

THE ANCIENT GREEKS AND THE GREEKS OF THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE*

1.

The history of the Greek people from the beginning of the second millennium before Christ, when they entered the country of their destiny, till the present, is one of the most eventful in world history. Whatever one may say about the geographical position of Greece which has been a decisive factor in its history, the fact remains that the Greek people has, during the four thousand years in which it has been inhabiting the southern part of the Balkan peninsula, often been at the summit of power and glory and equally often on the brink of total destruction.

The history of the name "Hellene" is not a simple one. The application of the term "Hellenes" to cover all ancient Greeks is still an unsolved problem. It is perhaps impossible to find out how it came about that at the end of the 8th century B.C. the various Greek tribes bowed down before the name of a small tribe inhabiting the neighbourhood of Dodona in Epeirus and later that of southern Thessaly, so that in time all of them, whether Ionians, Dorians or Aeolians inhabiting either the mainland, or the islands or Asia Minor, came to be called "Hellenes".

The conquest of Greece by the Romans, the rise of the Eastern Roman Empire, and the spread of Christianity contributed to the abandonment of the term "Hellene" which thus fell into oblivion. From now on the Greeks were called Christians, Χριστιανοί, or even Romans, Ρωμαῖοι, a term which in the form Ρωμιοί has survived till the present.

It was only in the twenties of the nineteenth century, immediately after the outbreak of the Greek revolution against the four centuries of Turkish rule, that the name "Hellenes" came again into current use in quite extraordinary circumstances. This paper discusses in some detail this re-emergence of the term "Hellene" in modern Greece.

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2.

Koumas, a Greek scholar of the beginning of the 19th century, records in his voluminous work "The History of Human Events" that once around 1800 A.D. he sought out one of the most renowned klefts by the name of Nikotsaras. The klefts were, as it is known, Greek freedom fighters who during the time of the Turkish rule waged unceasing guerilla warfare in the mountainous regions against the oppressors of their country. Accordingly, to show Nikotsaras some courtesy, Koumas addressed him by the name of the mythical Achilles. But Nikotsaras is said to have answered furiously: "What rubbish are you talking about? Who is this Achilles? Did he by any chance shoot down a lot of enemies with his gun?"¹

Nikotsaras had not understood Koumas' compliment, evidently because he had never heard anything about the ancient Achilles. But Makryghiannis who lived a generation later, who had taken part in the war of liberation and later wrote his memoirs, mocks the contemporary Greek Government which had appointed an insignificant officer Achilles Theodorides as the commandant of Akrocorinth, in the following words: "You have appointed a new commandant for the fortress of Corinth; his name is Achilles, and you imagined that you had the celebrated Achilles of yore..."²

The world of Greek antiquity about the existence of which the kleft of 1800 had no idea, was therefore known to the combatant of 1821; the latter knew also of the links which bound his people fighting for their freedom with the ancient Hellenes. I am not referring to the educated politicians and scholars but to the uneducated, simple Greek people. They realize now that their name was not *Ρωμαῖοι* or *Γραικοί* but Hellenes. And what is especially characteristic of the period becomes evident when we read through the texts dealing with the War of Liberation where it is apparent that the name Hellenes is reserved only for the rebellious Greeks. It is not accidental that the above mentioned Makryghiannis, in the first chapter of his Memoirs where he writes of the pre-revolutionary period on the eve of the uprising, speaks exclusively of *Ρωμαῖοι*; but a few pages further on, describing the battle of Makrynoros where he took part in an exchange of fire for the first time, the name *Ρωμαῖοι* is completely abandoned; it is now replaced by the name Hellenes: "At Makrynoros the Hellenes were few in number but they fought bravely like true patriots and they killed many enemies... And when the other Hellenes received news of this victory, they summoned up their courage and started besieging the Turks everywhere... On the 30th of May Karaiskakis and Yiannakis Koutelidas marched with 40 Hellenes to Komboti and besieged the Turks who were in that village".³ Throughout the remaining chapters of the work only the name Hellenes is used.

