

Who Saved the Parthenon?

A New History of the Acropolis
Before, During and After the
Greek Revolution



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Cover image: Figure 2.7. 'View of the Acropolis from the banks of the Illysus, Sep^r 1824.' Chromolithograph from a contemporary amateur picture. From: William Black, L.R.C.S.E., Surgeon, H.M.S. Chanticleer, *Narrative of Cruises in the Mediterranean in H.M.S. "Euryalus" and "Chanticleer" during the Greek War of Independence (1822–1826)* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1900), frontispiece. The chromolithograph was made by McLagan and Cumming of Edinburgh c.1900. Public domain.

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5. Communities, Real and Imagined

Besides the two main warring parties in the Greek Revolution, there were other communities, real and imagined, that participated in the struggle; either directly by, for example, supplying arms, or indirectly by helping to construct and maintain the stories of imagined pasts and aspired-to futures that real communities inherited, built on, emphasized, curated, and probably needed if they were to maintain the assent of their members.

The Ottoman authorities, we can be confident, could understand why many of the ‘Romans’ [Ρωμαίοι], as the Orthodox inhabitants of the former Empire of the ‘New Rome’ of Byzantium called themselves, might want to resort to violence to discontinue their allegiance to the Ottoman sultan, as some had done without success as recently as 1770. They could understand too that the Orthodox Christian community liked to celebrate Constantine’s victory at the battle of the Milvian Bridge. Their own capital city was still called Constantinople in the main languages, and even their own Turkish vernacular name, Istanbul, preserved its Greek and Christian root.

But, as they translated the first proclamations of the Greek Revolutionaries of 1821, they may have been puzzled. Who were these ‘Hellenes’ (Turkish ‘Yunanlar’) who demanded ‘liberty’? Why were the battles of Marathon and Thermopylae relevant to the present crisis? In 1821, the year of the outbreak, the Ottoman Government established a translation office as part of a long-standing ambition to join the European system of international diplomacy.¹ The Ottomans had plentiful practice in identifying rebel leaders and dealing with them in accordance with

1 Alloul, Houssine and Martykánová Darina, ‘Introduction: Charting New Ground in the Study of Ottoman Foreign Relations’ *International History Review*, 2021, 3. How the British Ambassador, Stratford Canning, was able to dangle the possibility

their own laws and customs, but who were these new-comers, or rather these resurrected old-comers, General Epaminondas and General Thrasybulus? How could they and their invisible armies be brought to battle and defeated?²

As Hakan Y. Erdem has explained, in official Ottoman eyes, anyone who attempted to revolt against the millet settlement had abrogated the pact founded in religious law ('dhimma/zimmet') that regulated the relationships between the communities of the millet and the Ottoman state. Rebels reverted from protected persons ('zimmis') to warring non-Muslims ('harbis') liable to the severest penalties.³ In theory, if a revolt occurred, the law distinguished between the guilty and the innocent, but mostly in terms of local communities, such as towns, rather than individuals. The numerous killings of unarmed men over the age of fourteen classified as rebels, who fell into the hands of the Ottoman forces, the enslavement of women, girls, and boys, and their sale through the slave markets of Constantinople, Smyrna, Alexandria, and elsewhere, that occurred during the Greek Revolution, as well as the seizure of property, although referred to in many accounts by Europeans as 'atrocities', 'crimes', 'acts of barbarism' and so on, were not, for the most part, aberrations, or instances of breakdown of law and discipline, but the norms of Ottoman understanding of Islam as interpreted by the religious authorities, 'muftis', of which there had been many precedents in recent centuries. The Grand Mufti, the Ottoman Government's most senior adviser on Muslim law, (sheikh al-Islam), was amongst the most powerful members of the Ottoman court, the only official who, in theory at least, could depose a sultan. In addressing the Grand Mufti, for example, it was customary for the sultan to call him: '... the wisest of all wise men, in all forms of knowledge, most excellent of all excellencies; and who takest care not to do things unlawful: source of truth and of true science; heir of the prophetic and apostolic doctrine; who solvest

of acceding to that ambition in exchange for saving the Parthenon from being destroyed a focus for neo-Hellenic nationalism, is discussed in Chapter 18.

