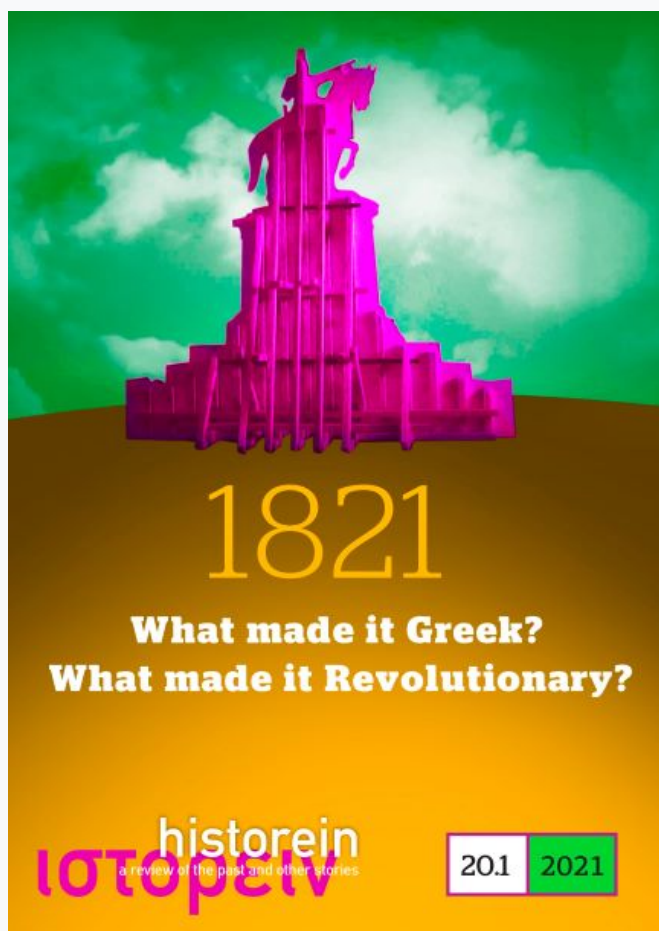


Historein

Vol 20, No 1 (2021)

1821: What Made it Greek? What Made it Revolutionary?



French Involvement in the Greek War of Independence

Anna Karakatsouli

doi: [10.12681/historein.25062](https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.25062)

Copyright © 2022, Anna Karakatsouli



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

Karakatsouli, A. (2022). French Involvement in the Greek War of Independence. *Historein*, 20(1).
<https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.25062>



French Involvement in the Greek War of Independence

Anna Karakatsouli

doi: 10.12681/historein.25062

To cite this article:

Karakatsouli, Anna. 2021. "French Involvement in the Greek War of Independence". *Historein* 20 (1). <https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.25062>.

French Involvement in the Greek War of Independence

Anna Karakatsouli

University of Athens

During the wars of the eighteenth century France lost most of its territories and trading posts overseas. At the close of the Napoleonic Wars, Britain restored a small number of them, notably Guadeloupe and Martinique in the West Indies, French Guiana on the coast of South America, various trading posts in Senegal, Île Bourbon (Réunion) in the Indian Ocean, and France's tiny Indian possessions. Britain eventually annexed Saint Lucia, Tobago, the Seychelles and Île de France (Mauritius) while the loss of New France was never remedied. Louisiana had been sold to the United States. By the time the Greek War of Independence was declared, the Restoration had negated all the gains from Napoleon's European expansion and France could hardly be considered an imperial power.¹

