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Denys BARAU
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The armed insurrection of the Greeks in 1821 was regarded in almost all of Europe and in the United States as a cause worth championing, and as particularly significant in the political and ideological context of the Holy Alliance. It was seen as the cause of a Christian people, the heirs of classical Greece, fighting to free themselves from despotic and barbarous Muslim domination. “Greek Committees” were set up in London, Paris, Geneva and most important cities. Between 500 and 1,000 volunteers left to fight alongside the rebels: many Germans as well as Frenchmen, Italians, Englishmen and Americans.[1] Women were also actively involved, for example by taking up collections for the Greeks in the streets of Paris.[2] They were particularly motivated by a sense of solidarity with the women of Greece. But what picture of these distant sisters did they construct for themselves? It was no doubt one which they could patch together from a colourful collection of texts and images culled from widely differing literary and artistic genres, of variable reliability, some representing the personal experiences of a volunteer or a traveller, others reworking second-hand material, and almost all produced by men. Moreover, Greek women were not always regarded in the same light,

[1] On this movement see St Clair 2008 [1972]; Barau 2009; Mazurel 2013.

[2] On the role of women in these activities, see Bouyssy 2003.

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depending on whether they were depicted grappling with the war or in their ordinary life. As we shall see, when women were involved in the struggle, the Philhellenes[3] found them quite similar to allegorical images of Greece, either as a devastated mother or a triumphant warrior.[4] On the other hand, the Philhellenes were disturbed by the subordinate position to which Greek women were assigned in their everyday life.

Favoured victims

In order to move "women's hearts" an *Appel aux Mulhousois* [appeal to the residents of Mulhouse in eastern France] painted the following picture of the suffering of Greek women:

> Remember that at the moment there is no mother in Greece who does not have a husband, or a son, on the battlefield; not one who does not weep for a daughter whose outraged virtue is groaning in enslavement to a Muslim master. Remember that countless Greek mothers and wives are wandering in the forests, surrounded by their children who are crying loudly for bread.[5]

In this war that actually started as an insurrection, no distinctions were made between the civilian population and the combatants, and no place was entirely protected. Excesses were most likely when a besieged city fell, but could also occur in the villages through which the Turks passed. The most emblematic example of such excesses was that of the reprisals against the whole population of the prosperous island of Chios, which had stood aside from the uprising for a long time, and therefore believed it was protected.[6]

On 26 April 1826, *Le Constitutionnel* reported, on the basis of a letter from Corfu, that the besiegers of Missolonghi, exasperated by its resistance, had, in full view, impaled two priests, five women and

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[3] The term Philhellene is used in both French and English of supporters of the cause of Greek independence (Tr.)

[4] Efstathiadou 2011.

[5] *Appel aux mulhousois pour une souscription en faveur des Grecs*. 1825. Mulhouse: Imprimerie de J. Rissler. (Pamphlet, Bibliothèque nationale de France, J 6332).

[6] On the shifting course of the war, Clogg 1992 and Delorme 2013 may be consulted. The *Memoires* of General Macriyannis (Paris, Albin Michel, 1986) are also an important Greek source of evidence.

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three children. The victims of this deliberate *mise en scène*, which was designed to terrify those who saw it, corresponded to the *topos* of "innocent victim" of the violence of war: "women, children, the elderly" (or, here, priests), the three categories of people who needed protection. For the final Sortie from Missolonghi, for example, the women and children were placed in the middle of the fighters. It had been possible to shelter others under British protection in the nearby Ionian islands. These removals, however, came close to simple abandonment: by shedding "useless mouths" the pressure of hunger was reduced, and sometimes the fugitives were reduced to wandering starving around a devastated countryside.

Actual violence can only be discerned in the distance in Delacroix's painting *Scenes from the Massacre at Chios* (1824). The violence which the French volunteer Philippe Jourdain saw committed on the island was particularly directed towards women.[7] Women are the dominant feature of the foreground of Delacroix's picture, which is subtitled *"Greek families awaiting death or slavery"* and depicts a moment of suspense before a triage similar to that described by a Greek merchant from Marseille:

> Mr Sagrandy had his throat slit in front of his whole family, his three-day-old child was thrown into a ditch and his wife and two sons taken into slavery in the island's fortress.[8]

Many women, like this wife, were spared from having their throat cut or being drowned, only to meet a fate "even worse than death".[9] A young woman, especially if she were pretty, could be sold for a good price or given to some important person for his pleasure. Delacroix suggests that rape is imminent by painting the naked body of a woman tied to the horse of a Turkish horseman. For the victims, the dishonour of prostitution would be added to the humiliation of servitude and possibly to the remorse of apostasy. However, forced conversion to Islam seems to have been mostly the fate of children (who were themselves not immune from sexual violence).

