case where the historian’s question controls the narrative (Chapman, 2016). Finally, Afandi and Baildon offer us their insight into students’ perception of historical accounts, presenting those perceptions over a continuum between “factual” accounts, “multiple accounts,” and “criterial” accounts, (Afandi & Baildon, 2015, p. 38). The latter continuum can also be described as the one between an objectivist perception of the accounts and a subjectivist one. At this point, a subject specific ‘problem’, history’s interpretational character and how to teach it at school, relates to a more general discussion about the possibility of having objective knowledge. Several surveys have been carried out to assess individuals’ stance as regards different history interpretations and the same individuals’ ability to form criteria to judge the several interpretations’ validity (Maggioni et al, 2010; Stoel et al, 2017). Both the above groups of researchers, constructed questionnaires that originated in general cognitive research, also the epistemology of history. They offered their participants clusters of statements to select while the approach was quantitative, unlike previous research in history didactics. Questions that guided their research, were first the possibility itself for the combination of general cognitive research with history cognition, and specifically the possibility of locating “developmental trajectories” in history too (Maggioni et al, 2010, p. 193). Second, the interpretation of the participants’ ‘subjective’ ideas and whether they would represent naïve epistemological beliefs or more nuanced (Stoel, et al, 2010). On the whole, the problem of making students cognitively receptive to the existence of parallel and sometimes conflicting accounts, remains, while researchers focus on locating students’ stances and cognitive ‘turns’ between objectivist and subjectivist approaches.

### 3. Method

This is a study with a predominantly qualitative, interpretative approach (Erickson, 1986). It also includes some basic (descriptive) statistical procedures to better illuminate the findings. It aims to describe students’, prospective teachers’ stances in relation to popular historical culture and more specifically in conflictual cases relevant to the national identity.

The sample was a «convenience» one, (Etikan et al, 2016, 1); undergraduate students from the first year of the education department of the Ioannina University, (Western Greece), volunteered after the lesson to fill in the questionnaire.

Regarding the instruments, to achieve the above aims, two conflictual sources on the issue of the Greek secret school in the Ottoman years were given to the students: one written by the German scholar and philhellene Carl Iken, in 1825, and the other written by a Greek philologist Vlahogiannis in 1945. Iken spoke for the existence of the secret schools, Vlahogiannis against. One can read the sources in the appendix of this paper. Data collection took place in June 2021, while 2021 was a special year for Greece, since the 200 hundred years from the revolution of 1821 were celebrated. Individual questionnaires (paper and pencil tasks) were applied to students. The questionnaire included three questions/tasks:

- a. The above, are two different sources that talk about the so-called “secret school”. Say your opinion, whether it existed or not, and justify it.
- b. If your opinion is that it did not exist, explain the existence of the ‘myth’.
- c. How is it possible, to have conflicting sources / opinions on the same issue?

Data analysis employed an inductive coding strategy originating in grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

## 4. Results

### 4.1. First and second tasks

The first task asked from the students was to express their opinion on whether the secret school existed or not, after having assessed the two conflicting sources, and afterwards to justify it. There are two tables that give a synopsis of students’ answers, the first one presents the frequency of those answers that are for or against the existence of the secret school, the second one registers and also gives the frequency of students’ reasoning when they justify their answers, offering also excerpts from students’ speech that exemplify their reason, or the relevant category.

Table 1

#### *Did the secret school exist?*

Total number of students	The secret school existed	The secret school was a myth	No answer at all	Non – clear answer
50	36	11	2	1

Source: self-elaboration.

While the sample is not representative, still one can note tendencies. As public historians attest (Athanasiadis, 2015) the existence of the secret schools in the Ottoman years is considered a fact by many people in Greece today, even if researchers have long before supported and proven the opposite (Angelou, 1997, Liakos, 1998). Angelou talks about the existence of mythology in history (1997), also for national inaccuracies, while Liakos about rhetoric in history (1998). The whole enterprise of rhetorical assumptions about the past seems to embellish our national history



(Angelou, 1997). But it would be more interesting to see in what ways the students of the sample support the existence of the secret school. Table 2 which follows gives us some ideas about that:

**Table 2**  
*Students' reasoning, the secret school existed.*

Reasoning/Categories	Number of excerpts/answers
'Anachronism', development of a theory, secret schools that support national identity	25
School knowledge	5
Popular culture, Pictures/movies	2
Art	2
Locations with secret schools	2
"Testimonies" and oral tradition	3
No reasoning	2
Not clear reasoning	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>

Source: self-elaboration.