There are other examples of this development. On the 4th of August the Greeks of Odessa met and established a Society with the aim of helping their compatriots who had taken up arms in their distant homeland. In the articles of the charter of the Society these fighters are called Hellenes, whilst those Greeks who were only following the struggle from a distance did not have the audacity of calling themselves Hellenes; they kept calling themselves Γραικοί. In the same way the request for aid which was drafted in their name and submitted to the Czar of Russia by the famous contemporary Greek scholar Οἰκονόμος ὁ ἐξ Οἰκονόμων describes the fighters as Hellenes but those who signed the document as: « The refugee Γραικοὶ in Odessa ».⁴

Who was more educated among the Greeks at this time than Adamantius Koraes? Who knew the Greek language and history better than him? And who was more anxious about the fate of the then subjugated Greek people and did everything he could to help them? And yet Koraes uses only one term for the contemporary Greeks, the term Γραικοί. When he uses Hellenes he means exclusively the ancient Greeks. Though Koraes was not a poet, he wrote a number of poems in order to encourage his countrymen. One of these poems runs as follows: "Through the passage of time Marathon's glory has not been forgotten, nor have the deeds of the Hellenes at Salamis; the Γραικοὶ treasure these deeds in their memory and will never forget them".⁵

The gulf between the ancient and modern Greeks could not have been more emphatically underlined. Koraes was following the usage of Western Europe and of the Greek immigrants who used to speak about Greeks, Grecs, Greci etc., but never mentioned any Hellenes.⁶ Photakos, a freedom fighter, writes in his Memoirs: "The foreign nations were not aware that even then the Hellenes still existed; when they spoke about the Hellenes, or read about them in the classics, their admiration was confined to the ancient Greeks; for the contemporary Γραικοὶ however, they felt only pity, a kind of pity which reminds one of the pity one feels for a suffering animal".⁷

Soon after the War of Independence we have its chroniclers; I am not referring to the academic historians but to the simple uneducated men who had taken active part in the war, some of whom were even commanders in it, and who now felt that those marvellous deeds, the ἔργα μεγάλα καὶ θωμαστά, *quaeque ipsi viderunt et quorum pars magna fuerunt*, should not be forgotten. These chroniclers were Kolokotronis, Photakos, Nikitaras, Kassomoulis, Makryghiannis. We can find out their education from Makryghiannis' remark: "My writing is quite awkward; for only when the war was over did I, as a General, start learning the alphabet in order to be able to write my memoirs".⁸ Indeed, his manuscript swarms with spelling mistakes. Kolokotronis again

knew just how to trace the letters of his own name. He had to dictate his memoirs.⁹ Similar is the case with the other chroniclers.

And yet these uneducated people, whenever they referred to the contemporary Greek fighters, used exclusively one term; the Hellenes, the brave Hellenes, the immortal Hellenes.¹⁰ It could be argued that these memoirs were composed or at least completed after the termination of the war when the Greeks were free and their fatherland had become a Hellenic kingdom, an *Ἑλληνικὸν βασίλειον*. Yet it would be wrong to assume that the term of the freedom fighters in these texts was an anachronism. The term was used immediately after the outbreak of the war and it spread rapidly among the warriors. Naturally, the proclamations of Hypsilantis and of the different official committees which sprang into being, spoke of Hellenes. But this is of no great importance. For the purposes of this study we must investigate the accounts of ordinary people of the time and listen to the words of the combatants themselves.

On the 28th of August 1821 the rather uneducated local authorities of Galaxidi described the battle of Vassilica in these words: "On the 23rd of this month the brave Hellenes were awaiting the Turks and when the latter appeared all the troops attacked them. Only sixty Turks succeeded in making their escape. On the 24th the Hellenes were again waiting for the enemy; the battle that ensued was bitter, Hellenic. The Hellenes captured 47 banners, many horses and countless other objects".¹¹

A private letter written at the same time describing the reception of the English General Gordon at Trikorpha says: "Prince Hypsilantis sent Greek soldiers to meet Gordon and bring him to the Greek camp. When he directed his gaze at the men who crowded around him and were wearing Albanian costume, he asked who on earth they were, and he got the answer: "They are Hellenes".¹²