However, compared to the colonial clauses of the 1763 Paris peace treaty after the Seven Years' War, the colonial provisions of the Congress of Vienna can be considered generous. France began to capitalise on that as soon as 1823, year of its short and victorious campaign against the Spanish liberals. From that point onwards, the country gradually regained a position of power. It turned its focus to the Levant and sought to restore equilibrium in European politics, always careful to avoid any move that could be interpreted as a sign of returning to an aggressive foreign policy. As it has been asserted, "the French Empire did not develop in a steady linear progression, but passed through a number of distinct stages in its history ... in which each stage was marked by a clear setback, a defeat or loss, which, temporarily at least, put a brake on the process of expansion".² This article argues that France displayed extraordinary resilience in world politics and managed to make major inroads into peripheral regions, such as Greece during the revolt. Capitalising on its sixteenth-century old economic interests in the Ottoman Empire and its privileged position as a major trading partner with the Ottomans, France achieved considerable influence in the Mediterranean and an important degree of informal power. France built a complex nexus of multiple and often contradictory political interventions, financial speculations, personal career plans and utopian projects as the failing Ottoman Empire offered fertile ground for all sorts of ambitions. In the turmoil of the Greek War of Independence and, later, within the fragile new independent Greek state, French projects of expansion were deployed, covertly at first. This policy culminated

in the Morea Expedition between 1828 and 1833 with the declared purpose of liberating the area from the Turkish-Egyptian forces. It would be the last drill before the large-scale military invasion of Algiers initiated by King Charles X in 1830 to remedy his wide unpopularity. Moreover, the Algiers expedition offered some of the French officers serving in Greece as philhellenes the opportunity to be reinstated at last to the ranks of the French Army, thus putting an end to a decade-long wandering in foreign service.³

We propose to examine here the various aspects of the French involvement in the Greek War of Independence at its three main levels of engagement (personal, institutional, economic) and to place it within what has been called the “French imperial meridian”. As David Todd, who coined the term in his homonymous article, has stated, “France remained [in the years 1814 to 1870] a military, economic, scientific, and cultural super-power, who deployed its influence on a global scale, and not always unsuccessfully.”⁴ The reduction in the territorial extent of French colonial possessions between 1800 and 1880 is a decisive factor that, according to Todd, led historians to neglect the informal dimension of empire in the French case (unlike the attention it attracted in the British one).⁵

According to the *Trésor de la langue française*, the noun “philhellène” was introduced to the French language in 1823 to designate Europeans who brought moral, material and military aid to the Greeks fighting against the Turks from 1821 to 1829.⁶ By 1825 the French government had enacted policies that favoured the Greek cause. France became manifestly active in the region after the signing of the Treaty of London in July 1827 when the United Kingdom, France and Russia agreed to call for a ceasefire. However, semiofficial French projects and individual projections can be traced well before that date and these are going to be discussed here.⁷ This article reflects principally on the works of William St Clair, who set the broader framework of foreign intervention in the Greek War of Independence; Jean Dimakis, who studied French philhellenism in depth; and Despina Themeli-Katifori, who offered a valuable critical study of the French involvement in Greek affairs during Kapodistrias’ rule.⁸

French interest in what was happening in Greece was intense, extending over a wide range of fields – political and social, financial and cultural – and crossing social strata. The painting of the “Massacre of Chios” presented at the Salon of 1824 by Eugène Delacroix that divided the critics for its Romantic violent pathos and intensity was nevertheless bought by Charles X for the Royal Museum for 6,000 francs.⁹ The French attraction to Greece also proved to be a lasting one: it was still lively when the independence of the Kingdom of Greece was proclaimed in 1830, representing a casual theme in the Parisian social scene, as attested by the *Memoirs* of Alexandre Dumas:

Now, the choice of a suitable costume was a very serious business to an author of twenty-six, who had already begun to possess the reputation, whether erroneously or not, of being quite an Othello. I had made the acquaintance at Firmin’s balls – I do not know why I have never yet spoken of those delightful réunions of his, where one

was sure to find, without powder or paint, the youngest and prettiest faces in Paris – of a clever young fellow, a pupil of M. Ingres, and who has since become the celebrated antiquary Amaury Duval. He had just returned from Greece, where he had taken part in an artistic expedition that had been sent to the land of Pericles, after the battle of Navarino. He appeared at one of Firmin's balls in the disguise of a Pallikar. The Pallikar was all the rage then; Byron had introduced it, and all our pretty women had collected funds for that mother of lovely women, the land of Greece ... We decided that the dress of an Albanian would suit me exactly; and Amaury accordingly designed me a costume. Now, the turban was the most striking part of this costume, and, being rolled two or three times round the head, it passed round the neck and was tied at the point it started from. But the costume had to be made, and, as it was covered with embroidery and braid and lace, it took a fortnight to make. At last, the evening arrived, and the dress was finished by eleven o'clock; by midnight I entered Madame Lafond's house. This costume of mine was then almost unknown in France: the jacket and leggings were of red velvet, embroidered with gold; the *fustanelle*, as white as snow, had not been robbed of a single inch of its proper width; the dazzling silver arms were marvellously wrought, and, above all, the originality of the head-dress drew all eyes upon me.¹⁰