2 Discussed by Erdem, Y. Hakan, "'Do not think of the Greeks as agricultural labourers': Ottoman responses to the Greek Revolution', in Birtek, Faruk and Thalia Dragonas, eds, *Citizenship and the Nation-State in Greece and Turkey* (London: Routledge, 2005). Hakan Erdem found the translation of the 1821 proclamation of Ypsilantes in the Ottoman archives, 78.

3 Erdem, 67.

the problems of faith; who illustrateth its orthodox articles; who art the key of the treasuries of truth; the light of obscure allegories; and who art fortified with grace from the Supreme director and Legislator of mankind.⁴ But when, at the outbreak of the Greek Revolution, the then Grand Mufti refused to endorse the putting to death of those suspected of being sympathetic to the Greek Revolution and the rounding up men from among the Orthodox community in Constantinople with family connections in the revolted territories to be sent to work in the dockyards, he was disgraced and replaced with a more biddable cleric.⁵ When, following the judicial putting to death of the Orthodox Patriarch and a number of Orthodox bishops, the western ambassadors urged the Ottoman Government to do more to separate the innocent from the guilty, they were told that those put to death had been guilty even if judged in accordance with their own European terms. The Patriarch had been put to death, it was explained, not because he was head of the Orthodox Christians but for conspiring to rebel, just as his predecessor as Patriarch, Parthenius, had been put to death in 1655, a precedent that a search in the files of the French embassy in Constantinople was able to confirm.⁶ Letters that they had intercepted, the Ottoman Government said, proved that the Patriarch had been in correspondence with the Revolutionaries but when they offered to show them, to the British Ambassador Lord Strangford, he declined on the grounds that, under the European doctrine of sovereignty, internal security was indeed a matter for individual governments, and he was duty-bound not to interfere.⁷

The Greek Revolution can, therefore, be conceptualized, although not of course exclusively so, as a moment when two main geo-political

4 Habesci, Elias, *The present state of the Ottoman empire,; containing a more accurate and interesting account...of the Turks than any yet extant. Including a particular description of the court and seraglio of the Grand Signor...translated from the French manuscript of Elias Habesci, many years resident in Constantinople, in the service of the Grand Signor* (London: Baldwin, 1784), 111, translated from an actual document.

5 'It is said that the disgrace of the Mufti originated in his refusal (supported by the Koran) to authorise the sanguinary proscription of the Greek Rayahs resident in Constantinople'. Ambassador Strangford to British Foreign Secretary 31 March 1821, Kew FO 78/98, 56.

6 Kew FO 78/100.

7 Strangford to Foreign Secretary, June 1821, Kew FO 78/99 22. The interception of letters, a feature of the war, is discussed in Chapter 6. The intercepted letters that helped to save the Parthenon are discussed in Chapter 17.

concepts met. On one side was the status quo, identity being essentially one of religious affiliation, given institutional form in the Ottoman millet system. On the other side was the arriving notion of 'nation', as it had been institutionalised in the western European 'Westphalian' model, named after the series of treaties concluded in 1648 that had begun to wind down the religious wars and population cleansings that had occurred over the previous two centuries, but that stuttered on intermittently in many places until much later and whose traces are still observable, and by some still celebrated, today.

At the time of the Greek Revolution, among the Greek-speaking Orthodox, there were pro-Ottomanists as well as pro-nationalists, and although in the historiography after the Revolution, those who found themselves on the losing side of the national history tended later to be treated as traitors, at the time of the Revolution they had reasonable grounds for fearing for themselves and for their families and for expecting that the Ottoman state would win. If we conceptualize the Revolution as a moving of geo-political plates from a religious to a nationalist identity, it is striking how consistently the Orthodox patriarchy urged its memberships to return to their obedience, even when the success of the Revolution was assured.⁸ And such divisions of opinion were to be the norm later in the nineteenth century amongst other ethnic and religious constituencies in the Ottoman territories as the geo-political plates continued their apparently inexorable grind towards the north and the east.⁹

In deciding to send armies and navies to put down the Greek Revolutionaries by force, the Ottoman Government was following the same policy, within the same legal, religious, and customary framework as they had successfully deployed in 1715 when their army re-conquered the Morea (Peloponnese). The Venetians had held the territory since the 1680s as a result of the campaign in which the European army they led had bombarded the Acropolis of Athens and done great damage to the Parthenon.¹⁰ The written ultimatum dated 28 June 1715 addressed

8 A selection of primary documents which illustrate this, often neglected, presence in the Revolution, is transcribed in English translation as Appendix E.