[7] Jourdain 1828: I, 55-64; Pouqueville 1825: III, 502-507.
[8] Bibliothèque de Genève, Ms 3228, letter from M. Petrococchino to T.J. Borély, 14 May 1826.
[9] Blaquière 1823: 12.

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Europe-wide opinion was disturbed by this enslavement, especially when it was very extensive, as at Chios or Missolonghi, with thousands of victims.[10] However, one of the accounts published by J. F. T. Ginouvier suggests that this was, on a smaller scale, probably a permanent danger.[11] He also describes the different stages of enslavement: capture, waiting in chains for departure, the sordid conditions of the crossing to Egypt, sale to one trader after another, captives being displayed naked in the marketplace.[12]

Behind this range of sufferings, to which women in particular were subjected, Europeans saw a Turkish intention to exterminate the Greek population. These atrocities gave a very forceful impetus to all the arguments which the Philhellenes advanced for their cause: that it was a revolt against oppression, involved a defence of civilization and religion, and was a matter of simple human solidarity.

Metamorphosis into heroines

To the Philhellenes the Greek women were not solely objects of compassion; not only did they suffer grievously from the war, but by taking an active part in it, they fuelled the other emotional impetus for the mobilization of support: admiration for heroism.

In besieged Missolonghi, daily life itself involved a certain amount of heroism. In going to fetch water, the women were exposed to enemy fire.[13] They sometimes mocked this waste of ammunition on “feeble creatures”.[14] They could also support the combatants more directly: the Greek women of Tripolitsa passed information to their compatriots who were besieging the town.[15] Young girls provisioned the soldiers. Women’s physical strength had indeed been utilized earlier, in the Souliotes’ war against Ali Pasha at the beginning of the century. Before tending to the wounded,

[10] William St Clair gives a figure of 41,000 for Chios and 3,000-4,000 for Missolonghi (St Clair : 80-81 and 242).

[11] The authenticity of the ten accounts he attributes to women from different parts of Greece is uncertain, but at least they indicate what the Philhellenes found credible.

[12] Ginouvier 1827: 119-124.

[13] Fabre 1827: 122.

[14] Villeneuve 1827: 204.

[15] Raybaud 1824-1825: 416-417.

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they transported them on their shoulders. When a Turkish weapons store was looted, women acted as porters.[16] Elsewhere there were instances of women helping guerrilla fighters, lighting fires to extend an ambush[17] or throwing boulders and tree-trunks down on to the enemy.[18]

Not all women confined themselves to these auxiliary roles. Some took the initiative to steal horses from the Turks and managed to keep them, despite men "claiming that they had encroached upon their rights".[19] On several occasions, they acted as fully-fledged combatants. During the last Sortie from Missolonghi, some women were carrying arms; during the siege others had replaced their wounded husbands.[20] At Souli, their desire to join the fighting even took the form of an indignant demand. The men, determined to resist to the end in the face of an overwhelming army, had decided to sacrifice the women before they themselves were killed. The women were horrified by this and insisted that, because of their past contribution to the fighting, they should die carrying arms "as Christians […] not like miserable cattle".[21]

A popular song described a Souliote woman fighting "just like a man […] cartridges in her apron, sword in one hand, rifle in the other, and marching ahead of everyone".[22] She had, however, needed men's approval. Other depictions show women taking over on their own initiative: a sister grabbing the pistol of her exhausted brother to shoot a Turkish horseman who was threatening them, and then hoisting the boy on to the horse to take him to safety;[23] a woman known as "the beautiful Chaïdo" taking the place of her husband who had been killed at her side, then leading his companions to a victory.[24] In a more symbolic gesture, the women of a village near

[16] Pouqueville 1825: I, 207-210.
[17] Carrel 1829: 174.
[18] Pouqueville 1825: IV, 14; Carrel 1829: 195.
[19] Voutier 1826 : 136-137.
[20] *Le Constitutionnel*, 14 May 1826.
[21] Pouqueville 1825: IV, 21-23.
[22] Fauriel 1824-1825 : I, 287.
[23] Bibliothèque de Genève, Ms sup 4249, letter from F. Marcet to his mother, 12 May 1826.
[24] Voutier 1823: 217-218.