The Greek Revolution occurred as the reactionary turn of the Richelieu government after the assassination of the Duke of Berry in February 1820 had led to the polarisation into liberal and royalist groups. Already during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the turn to the humanistic tradition of ancient Greece as “a cultural ideal of fundamental significance for the identity of European, or of Western modernity”, had laid the groundwork among philosophers and intellectuals for justifying philhellenism.¹¹ In early 1820s France, philhellenism moved from the literary to the political sphere and became a rallying cry for the opposition, both liberal and royalist, a timely occasion of criticism against the government for its indifference and inaction towards the suffering Greeks.¹² The flood of books of verse in favour of the Greeks was matched by the publication of numerous pamphlets in the same style. The philhellenic press flourished globally but the French production was prodigious. As St Clair stated, 30 pamphlets appeared in France during the first two years of the war alone. Thoughtful political tracts, fabricated appeals said to come from Greece itself or grandiloquent manifestoes, they intended to demonstrate the radically different nature of the Greek Revolution from all other contemporary liberal movements.¹³ They also put pressure on the French government to change its policy of support for Metternich's doctrine of legitimate sovereignty.¹⁴ These public interventions were directly relevant to current affairs in France. François-René Chateaubriand's famous pro-Greek pamphlet *Note sur la Grèce, ou Appel en faveur de la cause sacrée des Grecs*, was only published in 1825 only after its author had been suddenly dismissed of his ministerial post in June 1824.¹⁵ From then on, Chateaubriand, himself an ultra-royalist, used his public image as an acclaimed author and his political friends in the press to become the leading figure of the opposition to the Villèle government.

A good deal of the public discussion was also about the French national interest –

the chance of restoring French influence in the Levant, the danger of allowing the Russians to assume the leadership of the Greeks, and the possibility of new markets for French goods. Perhaps the most original of the pamphleteers was Abbé de Pradt, a former bishop and a widely read, albeit controversial, analyst of international affairs, who published a steady stream of highly popular volumes on current issues (including six on the Greek Revolution alone). Dominique-Georges-Frédéric Dufour de Pradt (1759–1837) placed the conflict between Ottomans and Greeks in an uncommon colonial context and drew a daring parallel between the liberal revolutions in Latin America against Spain and the Greek War of Independence against the Sublime Porte. He treated them both as anticolonial struggles against obscurantist despots and considered the liberation of the colonies a “natural fact”, an almost mechanical result of natural growth that rendered the colonised more vigorous and more successful than the colonisers, namely Spain and the Ottoman Empire. The sultan’s legitimacy for the Greeks, in de Pradt’s words, would thus match “the legitimacy enjoyed by a slave captain carrying black slaves over his captives”.¹⁶ Moreover, an independent Greece would be indispensable to the stability and prosperity of the “European system”. It could block the advance of England and Russia into the Mediterranean and, as a European people in culture and customs, Greeks would soon develop thriving commercial relations with the European states, which the Ottomans were unable to do.¹⁷