Some students' excerpts are also added:

Excerpt 1: "The above sources mention two different points of view. I believe the Turks would not let the Greeks get educated, they wanted them to be slaves and not to revolt. I base my opinion on what I was taught in school. Also, our grandparents referred to the secret school. If it didn't exist, why has it gained so much fame? There are also several works of art that represent the secret school.", student 9192, "Anachronism".

Excerpt 2: "[...] we see this while watching some movies on TV that can be considered sources as well as from testimonies ...", student 9166, "Popular culture".

Excerpt 3: "[...] but also, from eyewitness testimonies of Greeks and Turks who lived there then.", student 9166, "Testimonies".

Excerpt 4: "Also, our grandparents referred to the secret school.", student 9192, "Oral tradition".

Some comments to contextualize these students' answers above will be helpful. According to historians, the identification of education with the nation-state, constitutes an "anachronism", since those years nation-states did not exist. As Stathis points out, "the whole myth is based on the current perception of education of an institution of national education, a character that education did not have before the 19th century, not only in the Ottoman Empire but also in the West. Besides, the Greek nation had not even been formed before the end of the 18th century. So, to the extent

that education in the 14th-18th centuries did not shape national consciousness, the Ottomans had no reason to ban it (Stathis, 2005, pp. 62-63).

Laiou and Sarigianni, (2019), basing their research in Ottoman archives, refer to the Ottomans' conceptualization of the Greek revolution in 1821: Laiou and Sarigiannis, therefore, mention that the Ottomans attributed their failure to control the Greek and the other Balkan revolutions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to internal causes, to malpractice of their administration and not to the emerging Greek and Balkan nationalisms. If the Greek-speaking Christians of the Ottoman empire had no national consciousness in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Ottomans themselves had no perception of the concepts, of "nation" and "nationalism", even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the latter case, if they would not see in Greek education a danger of uprising, they would not prohibit education.

Excerpt 5: "[...] taking into account the knowledge we have received from our school years now [...]" student 9153, "school knowledge".

As for students' explanation that they learned about the secret school in their school, it has been noted above that there has been no reference in secret schools in Greek history textbooks since 1978. Nevertheless, Athanasopoulou points out, that even though secret schools in Ottoman years are not mentioned in the textbooks, an emphasis is given to the fact, that the first period of the Ottoman era was a "dark" one. Athanasopoulou explains that the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries might have been indeed "dark", but the latter characteristic is not owed to the Ottomans' attitude as regards the education and the everyday life of their subjects. This first period of the Ottoman occupation was hard for the subjects because they faced issues of adaptation, if not of survival in the new political context, (Athanasopoulou, 2008).

Excerpt 6: "There are also several works of art that represent the secret school.", student 9192, "art".

In relation to students' reference to "several works of art" to support the existence of the secret school, these items were created long after the revolution, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The most famous one is Gizis's painting with the title *The Secret School* that was made in 1886, while the well-known Greek poem with the same theme was written by Polemis in 1899. As historians explain, both the painting and the poem were made to idealize the role of the Greek speaking Christians during the Ottoman occupation years, to make them appear in resistance and at the same time to account for the inferior situation of Greece when it was liberated, in comparison to the other European nation-states of the period. The reasoning for the emphasis on the role of the church in the founding of the secret schools and of the priests in teaching, while the stereotype demands classes taking place in churches and monasteries, is the maximization of the role of the church in the preservation of the Greek language, within the multiethnic Ottoman empire and the uprising of the nation in 1821.

