

Original Paper

Greek Revolution and Art. The protagonists on Marble.

Illustrative and Typological Specimens

Markella-Elpida Tsihla^{1*}

¹ University of Patras, Department of Cultural Heritage Management and New Technologies, Patra, Greece

* Markella-Elpida Tsihla, University of Patras, Department of Cultural Heritage Management and New Technologies, Patra, Greece

Received: February 2, 2021

Accepted: March 12, 2021

Online Published: March 18, 2021

doi:10.22158/assc.v3n2p26

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/assc.v3n2p26>

Abstract

The Greek Revolution of 1821 was one of the most important issues in Europe of the early 19th century on a political and military level. The outbreak of the Greek Revolution was not supported by the Great Powers of the time, since as a liberation struggle it violated the terms of the Holy Alliance (1815), however it managed to prevail thanks to the support of the people of Europe as they regarded this an effort of a small nation to claim its freedom and oppose to slavery and authoritarianism. After all, we are in the time of Romanticism and this kind of struggle enjoyed the support of intellectuals, collectives, and different groups of citizens. Philhellenism was on the rise, and painters like Delacroix made a huge impact with works that made a strong impression on Europe. After the success of the Revolution, many foreign artists came to Greece, some on their own initiative as travelers and others carrying out their King's orders. Some of them were painters (both amateur and professional) that painted live portraits of the leading figures of the Revolution, leaving behind a remarkable oeuvre when seen from a historical, factual, and artistic point of view. And since at that point in Greece there could be no room for domestic artistic creation, the work of these artists is considered particularly important in terms of portraiture, history, facts, and artistic value. The most important out of the painters that were in Greece at that critical time are the Bavarians Karl Krazeisen and Peter von Hess, who painted portraits of Greek fighters and these portraits have since become the blueprints that other artists, painters, and sculptors based their work on resulting in the perpetuation of the historical memory. It is worth mentioning that in the 200 years of independence these works remain of enduring value when paying tribute and respect to the first martyrs of the Greek Struggle.

Keywords

Greek Revolution 1821, Holy Alliance, Karl Krazeisen, Peter von Hess, philhellenism, romanticism, Greek fighters, portraits, London Protocol, Eugene Delacroix, 200 years of Greek independence

1. Introduction

The Greek Revolution broke out at a critical political juncture for Europe. The Holy Alliance (1815) was founded to support the status quo in Europe, and make sure the balance between the great powers of the time was maintained. However, the Greeks revolted in 1821, the first among the Balkan countries to do so, and their success was sealed with the London Protocol of 1830 and the subsequent founding of the Kingdom of Greece (Koliopoulos, 2014).

During the Struggle, the Greeks received great support from persons in the philhellenic circles of Europe, who in the name of Greece's glorious historical past and the right to their orthodox religion as Christians oppressed by the Ottomans, supported the struggling Greeks in every possible way. This support was given on three different levels: the humanitarian, the political (military), and the economic (Huyghe, 1971).

As far as the humanitarian part is concerned, the greatest contribution is the illustrations of great historical events, the painting of portraits of the most distinguished revolutionaries, famous for their bravery, and in the depiction of historical places. These works, depending on their size and importance, appealed to the sensitivity of Europeans and led to the recruitment of great intellectuals, while the public watched in amazement as the events and the outcome of the Greek Liberation Struggle unfolded (Barth & Kehring, 1960; Muoni & Guido, 2016).

The works of Eugene Delacroix, *The massacres of Chios* (1824) (Figure 1) and *Greece in the ruins of Messolonghi* (1826) in particular, had a huge impact on people, as did the death of the British poet Lord Byron in Messolonghi in 1824.

It is a fact that many foreign artists, poets, architects, archaeologists, and designers were in Greece at that time to capture art, monuments, people, historical sites, and episodes of war. Some of them came to Greece on their own initiative, while others carried out orders from their kings, like the historical painter Peter von Hess and the landscape painter Carl Rottmann, who came to Greece by order of King Ludwig I of Bavaria.