The volunteers

During the Second Restoration, from Napoleon’s Hundred Days to 1830, France adopted constitutional monarchy rather reluctantly. Especially after February 1820, a series of reactionary measures confirmed the absolutist preferences of the Ultras. In October of the same year a new electoral law provided the highest taxed citizens with a double vote, leaving no chance for the liberals to legally accede to power. The Villèle government that resulted from the elections restricted the liberty of the press and encouraged church control over education. Excluded from the parliament, the liberal opposition found refuge in secret associations, including masonic lodges, that attracted old revolutionaries, Napoleon’s ex-officers and students. Secret societies flourished in France, such as the Union, the Friends of the Truth, the French Bazaar, to name a few.¹⁸ General La Fayette played an important role in the coordination of the Charbonnerie française into common action while special envoys, some of whom would soon be active in Greece, roamed the country to raise support for their cause. In these times of ambiguity and uncertainty both sides denounced the conspiracies of the opponent in an atmosphere of mutual fear and mistrust. Genuine conspiracy plots but also an intense conspiracy anxiety dominated the political arena. French philhellenes who joined the Greek cause in most cases stemmed from that specific environment of disaffected liberals; Colonel Charles Fabvier can well be designated as an

exemplary representative of this group.

The war in Greece offered a well-timed outlet to French liberals, conspirators against the Restoration and ex-officers of the Napoleonic Army on half-pay and under severe police surveillance (the three categories generally overlapped). As there was no room in Restoration France for ambitious Napoleonic career officers, these headed for foreign battlefields. Hervé Mazurel, in his PhD thesis on Western philhellenes, identified 118 French volunteers in Greece, the second most important ethnic group after the Germans (who numbered an estimated 133).¹⁹ The majority of the professional fighters who came to Greece, regardless of their nationality, wanted to continue their military careers, which had been brought to an abrupt and precocious halt by the fall of the empire.²⁰ It becomes clear from their memoirs and travel accounts that the successive liberal revolutionary fronts either in the Mediterranean or in Latin America were equally attractive options for them. Maurice Persat, a former Napoleonic officer, describes his dilemma bluntly upon returning to Europe after having served at Bolivar's side in Trinidad: "I had to reach a decision since I had not enough revenues to live idle and without employment. What should I do? Two revolutions were then in progress and offered me the possibility to pursue a decent political and military career. I knew Spain well, but Naples was new to me and I opted for it."²¹ Persat later moved to Greece but stayed only for a short period of time. He left bitterly disappointed in 1822, taking with him a young Turkish girl whom he married a few years later.

Maxime Raybaud was another French volunteer, one of the handful of officers picked up by Mavrokordatos at Marseilles in July 1821. Raybaud is quite typical of many of the philhellenes of the first period. He had joined the French army in 1813 but had not seen any active service. In 1820 he was forced to resign from the army and one of his reasons for going to Greece was to look for employment. He witnessed the fall of Tripolitsa in October 1821 and had been in Mavrokordatos' staff at Peta. On his return to France he wrote a book about his experience in Greece that offered a sober, thoughtful and accurate account, "one of the best books about the Greek Revolution", according to St Clair.²² It includes however this revealing quote describing his meeting with fellow philhellenes: "At last, I found myself surrounded by civilised men."²³

The case of numerous French ex-officers who responded instead to the call of Mehmet Ali for Western trainers for his army further supports the argument that ideology played little part in the life choices of the volunteers. Besides, the volunteers spanned the political spectrum, from Bonapartists and Orleanists to royalists and other disparate sections of Restoration society.²⁴ Even Fabvier, perhaps the most prominent figure among French officers in Greece, a veteran of the Napoleonic Wars, a staunch conspirator for the liberal cause and for long one of the leaders of the growing band of escaped revolutionaries and political refugees wanted by the French police, joined the conservative group when elected to the French National Assembly in 1848. Fabvier first came to Greece in 1823 under a false identity (Borel or Morel), with plans to establish an agricultural and industrial colony. The Greek government would give him up to 1,000 acres, which Fabvier would