Other pieces of art that reproduce stereotypes about the Ottoman rule or the Greek uprising, are, *The fighters' oath and the blessing of the flag by Paleon Patron Germanos [an hierarch]*, depicting the event that supposedly started the revolution, and created by the artist Vryzakis in 1865, *The Liberation of Greece*, by Von Hess, an album of lithographs referring to several episodes of the Greek revolution (Koulouri, 2020), Krazeisen's pencil sketches of the Greek revolution's protagonists (Koulouri, 2020) and many others. What is important to note is that, it is through these

idealized pictures of the Greek heroes, that Greeks of the 19<sup>th</sup> century till now, not only have they visualized the Greek revolution but also interpreted and remembered it. It is the European philhellenes that first depicted the Greek revolution and were afterwards imitated by Greek artists, Vryzakis for example, also popular, naïve painters, whose works decorated Greek houses and schools. Another case that exemplifies the above, is the fact that the Greek state in 1930, the first one hundred years after the Greek revolution, reproduced Krazeisen's works for a series of stamps. From the above, the case that is similar to the secret school's myth, is the Vryzakis painting, *The fighters' oath and the blessing of the flag by Paleon Patron Germanos*, since the depicted event have never taken place (Koulouri, 2020).

Why all this emphasis on works of art? Despite the fact that the actual references in our sample are few, one can appreciate the impact of culture on the perception of the past, in a way that people reproduce versions of events, that first, did not happen, second, were not taught at school or elsewhere (Salvanou, 2021).

Excerpt 7: "It is not a myth [the secret school], there is real evidence, the Ioannina Island [...]", student 9150, "Locations with secret schools".

Students of our sample also referred to the locations where secret schools supposedly existed: as it has been referred to in the literature review part of this paper, what we are having here is public history and the effect of tourism. Public history includes all the manifestations of the past in the public sphere, either those orchestrated by historians, experts, or non-experts, public history relates to the public manifestations of memory. Those manifestations are occasionally motivated by ideology, identity, nostalgia, or profit. As De Groot put it in his book about popular historical culture, there is a context of "leisure and commodification of the past" in history in the public, (De Groot, 2009, 60). Versions of the past that preserve the several popular myths and that flatter collective identities, attract consumers, in our case, tourists. What happens today in Greece, is that secret schools are supposed to have existed and are visited by tourists, also in places where there was no Ottoman occupation at all (Athanasiadis, 2015). Secret schools seem to be 'discovered' all the time, are exploited touristically, and used as evidence to support their existence also in the Ottoman years. This is the case of the excerpt used in this presentation, student 9150, excerpt 7 above.

Equally important to students' justifications about why secret school existed, are their 'theories' to explain the opposite, which is the existence of the myth. Typical excerpts follow below:

Excerpt 8: "Taking under consideration the propaganda exercised by political leadership through the writing of history textbooks, ..., to cultivate patriotism, hatred towards the "other" and the willingness of the child to sacrifice for the homeland, if necessary, I believe that the issue of the secret school is another stepping stone in this construction. We learn to hate others, the enemies, the Turks, who deprived us of education so that we would always be their slaves and never shake off their yoke. Through the myth of the secret school, we learn to be emotionally involved, to worship the homeland, preserving the common hatred towards the enemy.", student 9186.

Excerpt 9: "In fact, there was no "secret school". The images we have from that time that show children going to school at night are true. But not because they went secretly, but

because most of the children in the morning helped their family with the farm work. The myth was recorded to stimulate and awaken the national consciousness of the Greeks in order to revolt against the Turkish conqueror. In fact, the Turks, who were basically an illiterate people did not share the view that anyone who is educated is smarter and more open-minded, and therefore more dangerous to revolt"., student 9148.

Excerpt 10: "In my opinion there was no secret school, since the important thing was the collection of taxes and not so much the cultural development. The story serves in this case the formation of national consciousness and identity. Therefore, the emphasis on the ideals, the limitations in the Ottoman empire and the relief that followed the release, contributes to the creation of the national narrative", student 9171.