The painter who concerned himself most with the Greek Revolution and its main figures is Peter von Hess. He is the artist who painted the *The Entry of King Othon of Greece into Nauplia* (Figure 2) in 1833 and illustrated portraits of the most important historical figures of the Revolution. His war scenes and portraits are still considered some of the most important works of this heroic period and became the basis on which other artists, especially Greek, based their work on.

Another Bavarian artist worth mentioning is Karl Krazeisen, who came to Greece in 1826 as a member of the military expeditionary force that arrived in Greece by order of King Ludwig of Bavaria. He was an amateur painter, but excellent at drawing and his works depict the lead figures of the Greek

Revolution who he knew personally and were his live models (Figure 3). His portraits are also seen as items of historical value and are considered to be one of a kind.

The work of these two artists, along with the work of artists from other countries (Germany, France, and Italy), was an important cultural legacy for Greek artists, painters, and sculptors, who made their first appearance in the artistic scene in the mid-19th century. They were their factual, typological, and illustrative prototypes and have since adorned public and private spaces, as carriers of collective memory.

2. Method

2.1 Greek Sculptors of Historical Themes and Outdoor Heroic Sculptures

The creation of monuments in public spaces in Greece as a way of expressing gratitude to those who died for freedom, but also as means of strengthening the historical memory, first appeared in the second half of the 19th century. The reason is simple. There was no potential for professional artistic illustrations nor the sufficient technical knowledge for the construction of monumental works (e.g., statues) in the newly formed Greek state. The School of Fine Arts was founded only in 1837 and it was far too soon for it to undertake large-scale projects. The only artists who mastered western art techniques were those from the Ionian Islands, who already had the necessary knowledge and experience. For example, the first statue erected in public is the bronze statue of the Ionian Commissioner Frederic Adam in a central square of Corfu, made by the sculptor Pavlos Prosalentis in 1832.

The first sculptures erected in public spaces and in central spots of the Greek capital, Athens, depict heroes of the Greek Revolution, and were used to complement in a way, the mythological figures that adorn various neoclassical buildings as well as the various cemeteries themes of the historical First Cemetery. Those that excelled in this last category are the famous marble sculptors and stonemasons, who knew the techniques in the processing of stone and marble by tradition.

There are two sculptors who marked this new kind of the so-called “heroic” sculpture, in a period when historical subjects were dominant. The first is George Fitalis (1830-1880) who crafted the marble statue of *Patriarch Gregory V* (1872, Propylaeus Of Athens) (Figure 4) and the second *Ioannis Kossos* (1822-1873), who also created a marble statue, that of the pioneer of the Revolution *Rigas Feraios* (1871, Propylaea of the University of Athens) (Figure 5). Both are considered the first martyrs for freedom and the first national martyrs by Greek historians as they were two figures with spiritual scope and influence on the Greek revolutionaries. The first was hanged at the Beautiful Gate of the Patriarchate by order of the sultan on April 10, 1821, on the outbreak of the Revolution. He is considered a national martyr and was declared a saint by the Greek Orthodox Church. Rigas Feraios was an intellectual and a revolutionary and an advocate for the principles of the Enlightenment. Because of his ideas he was arrested in Trieste and imprisoned in Belgrade where he was executed by the Turks on June 24, 1798.

The next creative project was dedicated to the fighters who took part in the Struggle and the role of artistic supervisor was taken over by the sculptors of the School of Munich. The dominant figures in this project were Konstantinos Kanaris, Georgios Karaiskakis and Theodoros Kolokotronis. The statues were crafted by George Vitalis (18380 1901), Michalis Tombros (1889-1974) and Lazaros Sohos (1862-1911), respectively.