All the commanders addressed their troops as Hellenes. Such commanders were Karaiskakis, Androutsos, George Lambrou, Alexios Vlachopoulos and others.¹³ Also when the Greek army or the Greek navy is mentioned it is always described as Hellenic. All the commanders accord honour to the warriors by calling them Hellenes, though none more consciously and consistently than Theodoros Kolokotronis, one of the bravest and wisest leaders of the War of Independence. His contemporaries mention explicitly that he had never read a book, as he could not read. And yet every time he wanted to give the order to attack, he is said to have called on the soldiers with his mighty voice: "Attack, ye Hellenes!" The chronicler Spiliades describes this habit of Kolokotronis in detail: "The old man always calls the Greek soldiers by their national name, which they had formerly lost and came to be called Ρω-

μαῖοι ; he addresses them in a way they can well understand (not in the language of educated people). He addresses them with the distinguished name of their ancestors which for centuries had not resounded in their ears; he reminds them that they are the descendants of heroes, and they feel proud of their origin. Now, in the whole of the Peloponnese, one does not hear any more the word Πωμαῖοι at all. Only the Turks use it, but the Greeks use the word Hellene when they address each other".¹⁴

Indeed, whenever the words of Kolokotronis are quoted by the various chroniclers, the term Hellene is confirmed. Thus, in the battle of Dervenakia he said, "Hellenes ! We were only born today, we will also die today in order to win freedom for our country and ourselves !" On the eve of this battle when the General found his soldiers feasting and dancing instead of resting, he told them: "Do you think we are going to celebrate a wedding tomorrow morning?" At the siege of Patras he said, "Attack ye Hellenes ! The Turks are fleeing !". And so on, everywhere whenever he wanted to encourage his men, he made a similar address : at Akrocorinth, at Nauplia, at Tripolitsa, at Vervena, at Trikorpha and at Chrysovitsi.¹⁵

3.

Around 1900, a lively dispute arose among the Greeks over the question of whether the real national name of the Greeks was Πωμοῖ or Hellenes. The most important men of letters of the period took part in this controversy : Kostis Palamas, the famous philologist George Hatzidakis, the well - known protagonist of the demotic language John Psycharis, and others.¹⁶ I shall mention here only the controversy between Palamas and Politis, who, though they were great personal friends, came to be opponents on this issue. Palamas, who accepted the view of Karl Krumbacher and who started the dispute, asserted that the name Hellene had sunk into oblivion among the Greek people for many centuries, and that the true name of the Greeks was Πωμοῖ. The reappearance of the name Hellene is to be attributed, according to Krumbacher, to the archaic tendencies which were current, erroneously, in liberated Greece. The people continued to refer to themselves as Πωμοῖ, even later. For this reason it would be advisable to restore this name to an honourable place, and if it were too daring to introduce Πωμοῖ as the official name of the Greeks, one should at least recognise this term as equivalent to Hellenes. On the other hand Politis endeavoured to prove that the word Hellene as a name of the Greeks, had never become extinct among the people, not even during the centuries of Turkish rule; the term, Πωμοῖ, however, was used much more frequently.

I believe that neither the great national poet nor the celebrated scholar

can be said to be absolutely right. All instances cited by Politis are of academic origin; only in the Pontus did the name perhaps retain its original meaning. In the rest of the Greek world this term was not used by anyone among the people to describe the Greeks. In this respect Palamas was right; but he was wrong in so far as he maintained that *Hellenes* is a word that had been long forgotten by the modern Greeks, and that it owed its re-emergence exclusively to the scholars of the post-revolutionary period. As against this, we have been able to prove that the name of *Hellene* had already gained currency at the beginning of the War of Liberation; the fighters appropriated it and dropped the name *Ρωμαῖοι*. How is one to explain this readiness of the people to alter its name without any reservation? What were the reasons for which the name of *Hellene* was accepted so readily by the broad masses of the people?