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Monemvasia shamed for their cowardice the women of Mani, who had not prevented the Turks killing their menfolk; by dragging an old cannon and its cannonballs into their camp they highlighted ways women could participate in the struggle.[25]

In Souli, 400 women wanted to fight, so as to defend their honour themselves and not leave it to men to protect them from a fate held to be worse than death. In 1803, in analogous circumstances during the Souliote War, 60 women had thrown their children off a cliff before dancing in a circle as they too hurled themselves over it.[26] This "Dance of Zalongo" inspired poets and painters (Lamartine, Ary Scheffer), and other comparable actions also echoed it, such as the spectacular landmine explosion by which the women, children and old men left in Missolonghi killed themselves. As it also killed a number of the attackers, this action was celebrated as a moral victory. In a similar way, but a different register, Pouqueville praises a female servant who chose to die as a martyr rather than renounce her faith.[27] But there was no redemption, either religious or political, for the woman depicted by François-Émile de Lansac in his painting *An Episode in the Siege of Missolonghi*.[28] She is seated with the corpse of her husband at her feet, holding the child whom she has just killed and turning the dagger against herself. No visible enemy threatens her, but the ruined and desolate landscape and the black clouds carry the colours of despair. Was she purely and simply a victim, rather than a heroine?

No doubt a creation of the artist's imagination, this despairing woman has no name; nor do the women in the stories collected by Ginouvier. Pouqueville's record of the names of some of the women who blew themselves up shortly after the Dance of Zalongo is an exception.[29] And even that was only a footnote in a large book, much less visible than the men's names, which came to be inscribed around the edges of a series of commemorative plates: Botzaris,

[25] Pouqueville 1825: II, 572-573.
[26] Fauriel 1824-1825: I, 277-278.
[27] Pouqueville 1825: II, 381-383
[28] Housed in the Missolonghi Museum of History and Art; reproduced in Constans 1996.
[29] Pouqueville 1825: I, 232-233.

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Canaris, Miaoulis.[30] Philhellene popular images, which, to a greater extent than fine art, preferred the heroic side of the conflict, did however include two women. One, Laskarina Bouboulina, was the subject of several lithograph portraits. The other, Manto Mavrogenous, only appeared on the label of a liqueur bottle, but Ginouvier wrote a short novel about her. Both appear in accounts by the foreign volunteers, one of whom, Maxime Raybaud, portrayed them jointly as a couple of very contrasting women. This antithetical pairing, supported to some extent by other testimonies, is quite significant of the Philhellenes' idea of heroism in women.[31]

On seeing a portrait of herself in the guise of Joan of Arc, Bouboulina is said to have burst out laughing.[32] Certainly, appearances were against the comparison: the Frenchman Olivier Voutier might have found her still beautiful at the age of 45,[33] but the Englishman William Humphreys saw her as "a vulgar masculine woman".[34] Opinion was particularly divided about her behaviour. She was the rich widow of a ship owner killed by the Turks and had placed her vessels at the service of the rebels. Voutier preferred only to recount this patriotic gesture; many others described her running to get her share of the booty at the point when the surrender of Tripolitsa was being negotiated, and even entering the city "protected by her women's clothing" to sell her protection, at an extortionate price, to the richest inhabitants.[35] Moreover, her alliance with Kolokotronis, one of the principal leaders of the peninsular Klephts, meant she was involved in the struggle between Greek factions, and indeed, in the eyes of a number of the Philhellenes, on the wrong side. In short, while some continued to see in her the heroine depicted by the Parisian images, many blamed her, in particular, for taking part in a range of activities which tarnished the Greek cause.

