

New Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Greek Revolution

An International Two-Day Symposium Open to the Public

Jackson School of International Studies | Hellenic Studies Program

SPEAKER ABSTRACTS



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DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS

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PANEL 1

Sakis Gekas, The Ionian Connection. British Colonialism and the Greek Revolution

The Ionian Islands as a geopolitical space was crucial in the Greek Revolution for at least three reasons: the first is the status of the Ionian Islands as a British protectorate that explains to a certain extent the shift in British policy during the revolution. The second reason is the proximity of the islands to Morea and Roumeli that affected the lives of people on the islands in various ways, including those who fought in the war and those who sought refuge in the Ionian islands. The third reason is the role of the islands in disseminating information through correspondence to foreign newspapers that shaped public opinion in Europe and the United States. This talk will argue that the history of the revolution from an Ionian vantage point allows us to understand the dynamic of revolution for those directly involved in the war both in the Ionian islands and in the areas where the revolution war was fought.

Evdoxios Doxiadis, Muslims and Jews in the Greek War of Independence and its Immediate Aftermath

Greek historiography over the past few years has begun to tackle the issue of the massacres of non-Christians during the Greek War of Independence but it still often fails to investigate the fate of those that survived or how their presence, as non-Christians or as new converts, impacted the construction of the early Greek state, its ideology, structures, policies or laws. This paper highlights the significance Greek governments and prominent Greek figures of the time, as well as foreign observers assigned to the question of non-Christian residents and their role in the state to be.

Paris Papamichos Chronakis, Narratives of Exclusion, Performances of Belonging: Jews and the Greek War of Independence, 1871-1941

This paper considers the multifaceted place of Jews and the 'Jew' in popular narratives and commemorative practices of the Greek War of Independence throughout the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. It argues that the War and its subsequent memorialization 'othered' the Jews by generating strong images of them as Greek-haters (μισέλληνες) rather than deicides alone. These images reshaped Greek Judeophobia in the post-independence period and proved remarkably enduring being still with us today. However, in the

interwar period, those 'othered' Jews (chief among them the Zionists in Thessaloniki) engaged with the Greek Revolution in highly creative ways as they attempted to craft a new and legitimate identity for themselves as Jews *and* Greeks, or else, as 'Greek Jews', brothers to their Christian neighbors. Although the project eventually proved futile, Jewish engagement with the Greek Revolution can nevertheless help us rethink how we can craft new narratives about the Revolution better fit for the multi-cultural Greece of the twenty-first century.

PANEL 2

Efi Gazi, Conceptualizing 'Liberty' in the Age of the Greek Revolution

In the course of historical time, liberty and freedom have acquired many contingent meanings. Starting with an exploration of the revolutionary motto *Ελευθερία ή Θάνατος* (*Liberty or Death*), the paper discusses how 'liberty' and 'freedom' became key concepts, associated with radically new ideas about rights, governance and independence in the age of the Greek Revolution. Political languages and concepts of the American and the French Revolution and their impact on Greek revolutionary discourses are examined. Usages and meanings of 'liberty' are also traced in the *Philiki Etaireia* texts and in the revolutionary constitutions. The paper argues that diverse itineraries and trajectories of ideas and concepts in the age of the Greek Revolution contributed to the articulation of new political languages, which redefined the Ottoman rule and shaped revolutionary visions and aspirations.

Nektaria Klapaki, The Cult of the Insurgent Greek Nation in Kalvos's *Odes*

The insurgent Greek nation features under different guises in Kalvos's *Odes* (1824, 1826): as Liberty ('The Ocean', 'To Psara') and Victory ('To Victory') but also as Glory ('To Glory') and Virtue ('To Glory'). In all of these odes, Kalvos employs the rhetorical trope of allegory, which is combined in some cases with the trope of divine epiphany, to represent the insurgent Greek nation in the form of allegorical female figures who resemble ancient Greek goddesses and occasionally manifest themselves to the Greek insurgents, especially in contexts of crisis. While critical discussion of these odes has read Kalvos's use of allegory and divine epiphany as instances of a neoclassical poetics, this paper argues that the employment of these two tropes also points in the direction of the cult of the insurgent Greek nation in line with the discourse of nation cult informing the *Odes*.