This development can be partly explained by the fact that, in the last fifty years that preceded the outbreak of the War of Liberation, education improved markedly in the occupied Greek lands. Everywhere in the towns and townships inhabited by the Greeks, primary and secondary schools were established, which were run by well-known teachers, mostly educated in Western Europe. This movement which was guided by the contemporary educational inspiration of the Enlightenment, was a principal cause of the resuscitation of the national consciousness of the Greeks. This was registered by Kolokotronis himself after the war. In 1838 he was invited by the headmaster of the then single secondary school in Athens, to deliver a speech on the Pnyx before the pupils. On this occasion he said among other things: "Many among the Greek scholars who have fled to the West have translated books and sent them to Greece. We owe a great debt of gratitude to these scholars; for as soon as a young man of the people had mastered the elements of reading and could read these books, he realised what kind of ancestors we had and how great were the exploits of Themistocles and Aristides and of the other Greeks; at the same time they became conscious of the terrible situation under which we were living. Thus we decided to follow the example of our forefathers in order to be happier".¹⁷

But still at that time national education was limited to a small fraction of the Greek population. Naturally the knowledge of the glory of their ancestors had somehow trickled down to the Greek people. But this could not have been the turning point. Neither was it the fact that the fighting Greeks, who, after having been asleep for four centuries, felt now as newborn, sought a new name in order to be rid of the old one which reminded them of the time of their servitude. All these factors have doubtlessly played their part, but I would like to submit that the main factor for the adoption of the term "*Hellene*"

was a different one. The main thing is that the name « Hellene » had never disappeared from the speech of the Greek people, even though it had completely lost its meaning as a name for the Greek nation as a whole, and had acquired a legendary meaning. It is really remarkable how this fact was completely overlooked in the controversy of 1900. However, in order to discuss this change in meaning, we must go back many centuries.

4.

Already in the early Byzantine period the memory of pagan Greece started disappearing from the minds of the Greek people. The efforts of Byzantine scholars to preserve classical learning did not influence the outlook of the untutored people living outside the towns. Especially after the fall of Constantinople, during the four centuries of Turkish rule, the country folk were in abject misery. There could not have been any question of a national education. On the other hand the struggle for the spreading of Christianity contributed to an early severance of any conscious connections with ancient Greece. Up to the 18th century Christianity strove to incalcate into the faithful the idea that they were not Hellenes but Christians.¹⁹ Thus the word Hellene came to assume the meaning of heathen in the speech of educated people.

However, the ancient Greek monuments were still *in situ*, visible, though most of them in ruins. In the towns, in the country, on top of hills, everywhere, stood those mighty edifices and were admired by later generations, and when the peasant ploughed his field, he often unearthed ancient tombs which, apart from bones, contained strange vases, weapons and other objects.

All these sights and discoveries exercised an influence on the imagination of the people; they imagined that the men who had lived in those places, who had built those strongholds and temples, who had piled up those enormous blocks of stone and had provided their dead with such wonderful objects, could not have resembled the later generations of humans; they must have been much bigger and stronger. Thus many legends came into being about the people who had previously lived in the Greek lands and who were said later to have died out. This legendary people were still called, most significantly, Hellenes ("Ελληνες, "Ελληνοι, 'Ελλένηδες, 'Ελληνάδες); the fables, however, that were told about them had nothing much to do with the real life of the ancient Greeks. And as ruins and tombs were to be found throughout the lands inhabited by the Greeks, legends about the Hellenes appeared in numerous places where the Greeks lived. Even today many Epirote, Macedonian, Thracian, Thessalian, Aetolian, Peloponnesian, Cretan, Dodecanese, Cypriot and other stories have been preserved which recount all kinds of tales about the time and life of the Hellenes.¹⁹

The Hellenes were of a gigantic size, fourteen feet high, as tall as poplars. They had such long arms that they were able, when they were on the island of Imbros, to reach out with their hands and get stones for their buildings from Samothrace. Their whiskers reached down to their knees; also their moustaches were so long that they had to be tied behind them.

As far as the strength of the Hellenes was concerned, they were as strong as savage animals. They could lift whole mountains into the air; they used to tear up great trees by the roots; they competed with each other by using mill stones as discuses; they picked up blocks of marble for their buildings with *one* hand. They could cross rivers in one stride; they sprang from one mountain summit to another, and when they ran with great strides or spoke to each other the mountains around them used to shake.