begin to pay for in January 1826. The ambitious plan included the drafting of a development plan for Greek economy, the introduction of modern cultivation techniques, the construction of factories, shipyards and fortifications for the cities and the creation of a military academy. In her solidly documented study on the French interest in Greece, Themeli-Katifori suggests that even at that early stage Fabvier may have been acting on behalf of French financial circles.²⁵ He returned to Greece in 1825, this time to advocate the need for a regular Greek army against the prevailing guerrilla warfare of the captains. His case was finally successful, and he was appointed to the command of the Greek regular forces in July 1825. When Fabvier assumed this task, another French military figure appeared in Nafplio. General Roche was a very different type of envoy. Although Roche's military career, like Fabvier's, had been spent in Napoleon's service, he had accommodated himself to the Bourbon Restoration in 1815. Roche was sent to Greece as the official agent of the Paris Greek Committee. His presence at Nafplio was the result of a complex interaction of circumstances, and his brand of philhellenism had very different roots from Fabvier's. As usual, concern for Greece was only part of his motivation. Roche's real mission related to a far more important French intrigue, a scheme to provide Greece with a French king.

The French government

Roche illustrates the second strand of French involvement in Greek affairs, this time at an institutional level. Interestingly the French philhellenic movement was to reach its greatest strength in 1826 at the very time when English philhellenes – following the scandal of the Greek loans – were at their lowest numbers. French philhellenism was first organised on a philanthropic basis through the action of the Société de la Morale Chrétienne, established in Paris in 1821 to promote noble causes such as the abolition of slavery and of the death penalty, assisting widows and orphans, and suppressing gambling and drinking. In early 1823 the society created a relief committee to raise money for Greek refugees in France (Comité en faveur des Grecs réfugiés en France) and a second one in February 1825 (Société philanthropique en faveur des Grecs, usually known as the Paris Greek Committee), tasked this time with collecting funds that could be used to buy guns and ammunition. The committee, whose prestige had been greatly enhanced by Chateaubriand's support, managed to send about 100 fully armed men in Greece. These reinforcements boosted Fabvier's prestige and allowed him to organise the Taktikon, the first regular Greek forces, into military companies under French and Italian officers.²⁶

Again, Themeli-Katifori persuasively argues that all this was only an effective façade to more obscure plans of the French government to establish a firm influence over Greek politics and economics. After the Latin American crisis had been resolved to the benefit of British interests, French diplomacy suffered a serious setback. The mobilisation of the

philhellenic mechanism in France could offer compensation and increase French influence in the Levant. News of the disaster of Psara (1824) and of the hardships of the Greek struggle affected public opinion appropriately. Moreover, the presence of Andreas Louriotis in Paris at that moment (February 1825), on his way to London to negotiate the second loan, has to be interpreted in the context of the French interest in investing in Greece. In fact, Louriotis was investigating the prospect of a loan of 40 million francs that had been proposed to the Greek government a few months earlier (November 1824) by Gabriel-Jacques Laisné de Villévêque, a member of parliament who was close to the government and to the duke of Orléans. A French “Greek Committee” was thus thought necessary to counteract British activity.²⁷

During the next three years the Paris Greek Committee collected over 1.5 million francs, becoming the centre of renewed philhellenic activity all over Western Europe. Its avowed mission was educational and technological, and it would channel teachers, books, ploughs and machinery to Greece. In fact the committee sent men, arms and money to Greece in quantities which had an important effect on the outcome of the war, and, according to St Clair, it was “undoubtedly the best organized and most effective of all the militant philhellenic movements to arise during the war”.²⁸ This impressive organisation however was also used, unbeknown to the mass of its supporters, to serve the plans of the duke of Orléans. The duke (later King Louis Philippe of France), one of the wealthiest men in France, maintained contact with liberal opposition groups and formed a focus of opposition in Restoration France for those factions hostile to the Ultra policies of King Charles X. He entertained the most prominent liberal deputies and journalists at the Palais-Royal and open patronised the opposition newspaper *Le Constitutionnel*. The duke of Nemours was the second of Orléans’s six sons, then aged eleven. According to the plan, the young prince would be made king of Greece in exchange for active French help in one form or another. Various Greek leaders, especially Mavrokordatos, pretended to encourage the duke’s scheme, but their main motive was mainly to multiply the ties with Western European interests in the hope that the Powers would eventually come to Greece’s rescue.²⁹ Alexandre Dumas, then employed in the duke’s office, comments on the impact of the announcement of Lord Byron’s death at Messolongi:

