



European
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Center for
European Studies

Thursday, January 11, 4 pm • Room 1636, International Institute

CONVERSATIONS ON EUROPE LECTURE SERIES

“Enlightenment, Emancipation, and National Identity: Koraes & the Ancients”

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As Enlightenment educational projects began to infuse their curricula with rational ideas, secularize them, and make them available to broader audiences, they turned to ancient Greek texts, among other sources, in search of universal principles. These works were not only eloquent sources of such principles, they were also pagan and unclaimed—they belonged to all mankind. Inspired, on the one hand, by this program to educate the world, and driven, on the other, by a desire to see his fellow-countrymen liberated from the Ottoman yoke, Adamantios Koraes, an expatriated Greek living in Paris, began, in 1805, to edit ancient Greek texts so as to make them accessible to modern Greeks. Seeing his compatriots as the natural heirs of these texts, Koraes hoped that his *Hellenic Library* would become the foundation for the formation and consolidation of a Greek national identity, a necessary first step on the road to freedom. Koraes prefaced his scholarly editions of such texts as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Theophrastus's *Characters* with discussions of the significance of language, education, and civic responsibility, often mirroring the subjects and methods of his European contemporaries. Encapsulating, as they do, the tension between the particular and the universal, these prefaces mark a singular moment in the development of modern national identity, and offer a unique insight into the continuities and discontinuities that mark the trajectories of national traditions.



Free and open to the public.

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