Simos Zenios, "Freedom-loving Speech:" Greek Poetry and Modern Revolution

How did Greek poetry conceive of the 1821 uprising as a case of that distinctly modern political phenomenon we call revolution? In this talk, I argue that in his early poem "[From a cave dressed]," Dionysios Solomos posits lyric voice as a site where the modernity of the called-for Greek revolution is tested. Starting from seemingly minor aspects of the poem (Why does Solomos substitute the name of Theocritus for Anacreon in his manuscript? Why does he use two rhyme schemes?), I show that the poem's figurations of voice follow a progressively developing path: natural and song-like enunciation gives way to an utterance that is commensurate with the reflective, thinking speech of a modern subject. This reading enables us to situate the work in a broader intellectual context that conceptualized voice as a potent aesthetic and political category, operative in the founding of new political and national communities.

PANEL 3

Roderick Beaton, Byron on Greece and Greeks – *was* he a Philhellene?

We take it for granted that the most famous philhellene of all time was captivated by the cause of Greece when he first travelled there in 1809, wrote poems in favour of Greek liberation, and gave his life willingly 'in Greece, and for Greece', in the words of the obituary pronounced by Spyridon Trikoupis in Missolonghi in April 1824. A closer look at what Byron actually wrote about Greece – in verse, in published notes to his poems, in letters, and in conversations written down by contemporaries – reveals that each of these statements is problematic, if not downright wrong. This paper argues that Byron never made any public statement, whether in verse or in prose, that unambiguously supported revolution by the Greeks against their Ottoman masters before the spring of 1823. And even when he did make up his mind to devote his energies, his money, and his person to the 'cause' of Greece, his often negative comments about the people for whom he risked so much shocked the friends and acquaintances who heard them and recorded them. So why *did* Byron risk so much for the freedom of a people whom he apparently despised? The answer to be proposed calls into question the received wisdom that Byron was inspired by 'love' for the 'Hellenes' whom he went to Greece to serve.

Gonda Van Steen, The United States as a Haven for Greek Revolutionary War Orphans? Myth and Reality

During the revolutionary war decade of the 1820s, American philhellenes and missionaries, in particular, transported some forty Greek orphan boys to the upper East Coast of the United States. There, the boys, most of whom were in their teenage years, were given a new home and also educational opportunities. Traditionally, the terms of 'rescue' and 'adoption' have been associated with the first stories, and subsequently with the biographies of these Greek-born boys, who became known as *τα ορφανά του Αγώνα*. Given the positive connotations of 'salvation' and 'adoption', the biographies of the orphan boys routinely 'drop the curtain' after mentioning the educational and professional achievements of handful of them. Hardly any book or article on the earliest Greeks living and working in the United States lists all the boys—or diverts from the biographical patterns and tropes. Indeed, the terms 'rescue' and 'adoption' do not invite further questioning of what has long been presented as an emergency rescue situation, in which any 'adoption' was better than no 'adoption' at all. The stories of Greek girls being 'adopted' by Americans are few and far between, but their stories shed a different light on these informal adoptions of the Greek revolutionary era. Also, the stories of the very few Greek girls restore the dimension of individuality and subjectivity that has been missing from the trite redemption narratives featuring the boys. My aim is to present not the cases of 'rescued' orphaned children but the patterns to which their stories were made to conform. I will also present some conclusions that will shed light on the discourse surrounding the (post-WWII) future of adoption of Greek-born children by American families. Thus this paper leads us to rethink the work of American philhellenes on the ground in Greece.

David Ricks, Between Teos and Sparta: the Revolution in Panagiotis Soutsos' *The Cithara* (1835)

'Fallen our Giants. . . Now a race of pigmies/Has been founded on the holy relics of the demigods'. Alexis Politis has cited these lines from Alexandros Soutsos as marking the beginning of the modern Greek tendency to self-disparagement. A complex (or confused) blend of themes reflecting much the same outlook marks his brother Panagiotis' neglected collection of lyric poems published just two years into the reign of King Otto. This volume, torn between the Anacreontic tradition of Phanariot verse and the events, heroes, and locations of the 1821 revolution, all wrapped up in borrowings from the poetry of revolutionary Europe, and prefaced by some sharp political reflections, deserves attention as an early (though artistically uneven) response to the Revolution and its 'demigods'.