There was, on the contrary, no division of opinion about Mavrogenous: those who met her, or who spoke about her, celebrated her

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[30] Botzaris was the chieftain of the war in Epirus and was killed in action in 1823. Canaris was the most famous of the captains of the fireships. Miaoulis was the admiral of the Greek fleet.

[31] Raybaud 1824-1825: I, 450-452.

[32] Persat 1910: 79-80.

[33] Voutier 1823: 60.

[34] Gennadius Library (Athens) Mss 238, p. 115.

[35] Raybaud 1824-1825: 457.

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good qualities, sometimes to the point of exaggeration.[36] Young and beautiful, a descendant of princes, with a regal bearing, she had defended Mykonos at the head of a militia raised at her expense, and then led her forces to support the rebels in Euboea, which she hoped to turn into "a safe place of refuge for women and children".[37] She was generous with the defeated, sometimes comforting them, and had received an "excellent education" of a kind that was, on the whole, not available to Greek women. She was praised above all for her "natural eloquence which [arose from] inspiration" and expressed extreme patriotic enthusiasm. Having promised her hand in marriage as the "reward for the victor against the Turks",[38] she is said to have contrasted the flirtatious frivolity of "Parisian ladies" with her way of utilizing her seductive powers, requiring from men "as the price of [their] enchantment, the most wholehearted zeal for the independence of the fatherland".[39] Whether or not she actually said this, the attribution of value to a woman for what she causes men to do, not what she does herself, resonates with the strange denial with which Raybaud begins his praise: "[She] is not, as has been asserted, a female warrior who trades physical blows with the most intrepid of Turks". It seems that, even as he lauded her unreservedly as a heroine, he was keen to endow her heroism with specifically feminine characteristics.

Inferior status

Contrasting the "greediness" of Bouboulina with the "nobility of soul" of Mavrogenous was also a way to counterbalance the "loss of illusions" for a writer particularly susceptible to the oscillation between disappointment and enthusiasm common to the Philhellenes. But most of them failed to find anything to redeem their

[36] The figure of Mavrogenous, as it was shaped by Raybaud and Villeneuve, who had met her, and by Ginouvier, who embroidered upon what Pouqueville said of her, could usefully be compared with certain heroic women who were the fruit of the Romantics' imagination, such as Laurence de Cinq-Cygne in Balzac's *Une Ténébreuse Affaire* (1841).

[37] Blaquière 1825: II, 134.

[38] Pouqueville 1825: II, 505.

[39] Ginouvier 1825: 196. This letter, appended to the novel, is of doubtful authenticity.

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dismay at what they saw of Greek women going about their everyday lives.

Firstly, the foreigners found that women were too rarely to be seen. The Italian traveller Giuseppi Pecchio complained that they were "invisible, because the men would not allow them to appear".[40] Sometimes it was the foreigner who was subject to prohibitions, required to "avoid even the slightest sign of friendliness".[41] The tradition of hospitality obliged women to show themselves to serve refreshments. But at all other times they had to keep away, running to hide behind a curtain when a visitor arrived,[42] or shutting themselves away "at the back of the home", like the four daughters at whose beauty Raybaud and his companions could not help gazing, when lodged by the girls' mother.[43] But even when they could only catch a glimpse of them, the Philhellenes did not fail to remark whether the women were beautiful, or to make comparisons between the women of one region and those of another, sometimes deploring their unbecoming costumes, which they nevertheless took pains to describe in detail.

Beyond these appearances, the condition of women varied from region to region. Authors did not always arrive at the same conclusions: in Hydra, an English traveller, James Emerson, thought women's situation was more free, while Raybaud and Byron's doctor, Julius Millingen, thought it more constrained.[44] But the general impression was that it was markedly inferior. The Prussian volunteer Bollmann spoke of slavery, as he compared the idleness of the men to women's work: spinning, weaving and even hard labour.[45] The American doctor Samuel Howe saw one woman "carrying a load of wood on her back which [he himself] could not carry".[46] They were "used to it from childhood".[47] In fact their education, which was

[40] Emerson & Pecchio, vol. II 1826: 9.
[41] Bollmann 1823: 5.
[42] Millingen 1831: 107.
[43] Raybaud 1824-1825: I, 370-371.
[44] Emerson & Pecchio, vol. I 1826: 332; Millingen 1831: 110; Raybaud 1824-1825: II, 54.
[45] Bollmann 1823: 19.
[46] Howe 1907: 75.
[47] Pouqueville 1825: I, 176.