9 A point made explicitly by, for example, Caglar Keydar in his introductory chapter to Birttek, Faruk and Thalia Dragonas, editors, *Citizenship and the Nation-State in Greece and Turkey* (London: Routledge, 2005), 3.

10 Discussed in Chapter 7.

by the grand vizier to the Venetian commander of the Acropolis of Corinth, with his seal, officially translated into French verbatim and in full, has been printed, as has the letter of rejection by Minetto, the Venetian commander. In the letter the grand vizier claims that the Ottoman sultan, 'the most powerful emperor in the universe and the most eminent of monarchs in the world', has ancient rights, and unless the place is surrendered, then he 'with the assistance of God, will kill all the men and enslave the women.'¹¹

In 1785 was still to be seen outside the voivode's palace at Tripolitza in the Peloponnese the remains of a carefully constructed pyramid of one thousand five hundred skulls set up six years before so as to face the palace gate. The men, who had mostly not been killed in battle, had been decapitated by the Ottoman authorities after the putting down of the uprising named after the Russian admiral Orloff who had failed to come to the aid of the Revolutionaries.¹² In retrospect we can see that the Ottoman authorities had, in their own terms, been successful in carrying into the provinces the practices of display and performance that had long been practiced at the imperial court at Constantinople as its main means of demonstrating and projecting its power.¹³ Their centuries-old as well as their recent experience help to explain why the Ottoman authorities of 1821 felt confident that their ancient laws and practices, as endorsed by their religious authorities, would continue to be successful, and why the Greek Revolutionaries, as well as those

11 Brue, Benjamin, *Interprète du roi près la Porte Ottomane, Journal de la Campagne que le Grand Vesir Ali Pacha a faite en 1715 pour la Conquête de la Morée* (Athens: Karavias 1976), 14. Reprinted from the edition published in Paris by Thorin in 1870.

12 D'Ansse de Villoison, *De l'Hellade à la Grèce, Voyage en Grèce et au Levant (1784–1786)* edited by Étienne Famerie (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 2006), 78. This work, not known until 2006, is edited from more than five thousand pages of manuscript notes compiled by D'Ansse de Villoison over a long life, including many years spent continuously in libraries and nine years of travels, including some as a member of the travelling academy of the Comte de Choiseul Gouffier discussed below. The author, who had hoped to produce a history of Greece from Homer to [his] present day, adds much that was not previous known as well as providing a warning to overambitious scholars. The skulls were also seen also by Castellan, A. L., *Lettres sur la Morée* (Paris: Nepveu, second edition, 1820), part of a three-volume work, at iii, 226. The 1770 rising, that had been coordinated as part of a Russian-Turkish war, was regarded by Pouqueville, one of the first historians of the Greek Revolution of 1821, as the start of that Revolution.

13 As described in Chapter 6.

who were drawn willy-nilly into the conflict, knew what to expect if the Revolutionary enterprise failed.¹⁴

Although the bodies of executed criminals and rebels were a common sight in western European countries, the Ottoman punishments gave Europeans a special frisson of horror as examples of what they saw as exotic oriental barbarism. Henry Gally Knight, for example, later a British Member of Parliament who in 1816 served on the Parliamentary Select Committee that recommended the purchase of Lord Elgin's collection of antiquities, wrote of an episode he had witnessed on his travels before the Revolution: 'a massacre takes place in the town where he [the traveller] resides—he sees the victims driven to execution, and their wives led into bondage; these circumstances, however revolting to his feelings as a man, are favourable to his views as a poet.'¹⁵ As was to be repeatedly explained by the Ottoman leadership to western ambassadors during the Greek Revolution, to be put to death according to perceived degree of guilt in accordance with a tariff of degrees of cruelty, including sudden strangulation with a bowstring by a eunuch or a deaf servant surprising the victim from behind, formal decapitation by a sword, impaling, and staking, was the legal punishment for adult males, and being sold as slaves was the punishment for women, girls, and boys.¹⁶ Sometimes, in order to maximize the period of time during which body parts performed their intended deterrent function, the skins of executed men were stuffed with straw.¹⁷ By these elaborate devices that were related more to the status of offenders than to the nature of the crimes, the Ottoman state, which had forbidden itself the use of pictures, attempted to display the actual live performance of its power and not just the fact of its having been exercised, and to prolong the deterrent effect as long as possible. This was achieved by,

14 The heap of skulls set up by Reschid was a display of what the people of Athens could expect when he marched his army there. The role of the Parthenon in the outcome will be discussed in Chapter 11.