The excerpts above coincide with the most common critique exercised on the myth of the secret school, that it was created post *eventum*, after the Ottoman period, to embellish the situation in the modern Greek state of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and to emphasize the accomplishments of the Greeks that had faced excessive obstacles and difficulties under the Ottoman rule (Angelou, 1997). On the other hand, Student 9148, even though he adopts the modern historiographical stance, that the secret school was a myth, himself makes the same mistakes as those students arguing for the existence of the secret school: he refers to the "images of that time", while we know that all paintings we have were made after the liberation of Greece, he accepts that the myth serves national consciousness, but he places the latter before the revolution, "in order to revolt", and he underestimates the Ottoman state and the level of education. Historians, comment on the fact that the Ottomans did not link education with uprisings, the latter being an Enlightenment characteristic, but they admit that there were institutions of education within the empire, of a religious type and limited to the upper classes (Stathis, 2005, Theodoropoulos, 2018).

## 4.2. Third task, conflicting sources

The third task asked from the students to argue on how it is possible to have conflicting sources/opinions on the same issue. The conflicting opinions were the two sources, one written by the German scholar and philhellene Carl Iken, in 1825, and the other written by a Greek philologist Vlahogiannis in 1945. Iken spoke for the existence of the secret schools, Vlahogiannis against. Many students from our sample that answered the first task, left blank the

**Table 3**  
**Conflicting sources**

Total number of students	60
Criterial	14
Impositionist	8
Biased	10
No complete answers	10
No answer	18

Source: self-elaboration.



The total number of answers is 60 and not 50 which is the sample; This happens, because answers are counted and not students/participants. As one can see from the excerpt 11 in the category “Impositionist” below, in the specific student’s answer one can locate elements that were classified in several categories; Afandi & Baidon’s (2015); Chapman’s (2016) and Lee’s (2004) typologies, referred to in the literature review section of this paper, may help us to gain insight into students’ understanding of why historical accounts differ.

Students’ excerpts follow:

Excerpt 11: “We have so different sources, because it is about a distant past of 200 years and we certainly do not know exactly what was happening then. There can be no objectivity in this Greek-Turkish issue. So, every historian can write whatever he wants, even things that do not exist.”, student 9192, “biased”.

Excerpt 12: “Different views and sources on this issue can be justified by the fact that it is all about textbooks and official history that each political leadership chooses to promote [...]”, student 9186, “biased”.

The “biased” type is the one that faces insurmountable difficulties in assessing the several accounts of the past, while partiality and partisanship are attested in a way that there are no different views, only different groups where the authors of the accounts belong to. The accounts are not contextualized following criteria of time, circumstances, role of the author in the events, they seem to be perceived as products of the authors’ intentional manipulation of the past to serve interests. In the two quoted examples, students 9192 and 9186, politics seem to be the moving force. The “Biased” type spotted in the data of this research could have similarities with Lee’s “Bias” category “The past as reported in a more or less biased way”, (Lee, 2004, 154).

Excerpts from the “impositionist” type follow:

Excerpt 13: “As for the sources, they are different because each historian sees the facts from his own point of view and interprets them in his own way. That is why we have such different and conflicting views on this issue but also on all historical events.”, student 9157, “impostionist”.

Excerpt 14: “Opinions are different, what dominates is the subjective element and the personal point of view”, student 9174, “impositionist”.

Excerpt 15: “We have so different sources, because it is about a distant past of 200 years and we certainly do not know exactly what was happening then. There can be no objectivity in this Greek-Turkish issue. So, every historian can write whatever he wants, even things that do not exist” student 9192, “Impositionist”.

The “impositionist” type in this data might be similar to Chapman’s “impositionist explanation” category (Chapman, 2016, p. 10), where historians’ preconceptions are imposed on the archival record. Reference is made to “subjectivism”, student 9174, and to historians’ different points of view and ways of interpretation, student 9157, but in the most general way, making the above points of view seem arbitrary instead of supporting the “scope” and the “originality” of the account, or the “narratio”, as Ankersmit (1981, 218) states. In student’s 9192 excerpt, one can

also find other ideas too, like helplessness as regards the impossibility to learn about the past. The latter reminds us of Lee's "Inaccessible past", (Lee, 2004, 154). The specific answer combines elements of different approaches to the past, the least common denominator being the impossibility to assess the reliability of the historical accounts.