The womenfolk of the Hellenes, the so-called *Hellenissae*, Ἑλληγισαί, were similar to them. They could support in their lap five sheep together and carry them home; the drums of the marble columns, weighing many hundred-weights, which were scattered here and there on the ground were said to have been their spindles. They could also destroy any object made of iron as easily as if it were made of paper.

Yes, and still more. The step, from the belief in the supernatural strength and gigantic size of the Hellenes to the belief in their immortality, is not so great. Thus it was told of the Hellenes that they could never die. If despite this, they have disappeared from the earth, their disappearance is due to quite other circumstances; to the fact that the Hellenes were so tall and heavy that as they occasionally stumbled and fell headlong onto the ground they could not get up again, and so they had to die; or because one day they would fall into a crevice, which they had not noticed, and so get to the nether world; for they were so proud and so lofty in spirit that they despised the earth and always looked up to the sky.

This faith in the mythical Hellenic world lingers on even today in different parts of Greece. What must be noticed here is the fact that usually there is no reference to the *ancient Hellenes* but only to the *Hellenes*. This means in turn that at the time when these ideas were current, the Greek people did not call themselves « Hellenes » mainly because they ascribed superhuman qualities to the Hellenes, and placed them in the dawn of history. "At the time of the Hellenes when people still fought with spears" so runs the beginning of one tale. The celebrated late medieval epic « Erotokritos », which was written by Kornaros in the 17th century, begins as follows (1, 19f); "In times past when the Hellenes still held sway, whose religious faith had neither roots nor foundations..." With these words the poet attests implicitly that he did not

regard as Hellenes either himself or the contemporary Greeks, christianised since many centuries.

Today in Crete they still use the expression: "He works the whole summer long (probably at harvesting) like a Hellene" (i.e. energetically). This usage is also quite common in Arachova, a village near Delphi. A strong porter in Meleniko, a town in Macedonia, was given the nickname "Hellene". "Hellenic work" has still the connotation today in Kephallonia of a piece of work requiring a great deal of strength. In an Epirote folk song we hear: "Angeliki, Koumaina's daughter, has a strong husband: his shoulders are as broad as those of a Hellene, and his breast as of a lion".²⁰

In all parts of Greece, we find the same faith in the supernatural strength of the Hellenes, and as such a distinguished description cannot be reconciled with anything quite ordinary, as was the work of the contemporary Greeks, these expressions must have originated at a time when the word Hellenes was used exclusively to describe the mythical, gigantic in size and might, the immortal Hellenic race as it was formed by the imagination of later generations.

5.

With this mythical belief the Greek people plunged into the War of Liberation. All of a sudden the fighters heard that they also were Hellenes. Kolokotronis and the other leaders addressed them as Hellenes; from abroad came news that everyone was talking about the resurrection of the Hellenes. Did then these, erstwhile humble, submissive slaves belong to the same race as the invincible Hellenes ? Was that legendary world of immortals really connected with them ? The doughty, modest warrior had now found a myth from which he could derive support. Through all these miraculous stories about the strength and bravery of the Hellenes, his own stand derived a higher purpose : He was the heir of a great race; and he should do everything to show himself worthy of such an ancestry. Of course he could not do what the Hellenes did, or better, what he thought they did. The ideal, in order to remain ideal, must remain at an unattainable distance. The mythical model always demanded that men should do the impossible so that they could attain all that was possible and so reach the limits of impossibility.

We are in the first months of the war. On the 7th August 1821 the Turks, beleaguered in the fortress of Pylos, were forced to capitulate. According to a treaty arrived at on the spot, they were to be given safe conduct. Shortly after they were attacked and massacred by Greek troops. What was the reason for this ? As some historian informs us, a few of the Turks had addressed the Greeks as *Ρωμαῖοι* at the moment that they were passing through the Greek ranks. This had been interpreted by the latter as a great insult. « You *Ρωμαῖοι* »

sounded in their ears like « you slaves ». And it is explicitly related that those who were so addressed were, μικροὶ καὶ ἄπλοὶ Ἕλληγες, unimportant private soldiers.²¹ They had naturally no idea at all about historical Hellas, but they had appropriated the name Hellenes together with its mythical aura, and they could no longer tolerate the appellation Ρωμαῖοι.