15 Knight, Henry Gally, Esq., *Eastern Sketches in Verse*, 3rd edition (London: Murray, 1830), Preface, vii. Knight's visit was in 1819.

16 Numerous reports in the documents at Kew from 1821 and 1822, including, for example, FO 78/108, 70, Lord Strangford, British Ambassador, to Foreign Secretary Lord Londonderry (formerly Castlereagh), 25 May 1822.

17 Chishull, Edmund, the late Reverend and Learned, B.D., Chaplain to the Factory of the Worshipful Turkey Company at Smyrna, *Travels in Turkey and back to England* (London: Printed by W. Boyer in the year MDCCLXVII, 1767), 70.

in effect, turning the bodies of the offenders into moving and then static pictures.¹⁸ Knight was not untypical in reporting the effects of the scene on his own emotions, objectifying the unfortunates whose sufferings provided him with his frisson.¹⁹ The western visitors, making minimal concessions to their normal dress, not only observed the landscape but inserted themselves into it. They were the 'Franks', a distinctive and privileged community, with access to the Ottoman imperial authorities in Constantinople through a network of consulates and ambassadors.

As for the third constituency of actors in the conflict, the European powers who were attempting to manage the international system found themselves facing questions that went to the heart of what constituted 'identity', whether collective or individual. As their *de facto* leader, Count Metternich, the foreign minister of the multi-linguistic, multi-ethnic and multi-religious Austrian Empire, asked in a letter to Count Esterhazy, his ambassador in London: 'What do we mean by the Greeks, do we mean a people, a country, or a religion? If either of the first two, where are the dynastic and geographical boundaries? If the third, then upwards of fifty million men are involved.'²⁰ As Katerina Zacharia has pointed out, Metternich's question can be compared with an ancient Athenian formulation of Hellenic identity that was put into the mouths of an Athenian delegation to Sparta by Herodotus, as their answer to the charge that they were being un-Hellenic in making an alliance with the Persian king. The markers can be roughly translated as 'people of the same blood, with the same language, having common sanctuaries and practices when sacrificing to the gods, and practising the same customs.'²¹

18 My discussion of how the early Christians, who also denied themselves the use of pictures, used displays of the act of mutilation of the images on the Parthenon to show their triumph over their ideological enemies, incidentally allowing some of the images to survive through the long millennium and enabling our generation to take a more informed of how the classical temple may have appeared in pre-Christian times is in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>

19 Another example of detachment, Edgar Quinet in 1829, when the misery was in post-Revolutionary Athens, is noted in Chapter 13.

20 Quoted by Livanios, Dimitris, 'The Quest for Hellenism: Religion, Nationalism, and the Quest for Collective Identities in Greece, 1453–1913', in Zacharia, 237–69.

21 Quoted in Greek with English translation by Zacharia, Katerina, 'Herodotus' Four Markers of Greek Identity', in Zacharia, 21–36 from Herodotus 8.144, 1–3. I have altered the translation of 'religion', always a difficult term to apply to ancient Hellas, to bring out that it was more of a sharing of religious localities, pan-Hellenic sites such as Delphi and Olympia, and a similarity in the practises of animal sacrifices and shared feasts than a common belief system. The phrase reads

As a geographical concept, 'Greece' had been invented by the Romans as 'Graecia', an area that was mainly inhabited by speakers of forms of Greek and others who knew the literary language, but that excluded many others who lived in Hellenic cities from Sicily to the Black Sea, as well as in Egypt, Syria, and especially in Ionia in modern western Turkey where cities such as Miletus had been leaders in Hellenic thought and innovation since the time of Homer. The ancient Hellenes had also celebrated their differences, inventing a mythical family that provided a symbolic system of ancestral eponyms, Hellen, from whom all Hellenes were descended, and his son. What did they have in common that distinguished them from non-Hellenes? This question had confronted the designers and the builders of the classical Parthenon, as will be discussed later.²²