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limited to learning household tasks and, for the poorer classes, to "the hardest labour",[48] ensured their inferior status. It kept them in ignorance, a prey to superstitions of all kinds, in particular about their future husband, since "the unceasing occupation of the parents was to procure, without delay, a husband for their daughter". The result was arranged marriages, with no concern about differences of age, which confirmed the daughter's subservient state and simply led "the bride from one prison to another".[49]

Their situation also varied according to social class, about which the Philhellenes had rather vague ideas. Those who, like the Genevan traveller Franck Marcet, were received into Europeanized circles, were able there to meet women who dined with the guests, joined in the conversation, and indeed, Dr Howe thought, behaved "somewhat like rational beings".[50] In a less urban, island setting, the French volunteer Jourdain considered that the "ladies of Sifnos", gracious, pert and generous, would have been the most attractive in the world "if they had received the same education as our Parisian ladies".[51]

In this depiction, it is difficult to disentangle the effects of a Philhellene gaze from those of a gaze which is male and western. On the one hand, the state of submission and ignorance in which they saw Greek men keeping women seemed contrary to the struggle for liberty and civilization which they had come to support. The explanations which could be advanced for this – Turkish influence, the traditions of Ancient Greece, jealousy as a trait of the national character – only exacerbated a disquiet which, when added to many other disconcerting or shocking aspects of this war, contributed to a general climate of disappointment. On the other hand, they might find themselves personally frustrated by the concealment and evasiveness of beautiful women, and by the fact that they did not conform to the model of "cultivated and refined ladies"[52] current in their own countries. Eugène de Villeneuve's romance – he married, having

[48] Ginouvier 1827: 43.
[49] Millingen 1831: 109-110.
[50] Howe 1907: 75.
[51] Jourdain 1828: II, 103.
[52] Howe 1907-1909: 319.

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lost and then miraculously found her again, the young Greek woman who had nursed him – was altogether exceptional, so much so that it seems more like a fantasy than a real event.

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This article does not purport to describe how Philhellene women pictured their Greek sisters, but merely what they *could have* read or seen about them in literature and images that were not specifically intended for them. As mentioned above, all we have done is reconstruct a picture on the basis of a very heterogenous corpus of sources, whose relation to reality is hard to estimate. There is a very clear gap between the sources utilized for each of the two situations discussed above. On the everyday life of women, the Philhellenes were reporting what they had seen or experienced themselves, though even this might involve some distortion. Only Philippe Jourdain actually witnessed violence inflicted on women, and no Philhellene had seen them in battle. Almost everything written about women in the war came at second hand, from sources that were mostly Greek, though sometimes from foreign consuls, whose reports could not always be verified, and were often partisan, with a strong risk of exaggeration to fit into the Philhellenes' expectations. However, witnesses of atrocities committed by the Greeks against the Turks did not cover up their great cruelty;[53] this gives some idea of the extreme violence of this war, and renders the barbarity attributed to the other side more credible. It should also be noted that in most of these writings there are only brief glimpses of women: the rather more systematic discussion by Dr Millingen is an exception. As for Ginouvier's books specifically devoted to women, their status is all the more problematic because their author is hard to identify.[54] The marginalization of women can almost certainly be accounted for by the fact that the texts were written by men, who were mostly interested in the development of the war and the major stakes involved in this cause: liberty, civilization, Christianity, humanity. When they did notice

[53] I have provided some examples in Barau 2009: 605 -610.

[54] All that we know of him otherwise is some writing on prison reform and commercial law, and an epistolary novel.

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women, they did so through men's eyes, and against the yardstick of an enterprise that, in this area as in many others, proved full of misunderstandings, setbacks and disappointments: to bring back into the sphere of the West a country which had effectively been orientalized by centuries of Ottoman occupation. If the sources were available, it would be valuable to contrast the results of a socio-historical study of the Greek situation as it actually was with the Philhellene perception: women as markedly subordinate, and particularly subject to much suffering resulting from the war, yet also capable of sharing in the heroics of the struggle, without ever, except in the rarest of cases, attaining a position equivalent to that of men.

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