This, I think, is the explanation why the Greeks accepted the appellation Hellenes so enthusiastically and so willingly; this is also the explanation why this appellation was exclusively used for the fighters and why there resounded in it the added connotation of courage and greatness. Many striking expressions in the contemporary descriptions were determined by this conception. When the authorities of Galaxidi wrote: "The battle that ensued was bitter, Hellenic",²² the expression *Hellenic* can only mean, in the manner of the Hellenes i.e. bravely. And when Makryghiannis calls his soldiers very often the « immortal Hellenes », ²³ it is clear that he is alluding to the legend of the immortal Hellenes.

6.

It is a fact that it was the legend of the godlike, immortal Hellenes that brought modern Greece directly into contact with the ancient. And when did the Greek people find out the historical reality of ancient Hellas ? The transition from myth to history was at first made gradually: the fighters came to know little by little, from their leaders and from their scholars, that their forefathers, even if not endowed with supernatural powers, were still the most formidable warriors of their time. Even if they were not seven yards high, and even if they could not spring from mountain summit to mountain summit, their exploits were nonetheless stupendous. They had defeated the Trojans and later took up the struggle against Xerxes and his countless troops and achieved victory.

The Τρωικὰ and the Μηδικὰ, the Trojan war and the Persian war became now the models of warlike ἀρετὴ exactly as they used to be in ancient Greece. "Till today the centuries admire the vanquishers of the Persians", writes Hypsilantis to Androutsos. In another letter also from Hypsilantis to Androutsos, whose Christian name was Odysseus, we read: "Distinguish yourself as a second Odysseus against the Trojans".²⁴ And when Kolokotronis wore his famous plumed helmet — so it is imparted to us — he would say that he was old Nestor or Agamemnon.²⁵ A scholar by the name of Martelaos had previously recounted to Kolokotronis the history of the Trojan war. He had also presented him with a text-book of Greek history, so that it could be read to him whenever he would have time for it.²⁶ Kanaris, one of the bravest freedom fighters, when he was still a youth, is said to have read ceaselessly du-

ring his sea voyages the history of Alexander the Great, and he soaked the pages of it with his tears.” In order to show how intensely the leading personalities were interested in ancient history let us cite here a somewhat humorous but at the same time quite touching story: Tsionkas is said to have been a quite uneducated man; however, he adored history; he was determined to know how all ancient places were called. What he once learned from scholars about historical personalities, their life, their warlike deeds, he would gladly repeat over and over again, of course not without gross errors; and when people tried to correct him, he used to get angry and insisted that he was right.”

Thus the Greek myth merges gradually into Greek history. What one hears now are the exploits of the Greek expedition to Troy and the Persian war. To know anything else about the ancient Hellenes was quite unnecessary during the years when the war raged. The knowledge of their warlike prowess was the only useful lesson in those critical times. Only later, when Greece became a free country, does Kolokotronis speak to the young Greeks about the wisdom of the Hellenes; I translate here a few sentences from his Pnyx speech: “On this soil lived in olden times wise men, who were able to create a superior civilisation. I cannot compare myself to these men; I cannot follow in their tracks. What knowledge the ancient Hellenes possessed you learn every day from your teachers”.”

Of all the simple freedom fighters, however, it was the great Makryghianis who succeeded in giving the most far-reaching glorification of the complete ancient Greek ἀρετή, connecting at the same time the glory of the ancient Hellenes with the glory of the modern who had won their freedom after a war which lasted seven years. After Makryghiannis had completed the annals of the war, he added a dialogue of the dead; he contrived a meeting between Napoleon and Alexander the Czar of Russia, in the nether regions. The two monarchs regret their life as they realise that the glory, which they had pursued on earth, was vain and transitory. Finally, Alexander says: “Let us go, Napoleon, to find the ancient Greeks in their underworld regions. We want to meet the old Socrates, Plato, Themistocles and the brave Leonidas, and bring them the glad tidings that their heirs have arisen; for they had been crossed off the list of nations a long time ago. The ancient Hellenes were virtuous and righteous, they lived in the light of truth, defended their freedom bravely and served their fatherland truly and selflessly. Particularly through their virtues they have enriched mankind. In transitory and vain riches they were poor but on the other hand, they were rich in imperishable glory. Their deeds were the accomplishment of their ἀρετή; for this reason God decided, in His righteousness, to allow their heirs to arise”. Alexander’s speech ends with a prayer: “Thou, Lord, will bring the dead Hellenes back to life, the heirs of the men