Excerpts from the "criterial" type follow:

Excerpt 17: "Obviously, equally in the modern and the past era, views and ways of looking and thinking are different. Testimonials and sources differ depending on the behavioral and experiential and context of each person. In short, the sources reflect different situations, desires, difficulties. Based on the above, we can be sure that referring to the past, as well as the present and the future, there will always be different views on all areas of human life.", student 9150, "criterial".

Excerpt 18: "We can have different sources on the same issue because it has to do with official and unofficial narratives. Unofficial and alternative narratives present other aspects of the story, sometimes black pages that are not embellishing the facts.", student 9147, "criterial".

Finally, the "criterial" type of the data adopts criteria that contextualize the accounts and the authors' "positionality" (Holmes, 2020), meaning the political, social and experiential context that forms one's identity and point of view. Emphasis is given to individual experiences, also to the situation in which one is positioned, one's "desires" and "difficulties". On the other hand, reference is made to different types of narratives, student 9147, "official", "unofficial" and "alternative". The latter reminds us the "official" and "counter" narratives of Wertsch (2000, p. 39) and the "vernacular" narratives of VanSledright (2008, p. 133). The student 9147 seems to be aware of what Wineburg calls "[collective]memory occlusions" (2001, p. 243), of the fact that some versions of the past are not salient to the present, or not flattering enough either for individuals or national institutions, like the "black pages" of a country's history. As Wineburg clarifies, occluded memories continue to exist "in historical and archival cultures, in books, on the Web", but are not easily recalled to the present. The "Criterial" type of this sample could have similarities with the Afandi & Baildon's "critical [type] approach to viewing history (Afandi & Baildon, 2015, p. 42), and the "inquisitorial" type of Chapman, (2016, p. 10). The "criterial" approach to historical accounts as described by Afandi and Baildon, allows the reader to search for and take under consideration the limits that the author, or the historian, set to his work. On the other hand, the "inquisitorial" type of Chapman is supposed to seek for the questions that the historian set to himself in order to answer by his account.

## 5. Discussion

This paper aimed to comment on two different issues, the one dependent on the other: the first was the dominance of popular historical culture on perceptions of the past by non-experts, and the second, the issue of the historical sources and how students perceive of them, the latter being one of the most crucial topics for debate and research among history educators.

As for the first one, [popular] historical culture, the fact that elements of the popular culture are prevalent in the representation of the past is most evident in the case of the Greek revolution of

1821. The Greek war for independence (from the Ottoman empire), is a case where the findings of academic, historiographical research are occluded. Especially in the case of the secret school, we noted inertia on the part of the participating students, and perpetuation of interpretations of the past that are located in the public sphere, theatrical performances, films, school holidays and trips, also in the reproduction of the 19th century European iconography for the revolution of 1821 and the Ottoman period, which is largely Bavarian.

As for the second issue, which is how students perceive of the conflicting historical sources, this is not irrelevant to the dominance of popular historical culture, since what characterizes it, is the existence of many, often conflicting, and of different types, sources, that students need to take under consideration and evaluate. In the case of the Greek undergraduate students presented above, half of them did not comment the relevant question or did not produce clear answers, while many of those that answered, adopted either the “biased”, or the “impositionist” stances according to our categories, stances that imply an omnipotent historian that makes decisions for subjective reasons without using any methodology. As Stoel et al put it, “[in that case] history becomes a matter of opinion and historical thinking procedures lose their relevance” (Stoel et al, 2017). This could be owed to the dominance of ‘content’ history in Greek schools and the lack of practice in source analysis in the classrooms. Students are accustomed at commenting on sources that complete and support the narrative part of the schoolbook.

As Husbands put it, “history is an evidence-processing activity which plays an essential part in the preparation of pupils for the demands of life outside and beyond school, where they will be confronted with a mass of information, much of it conflicting [...]”, (Husbands, 1996, p. 16). On the other hand, Kühberger (2018) suggests for the history classroom, the comparison of different cultural products, television series, movies, novels with the products of historiography for the respective time periods or historical events, or even between them. Körber insists on cultivating students' ability to deconstruct all kinds of past narratives they encounter, and not necessarily those of historiography. Students need to practice the historical contextualization and interpretation of various sources, accounts, and the examination of their origin, provenance, for example the identity of the author (2015). The myths in particular, are advantageous for the teaching of history, because they are cultural products of their time and in this respect, they tell us a lot about the needs of the people and the societies that produced them (Martin, 2018). Therefore, one can understand the necessity of practice in source analysis for the students, in an environment that is characterized by explosions of information through different types of media.