The great man [Lord Byron] had no notion that, in dying for the Greeks, he was only dying so that Europe, as the duke of Orléans once expressed it to me, might have the pleasure of eating sauerkraut at the foot of the Parthenon! Poor immortal bard, who died in the hope that the news of his death would resound through all hearts! What would he have said if he could have heard, as I rushed in, the newspaper containing the fatal notice in my hand, crying despairingly, “Byron is dead,” one of the assistants in our office ask, “Who was Byron?” Such a question caused me both pain and pleasure mixed; I had, then, found someone even more ignorant than myself, and he one of the chief clerks in the office. Had it been only an ordinary copying clerk I should not have felt so consoled.³⁰

While the London Greek Committee mostly identified itself with the circle of Benthamite liberals, the Paris Committee gradually extended its membership and influence beyond liberals and Orleanists. With the accession of Chateaubriand to the Paris Committee, it became a national movement. At the beginning of 1826, the committee began to publish a regular bulletin on its activities, and this was a skilful propaganda vehicle. French government support was discreet. In 1825 the restrictions at Marseilles, in effect since 1822, were quietly lifted. The purchase and export of arms intended for the Greeks, as well as the recruitment of volunteers, proceeded undisturbed.³¹ The news of the fall of Messolongi in April 1826 led to a huge intensification of philhellenic feeling in France. In poetry, concert halls, theatres and painting exhibitions the influence of the friends of the Greeks prevailed. In 1825–1826 the Paris cultural scene included Victor Hugo's famous ode "The Heads of the Seraglio"; Alexandre Dumas' first literary appearance with a philhellenic dithyramb sold for the benefit of the Greeks; *The Siege of Corinth* by Rossini at the Académie Royale de Musique; Pichald's tragedy *Leonidas at the Théâtre Français*; and, *Delacroix's paintings of Byronic inspiration*, "The Combat of the Giaour and the Pasha" and "A Turkish Officer Killed in the Mountains". It has even been argued that the Orleanist plans to install Prince Louis, duke of Nemours, the 11-year-old son of Orleans, on the Greek throne had also played a role in Delacroix's choice of Greek themes since much of his early support came from prominent members of the group such as Cousin and Thiers.³² In addition, the publishing industry contributed massively to this Greacomania with over 112 new titles in French in 1825 and 1826 – histories, memoirs, verses, pamphlets, brochures, appeals.³³

General Roche was sent at that time by the committee to Greece with the secret mission to persuade the Greek leaders to select Nemours as their king in exchange for promises of money and military assistance. His mission, approved by the French government, was known to only a few members of the committee. Openly he was supposed to prepare the way for the arrival of volunteers and military supplies. Fabvier's presence, considered a Bonapartist traitor by the Bourbon authorities, was an ominous obstacle to Roche's plans, which soon became known. Moreover, the Petition of July 1825, in which the Greek government and numerous Greek leaders asked the British government to place Greece under British protection, revealed the power of the pro-English group. Roche's credibility fell sharply. Intense rivalries broke out among Roche, Fabvier and Raybaud about who should be the leader of French nationals present in Greece. Roche's failure meant that all French efforts were now concentrated on controlling the organisation of the Greek regular armed forces. Despite his efforts to safeguard national sovereignty, Kapodistrias had to agree to the nomination of Camille Alphonse Trézel as general commander of the regular army in order to keep French financial aid running.³⁴ Nikolaos Kasomoulis eloquently described the profound frustration of Greek officers in his

Enthymimata Stratiotika (Military reminiscences), as did Karpos Papadopoulos in *Anaskevi* (Refutation).³⁵ As denounced by the latter, the military regulation drafted by the French was never translated into Greek and this constantly put Greek officers at a serious disadvantage.