who have adorned mankind through their virtues. Your righteousness and Your power have willed it that Hellas should again become the name of a living nation. According to Your will this resurrection will serve as both the glorification of the Hellenic nation and of Christ's religion; for in this land there must live again righteous and virtuous men".³⁰

In these sentences we no longer read exclusively about ancient heroes, but also about Socrates and Plato. The matter under discussion is no longer exclusively bravery but also righteousness. After the end of the war political excellence gains in importance. What value Makryghiannis attributes to it for his nation, can be seen in the following address to the protagonists of the Persian war: "You brave ancestors, Miltiades, Themistocles, Aristides, Leonidas and all you other valiant men ! Be not so proud of your heroic deeds ! Alone you could not have achieved them. Your statesmen and your philosophers have helped you in this; they had knowledge and a sense of righteousness, you had courage and disinterested love of your country".³¹

Warlike excellence and political excellence: what was absent from this heritage of the ancient Hellenes? Classical art. But classical art did not remain unknown to the Greek people during the war. Makryghiannis got to know once that two ancient statues which represented, as he himself says, a woman and a prince, had been found and bought by some foreigners in order to be exported. He then decided to pay out from his modest means 350 thalers in order to be able to keep the statues. Later he presented them to Otto, the first king of Greece.³²

A second episode: The Greeks were besieging the Acropolis of Athens. One day they got to know that the beleaguered Turks were running out of lead; because of this, the latter were beginning to extract the lead used as binding between the marble blocks of the Parthenon. The besiegers then sent the Turks a lot of lead, although it was going to be used to cast bullets which were going to be fired against their own bodies. So much did they desire the old temple to be spared.³³

A third episode: Greece is free: one day in 1836 some personalities of the War of Liberation went up the Acropolis. A scholar by the name of Tertsetis (who later described this visit) was accompanying them. At a certain moment he turned to one of the old gentlemen called Zaimis in order to tell him something, but the words never left his mouth; for "Zaimis' face radiated beauty and youth, his lips were trembling and his eyes were full of light". Tertsetis left him undisturbed and only after a few days, enquired of him what were the impressions left on him by the Acropolis. "I had never imagined", answered Zaimis, "that the fortress would impress me so much. I completely forgot myself as I trod its ground. I saw the Parthenon and its marble blocks stream

on the ground. Then I reconstructed it as it must have stood in those wonderful times. The statues came to life, the reliefs on the frieze began to move, the depicted men began to speak among themselves; the visage of the goddess Athene shone in its beauty and perfection in the middle of the temple. I remembered the Panatheneia; I saw the Acropolis full of people; the priests prayed, the wagons creaked; the whole festival was before my eyes. If anyone on this earth can immerse himself in pure bliss, freed from every unpleasant sensation, then I have lived through such a blissful hour on the Acropolis".⁴

7.

The imperishable achievement of the ancient Hellenes shines forth on to the whole civilised world. In particular the culture which we call occidental can be described as hellenocentric. Just when the Greeks were struggling for their freedom and became Hellenes once more Europe was going through its neo-humanist period, as a result of which the contacts of the European classicists with the Greek world were naturally more intensive and went much deeper than those of the Greek freedom fighters. It must, however, be noted, that the contacts of the modern Greek people with the ancient Hellenes, however one-sided they may have been, and however weirdly they came about, are neither lacking in fascination nor without historical importance. It was incumbent on the new Greek generations to hallow the image of Hellas that was recaptured during the War of Liberation and to make its contact with the Hellenic world more fruitful. During the years of the War of 1821, however, the ancient Hellenes helped their descendants to recover their name and their freedom.

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