## 6. Final reflection

Building on the discussion of the findings above, one could now discern the contribution of this small-scale research that refers both to issues of historical content, the secret school and its existence, and to students understanding and reflection over conflicting sources. If popular historical culture distorts past representations, the latter is realized by sources available and accessible on the internet, or in the public sphere. Since we cannot keep students isolated from history in public, historical culture needs to be included in history lessons and students to exercise in analyzing and debating over its products. Consequently, history teachers' trainers in education departments, ought to include in history training sessions sources of a variety of types, in a way that university students, prospective teachers familiarize themselves with literacies referring to different types of sources, documents, pictures, moving pictures, digital media, material culture or

oral history. Only if prospective teachers in university education departments feel confident about their subject knowledge, will they make the transition from factual to interpretational history in the classroom.

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## Specific contribution of the authors

I hereby declare that I have authored this paper individually by my own.

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## Appendix

The two sources given to the students - participants:

A) In 1825, the German scholar and philhellene Carl Iken published his work *Leukothea* and shared the following information about the state of education during the Ottoman Rule: "Turks used to prohibit schools more than churches, this was the reason why Greeks ended up identifying religion with education, so that in large and small cities they tried to set up public schools secretly, where the children of the poor were taught free of charge."

B) From what I have read, I haven't located any historical evidence that would confirm the existence of a secret school, ..., apart from the song ..., how would it be that the Turk, who was

illiterate, would prevent the Christians from being educated, only very rarely, did the Turk intervene to separate the teachers, if the latter were fighting ..., Vlahogiannis, 1945

From the 1997 Angelou book, *Krypho Scholeio, Chroniko enos Mythou* [The Secret School, The Chronicle of a Myth], Estia.

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Los revisores deberán rellenar un informe de evaluación que centrará su atención en aspectos tales como características formales, originalidad y novedad de los trabajos, relevancia de las propuestas y los resultados, calidad metodológica y validez científica.

Una vez terminado el proceso se decidirá la aceptación o no de los mismos y su publicación en el número que sea pertinente, así como las modificaciones susceptibles de ser realizadas para su final publicación. Dicha notificación se enviará únicamente por correo electrónico, en un plazo máximo de seis meses.

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The author is committed to submit original papers not having been published in other reviews or in other languages. In this way, it is not allowed for the same paper to be presented in other reviews during the evaluation process.

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The sixth edition of the Manual of the American Psychological Association will be taken into account for the writing of the papers. The length of the papers must not exceed 30 pages. Typography will be Arial 11, with simple line spacing and no space between paragraphs. The text must be justified on both margins without indentation in the first paragraphs. Margins size will be 2.50 cm. Where it could be necessary the incorporation of notes, they will be at the bottom of the page, consecutively numbered with typography Arial 10, simple line spacing and justified on both margins.

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The Journal will submit the papers to a first examination once received. If the paper follows the presentation guidelines, the subject agrees with the editorial line of this journal, and possess the scientific quality required, it will be sent to the advisory council for a first assessment. If not, the documents which clearly fail to complete the editorial line may be rejected straightaway in this first step.

The Advisory Council will indicate the originality, relevance, structure, writing, bibliography, etc. of the text to the journal; for this purpose, two outside experts will be designated to review the papers; these experts can be (or not) part of this Advisory Council. The selection of the experts will adjust to the subject and methodological characteristics of the paper. Name and affiliation of the author will be eliminated from the text for its review, in this way experts will act anonymously and confidentially.

The experts will fill out an assessment report which will focus on aspects such as formal characteristics, originality and novelty of the papers, relevance and results of the proposal, methodological quality and scientific validity.

Once the process is finished, the acceptance or not of the papers and its publication in the corresponding edition will be decided, as well as the modifications that may be done for its final publication. This notification will be sent by email within 6 months maximum.