The illustration of the Greek Revolution inspired most of the artists from the middle of the century onwards, with the painters stealing the spotlight since the repertoire that could be used in this form of art was richer. Painting depicted many historical figures, all of whom played an important role in the Revolution and became well known for their victories both at land and sea, like Athanasios Diakos, Andreas Miaoulis, General Makrygiannis, Alexandros Ypsilantis, Alexandros Mavrokordatos, and Markos Botsaris to name a few.

As a result painters such as the Ionian Dionysios Tsokos, Theodoros Vryzakis, Nikolaos Gyzis, Filippos and Georgios Margaritis, the painter of Makrygiannis' portraits and many others, chose this theme for their works to one extent or another.

3. Result

3.1 *The Portraits of Greek Fighters and Their Prototypes*

During the Revolution, which lasted for about seven years, obviously none of the fighters had the time or desire to pose in front of artists for a portrait. But this was not the case in one particular occasion. It was between 1826 and 1827 when a young officer from Bavaria, Karl Krazeisen (1796-1878) with a knack for drawing faces and acquainted with most of the Greek officers, with whom he fought battles against the Turks as a member of the Greek body managed to convince some of the most notorious captains and generals to pose for him including Theodoros Kolokotronis (**Figure 3**), Georgios Karaiskakis, Konstantinos Kanaris, Ioannis Makrygiannis, Alexandros Mavrokordatos, Andreas Miaoulis, Giakoumakis Tombazis and others, who even signed their portraits as a way of authentication. These portraits were turned into lithographs in Munich and gained international acclaim (Papanikolaou, 1999; Seidl & Wolf, 1981).

In January 1833, Prince Otto, son of the Philhellene king Ludwig I of Bavaria, arrived in Nafplio as the new king of Greece, following a decision made by the Great Powers, England, France, and Russia. He was accompanied by the successful historical painter Peter von Hess (1792-1871), who had been commissioned by Louis to paint scenes from the Greek Revolution in order to decorate the galleries of the Hofgarten Palace in Munich. These murals were destroyed by the bombing of the city during World War II. They also depict well-known faces of Greek fighters, whom the artist met in person. Hess in his work *The arrival of Otto in Nafplio* (New Gallery of Munich) (Figure 2) drew many famous people, in order to add realism and credibility to his work. These historical figures were designed by the painter separately and it became apparent that the result is not only accurate when it comes to their personal attributes and features, but he also managed to faithfully depict the ethnographic elements (costumes)

of that period (Mykoniatis, 1979).

Portraits of famous Greeks were also painted by the artists who completed the fresco of the Hall of Trophies in the palace of Otto in Athens (today's Greek Parliament) in 1840-1845. There are portraits of Alexandros Mavrokordatos, Kanaris, famous philhellenes and others, such as Markos Botsaris, which is surprising since this war hero, well known in Europe for his achievements, was killed in battle early on, in 1824 (Papanikolaou, 2007).

These images were the prototypes that inspired the corresponding works of Greek artists, painters, and sculptors, after 1850 as the demand for such pieces was high. In particular, the outdoor sculptures were the ones that dictated the guidelines that would be followed by other artists when depicting these historical figures since they were in plain view and should obey to certain principles and values, which were the idealization of the image, the emphasis on the moral personality of the depicted and the heroic character of their presence (Tsichla, 2020; 2020a).

Their display on pedestals was a requirement for a sculpture to be commissioned in order to highlight the baroque elements of the personality of those depicted. They were not only military, but also people of moral stature as freedom fighters. Without exaggeration, it was those statues that replaced the military saints of Orthodox worship, such as Saints Demetrius and George, who supposedly protected the disciples from their enemies.

It is interesting to see that this perception is inherent in foreign artists as well, because they treated this type of illustration as a requirement of that time, ie the emphasis on the national and religious elements in specific persons who marked the course of recent Greek history (Helmut & Friedel, 1979).