Profiteers and investors

Besides chances for military glory and distinction, the Greek war also offered ample opportunity for all kinds of speculation and important pecuniary gains. As early as 1822, when the need for funds was more than urgent, the French count Alexandre de Laborde offered to provide money by voluntary contributions, but in return lenders were to be granted free use of Navarino, be allowed to occupy it with a force of 1,500 men, and ultimately plant colonies in Greece. They also demanded the right to appoint political advisers to the Greek government. Another Frenchman offered a four million pound loan on very onerous terms, supposedly on behalf of the French liberal banker Jacques Lafitte. The loan was to be discounted 50 percent and to carry an annual interest of six percent. As security, the Greek government was to hand over to the lenders all national lands.³⁶

Count Philippe Jourdain, a naval officer, came with a more ambitious plan. In July 1823, Jourdain offered his services as mediator and concluded on behalf of the Greeks a “treaty” of military alliance with the Order of the Knights Hospitaller of Saint John of Jerusalem, known as Knights of Malta after their expulsion from Rhodes in 1522. The knights undertook to raise a loan of ten million francs at five percent, of which four million francs were to go to the Greeks. With the remainder, the knights would raise a force of four thousand men to campaign against the Turks. All conquests would be shared between the knights and the Greeks. The knights were also promised perpetual sovereignty over Rhodes but as the island was still in the hands of the Turks, the knights were to be granted use of the island of Syros, conveniently inhabited by Roman Catholic Greeks. Themelikiatitori argues that the French government was behind this scheme, which would have allowed France to control the Eastern Mediterranean with either Crete or Rhodes as a naval base.³⁷ Jourdain set about raising the money. The response in Paris was disappointing, but then the prospectus for a loan of 640,000 pounds was circulated in London and it was subscribed within 24 hours. The stock exchange authorities, however, stepped in and the scheme was not allowed to proceed. Jourdain reappeared in Greece in 1826, when the well-known Swiss banker Jean-Gabriel Eynard became actively involved in the project.³⁸ This time Jourdain was arrested and forced out of the country after his intemperate protest against the Greek government’s offer to place the country under British rule with the so-called Act of Submission.³⁹

To cite one last case, General Charles Lallemant, known in popular history as a “soldier, adventurer and conman”,⁴⁰ had a distinguished career as a Napoleonic officer. He was a member of Napoleon’s inner circle in the days following the emperor’s 1815

abdication. Under a French death sentence and unwilling to settle for a quiet life, Lallemand left for the US, where he founded a supposedly agricultural colony in Texas, his Champ d'Asile, which was obviously a military camp for exiled Bonapartists. When this was dismantled by Spanish forces, he returned heavily indebted to Europe, where by 1823 he had formed the volunteer Legion of French Refugees to help defend Spain from the invading French army. In 1825, Lallemand became the agent for representatives of the insurgent Greek government in London, who wanted to buy warships for their fight against Ottoman rule. He returned to the United States and negotiated with two New York firms for the construction of two frigates to be named *Hope* and *Liberator*. As Lallemand allowed the ships to be built by daywork rather than by contract, the price (which included enormous commissions) soared from the original quote of \$250,000 to \$550,000 per ship. The Greeks found themselves without enough funds to pay. The case went to arbitration and it was agreed one frigate should be sold to pay for the other.⁴¹ In the course of these transactions, tens of thousands of dollars entrusted to Lallemand disappeared. He spent the remainder of the decade quietly running a school in New York.

Beyond such individual cases of profiteering, from 1828 onwards the French government too became active in securing closer economic relations with Greece. The new foreign minister, Count Auguste F. de La Ferronnays, adopted a resolute stance in favour of Greek independence and supported the Morea Expedition under General Maison. His aim was to bring Greece under French economic control in an ambitious plan of informal colonial expansion. Greece, and especially the Peloponnese, could serve as a provider of raw materials for French industry, as a consumer market for its products and, finally, as a colonising ground for French settlers. French industrialists and bankers, in close collaboration with Geneva houses, saw great investment opportunities in postwar Greece. The protracted presence of the Morea Expedition of 1828 in the Peloponnese and the contract for the training of the Greek army by French officers were to secure French pre-eminence in the new state. The establishment of a French colony in Greek territory would be the next step. Greece was thinly populated and Kapodistrias appealed to France both for financial assistance and human resources. Investors, mainly rentiers, craftsmen and businessmen, made their interest known and the French government put pressure on the Greek side to facilitate their schemes. As expected, there was no shortage of adventurers and speculators. The French government was quite anxious to reach an agreement for the settlement of colonists in Greece. This was expected to act as a relief measure against the acute economic crisis, partly agricultural, partly industrial, that the French economy was going through. Between 1827 and 1832 France suffered repeated grain harvest failure and sharp food shortages; potato and wine production also dropped dramatically. In addition, there was a severe commercial, and in consequence, industrial recession. With numerous bankruptcies, low wages, high unemployment rates and rising food prices, “the 1830