PANEL 4

Artemis Leontis, Solomos's *Woman of Zakythos* and the Making of Refugees

In the past decade, as the official worldwide count of forcibly displaced people rose from 36.4 million in 2009 to 86.5 million in 2020 while support for refugee settlement programs declined, the cultural interest in stories of refugees has been growing. The same period saw a surge in “refugee literature”—writing that grapples with experiences of dislocation and the tense relationships of refugees with hosts who jealously guard their sovereignty. The generic category or “refugee literature” is new, but modern creative works on refugees go back to the time when national borders were being drawn over the previous imperial order.

This paper reads Dionysis Solomos's *Η Γυναίκα της Ζάκυθος* (The woman of Zakythos (1826-1833), about an upper class woman who brutally rejects pleas for help from the displaced women of Messolongi, as refugee literature. Solomos composed the prose work in the aftermath of the siege and fall of Messolongi during the Greek Revolution. He gave narrative voice to a monk Dionysios, who bears his name. Most readings of the unfinished prose work concentrate on the characters of the monk and the woman—especially the monk's reckoning with evil as he comes to terms with the woman's refusal to help the desperate Messongitisses and denigration of the Greek cause, and he reflects back on his own (and possibly Solomos's) implication in the dark scene of cruelty. My analysis turns attention to the women of Messolongi, who are invisible in most readings of the story, despite the central role they play. Even a recent staged theatrical adaptation by Dimos Avdeliodis (2013 Athens Festival, 2014 archaeological sites, 2020 Piraeus)—which specifically linked the women of Messolongi with present-day refugees in Greece—did not place them on the stage. It is as if the innocence of the women as victims of the violent clash between national and imperial forces speaks for itself. I work against the tendency in order to bring out the sounds, gestures, and voices of refugees. Using tools of analysis from refugee studies, I take the predicament of the refugee as the organizing question of the text that enables us to explore how refugees emerge together with the nation and Greece's national poet bears witness to the shifting, gender-structured ground of political life in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Vangelis Calotychos, Nights of 2021/2022: Regarding Dionysios Solomos' *Free Besieged* at the Bicentennial's End

Bicentennial commemorations for the Greek Revolution have taken many forms this year. As the curtain comes down on the zoom-administered spectacle, our weary minds may be forgiven for reaching for a screen-mediated metaphor: a childhood memory of the end of a day's programming on the Greek state channel, ERT. Then, Nikolaos Mantzaros' musical orchestration of Dionysios Solomos' poem *Hymn to Liberty*, known to all today as the Greek National Anthem, provided a serene and somber endnote to a long, hot summer's day. As the flag melds into a dark screen and silence tonight, at the end of 2021, soon there will dawn a centennial commemoration of a far less upbeat, though no less significant event, the Asia Minor Catastrophe of 1922. The sunset both exhilarates and debases, as Emily Dickinson observed. This co-celebrant finds himself suspended in a moment of vastly irreconcilable emotions, liberated by history in one moment and devastated by it in the next: freed by it and soon-to-be besieged by it. Partly to throw light on a certain period—then and now—or partly to kill an hour or two, let me look not to the *Hymn to Liberty*, but in the direction of Messolonghi. Let me look to Dionysios Solomos' *Free Besieged* and read it alongside Syllas Tzoumerkas' film *The Miracle of the Sargasso Sea* (2019), for a topical commentary on revolution and resistance, failure and endurance, sacrifice and agency for men, but mostly, for women.

Nikolas P. Kakkoufa, Queering the Greek Revolution

A few days before the 25th of March this year, an unexpected image went viral; it was a digital alteration of Theodoros Vryzakis' 1865 famous painting 'Ο Παλαιών Πατρών Γερμανός ευλογών την σημαία της επανάστασεως'. The picture, which was posted on Instagram by the account @lgbt_greece_, replaced part of the flag of the Mavromichalis family with the rainbow flag. This action, considered by many a blasphemy due to the manipulation of 'the holy symbol of the revolution', was received as an attack against the memory of those who fought for freedom. Such an approach to history reinforces the narrative of a complete and impenetrable archive: one that is waiting to be either discovered or celebrated as it has been established. The talk will work against this imagery of the nation by focusing on the ways in which the queer body has been registered in literary anthologies, as well as in biographical and legal texts throughout the 19th century. In doing so, it will argue that the image of the archive we currently celebrate is incomplete without the inclusion of these untold stories and that the development of desires and Greekness itself, is nothing but a series of interpretations that we must be willing to embrace.