4. Discussion

200 years after the Greek Revolution, the historical memory brings the faces that define that heroic period back to the spotlight through the depictions created by these artists. The painting of their portraits was undertaken by foreign artists as there were not any potential artists with the knowledge and technique to achieve the levels of realism and resemblance that were a given for the western art scene of the same period. The form of art that was flourishing in Greece during the Turkish occupation was the one that followed the Byzantine standards and the places where it was mainly displayed were the sacred temples. Another form of art that was popular at the time was folk art, which flourished mostly in the countryside and adorned either mansions and cottages or was imprinted on handicrafts, costumes, and household items. Thus, European artists were the ones who took upon themselves the portrayal and visual depiction of various episodes of war. European artists based their portraits either on journalistic descriptions of the fighters and their heroic deeds, or on their personal experiences with them after they met them in person. Of course, works of the first category were products of imagination, while the latter were the result of personal knowledge and experience (Krazeisen, Hess, painters of Otto's palace, etc.). And as expected, those works of art inspired many Greek artists after the Revolution and served as prototypes for their own artistic endeavors, while presently they are historical

evidence on a personal, ethical and ethnographic level. There are many artists that came to Greece around that time but our research focuses on those among them whose work was recognized the most and in a way contributed in the creation of a national identity and awareness by the Greek people.



Figure 1. Eugène Delacroix, *The Massacre at Chios*, 1824, Oil on Canvas, 419x354cm, Louvre Museum, Paris



Figure 2. P. von Hess, *The Entry of King Othon of Greece into Nauplia*, 1853, 415x269cm, Neue Pinakothek, Munich



Figure 3. K. Krazeisen, *Theodoros Kolokotronis*, 1828, Lithography, 16.5x12.1cm



Figure 4. G.Fytalis, *Patriarch Gregory V*, 1872, Marble, Propylaea of the University of Athens, Athens



Figure 5 I. Kossos, *Rigas Feraios*, 1871, marble, Courtyard of the National Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens

References

- Barth, W., & Kehring-Korn, N. (1960). *Die Philhellenenzeit*. Muenchen.
- Friedel, H. (1979). Das Bild Griechenlands in der Muenchner Malerei, 1800-1850). In *Muenchner Landschaftsmalerei 1800-1850* (Auss. Kat.), Muenchen Staedtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, 8/3-20/5/1979.
- Huyghe, R. (1971). *Delacroix and Greece*. Athens: Issued by Ionian and Laiki Bank.
- Koliopoulos, G. (2014). *History of Modern Greece. 1797-1980*. Thessaloniki: Vaniass Publications.
- Lydakakis, S. (1981). *The Greek sculptors. Modern Greek sculpture, history, typology, dictionary of sculptures*. v. V. Athens: Publications Melissa.
- Mykoniatis, I. (1979). *The twentieth in painting. Contribution to the study of the iconography of the Struggle* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Thessaloniki: AUTH.
- Muoni, G. (2016). *Philhellenic literature in Italian Romanticism*, ed., Anda Mpoumpara, trs. Spyros Koutrakis. Thessaloniki: University Studio Press
- Papanikolaou, M. (2007) *The Wall-paintings in the House of the Hellenic Parliament*. Athens: Hellenic Parliament Foundation.
- Papanikolaou, M. (1999). *The History of Art in Greece, Painting and Sculpture of the 20th century* (Vol. I). Athens: Adam Publications.

- Papanikolaou, M. (1981). *German painters in Greece during the 19th century (1826-1843)*. Dissertation on lecturership. Athens: NKUA.
- Seidl, W. (1981). *Bayern in Griechenland. Die Geburt des griechischen Nationalstaats und die Regierung Koenig Ottos*. Muenchen: Prestel-Verlag
- Tsichla, M. E. (2020). "The Semiotics of the Imagery of the Greek War of Independence. From Delacroix to the Frieze in Otto's Palace, The Current Hellenic Parliament". *American Research Journal of Humanities & Social Science*, 3(1), 36-41.
- Tsichla, M. E. (2020a). Art and Politics: The expediencies of the artistic choices made by the newly-founded Greek State (1830). *American Research Journal of Humanities & Social Science*, 4(3), 67-71.