The governments of Britain and France, while claiming to be neutral in the conflict, did not strive to stop the flow of material support and volunteers to the Revolutionaries, although in most cases such activities were illegal under their own laws. The contradiction was hard to explain to the Ottoman authorities without offering a long history lesson in ancient Hellenism, the start of a recovery of interest in the epoch of European humanism and the Renaissance, and its later adoption into modern societies elsewhere. From the beginning it opened the western ambassadors to charges of hypocrisy. And, as was more obvious to the Ottoman authorities in Constantinople, even if the Revolutionaries regarded themselves as Hellenes, the main institution of the Greek-speaking peoples, the Orthodox Church and its patriarchs and higher clergy regarded such ideas as a snare designed by the Devil and his demons to bring down Christianity.

Examples of episodes in the past being selectively appropriated and mythologized as a means of establishing an identity for the present are, it scarcely needs to be repeated, normal components in the constructions of modern 'nations' and how they are rhetorically presented by themselves and by others, both to insiders and outsiders. In the case of Greece, unusually, we can see that a reverse colonization was also occurring. As modern scholars have noted, during the nineteenth century the central

αὗτις δὲ τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν ἐὼν ὁμαιμὸν τε καὶ ὁμόγλωσσον καὶ θεῶν ἰδρύματά τε κοινὰ καὶ θυσίαι ἡθεὰ τε ὁμότροπα, τῶν προδότας γενέσθαι Ἀθηναίους οὐκ ἂν εὖ ἔχοι.

22 In *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>.

unifier of Modern Hellas was Ancient Hellas.²³ By the mid-nineteenth century, the philhellenic assumption that the modern inhabitants of Greece shared an identity with the ancients, which had begun in the countries of western Europe, had been successfully transplanted, and like the eucalyptus trees introduced into Greece in the 1860s, had become indigenous.²⁴

From the beginning, amongst the classically educated overseas Greeks and populations of Europe, the ancient ruins were central to the iconography of the Revolution as is illustrated by Figure 5.1, a composition of 1821.



Figure 5.1 Frontispiece to Σάλπισμα πολεμιστήριον [A Trumpet Call to War], pamphlet by Adamantios Koraes. Copper engraving.²⁵

The question of how much the Ottoman leaderships knew about ancient Greek history has not yet been deeply researched, nor how far

23 For example, Mouritsen, Henrik, 'Modern nations and ancient models: Italy and Greece compared' in Beaton, Roderick (with David Ricks), *The Making of Modern Greece: Romanticism, Nationalism and the Uses of the Past* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 43–49.

24 Discussed by Hamilakis, Yannis, *The Nation and its Ruins: Antiquity, Archaeology, and National Imagination in Greece* (Oxford: OUP, 2007).

25 The quotation appears to be an adaptation of a passage in the *Odyssey* Book 14, lines 339–40: 'ἀλλ' ὅτε γαίης πολλὸν ἀπέπλω ποντοπόρος νηὺς, αὐτίκα δούλιον ἡμᾶρ ἐμοὶ περιμυχανόνωντο' when Odysseus has secretly arrived back in Ithaca after his long absence and many misfortunes and is about to reclaim his inheritance by killing the usurpers.

the Ottoman leaderships had access to the huge literature in European languages that attempted to draw lessons from that past for the then present.²⁶ Nonetheless, like the Europeans, some knew antiquity mostly from stock quotations. Ibrahim, for example, the son of Muhammad Ali, the ruler of Egypt, and perhaps the most ruthless of the Ottoman commanders in the Greek Revolution, is recorded as remarking at an abortive meeting aimed at exchanging prisoners, that 'ancient history records them [the Greeks] what they are now, always fighting and at variance among themselves.'²⁷ This was a comment made by some in the ancient world, repeated by others in subsequent history, and still heard today, that Greeks are a warrior people.²⁸

26 As discussed in Chapter 8.

27 Report by the British naval officer Captain Hamilton, 25 September 1826, in Kew FO 78/141.

28 An example from the guide books given to British soldiers in Greece in the 1940s is given in Chapter 23.