depression was both longer-lasting and in some respects more damaging than that which preceded 1789", according to Labrousse.⁴² In a tense atmosphere of popular unrest, food riots and heavy pressure from industrialists and viticulturalists, government turnover was high, with the Villèle, Martignac and Polignac ministries rapidly succeeding one another in 1828 and 1829. The establishment of French colonists in the Morea would also serve to deter British preponderance in the Eastern Mediterranean. All these plans failed after Kapodistrias firmly refused to give priority to the concession of national lands to French colonists over Greek beneficiaries.⁴³

Conclusion

In January 1829, an up-and-coming poet in his late twenties, Victor Hugo, published a collection of poems, *Les Orientales*, depicting scenes from the Eastern Mediterranean and the Greek War of Independence. Originally considered an exercise in pure poetry, an innovative experiment in versification detached from the poet's inner emotions or current political issues, it is now seen as a particularly timely publication composed in 1827 and 1828 directly inspired by contemporary history.⁴⁴ The insightful Hugo wrote in the preface: "for empires, as well as for literature, before long, the East may be called on to play a great part in the West ... We shall see great things."⁴⁵

French involvement in Greek affairs cannot be justly understood outside the context of the French imperial meridian, which brings us back to our point of departure. We believe that this is precisely a case in point. France's global ambitions are amply illustrated in its action in Greece and its search for new means of spreading French influence. France's "informal empire" can be seen at work in the complex operations mounted to ensure that French expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean would continue unhindered. In that respect, we may consider the successive French military expeditions in Egypt, Morea and Algeria as three phases in the transformation of the Mediterranean into a geographically united, historically unique and essentially French colonial space.⁴⁶

¹ Margaret A. Majumdar, *Postcoloniality: The French Dimension* (New York: Berghahn, 2007), 5.

² Ibid., 1. The author distinguishes three distinct phases: (1) from the early sixteenth century to the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815; (2) from 1830 (the conquest of Algiers) to 1870 (the fall of the Second Empire); and (3) the period of imperialist expansion under the Third Republic from 1875 to Algerian independence in 1962.

³ Gustave Schlumberger, "Introduction," in Maurice Persat, *Mémoires du commandant Persat, 1806 à 1844* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1910), vi–vii.

⁴ David Todd, "A French Imperial Meridian, 1814–1870," *Past and Present* 210 (2011): 155–86.

⁵ John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *Economic History Review*, new ser., no. 1 (1953): 1–15; Todd, "A French Imperial Meridian," 157–59.

- ⁶ Gilles Grivaud, "Introduction au(x) mishellénisme(s)," in *Le(s) mishellénisme(s)*, ed. Gilles Grivaud (Athens: Ecole Française d'Athènes, 2001), 1; Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales, <https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/philhell%C3%A8ne>, accessed 11 April 2020.
- ⁷ Pierre Echinard, *Grecs et Philhellènes à Marseille de la Révolution française à l'Indépendance de la Grèce* (Marseille: Institut Historique de Marseille/CNRS, 1973), 193–98.
- ⁸ William St Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free: The Philhellenes in the War of Independence* (Cambridge: Open Book, 2008); Jean Dimakis, *La Guerre de l'Indépendance Grecque vue par la presse française (période de 1821 à 1824): Contribution à l'étude de l'opinion publique et du mouvement philhellénique en France* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1968), and "Philhelléniques": *Études sur le philhellénisme pendant l'insurrection grecque de 1821* (Athens: Kardamitsa, 1992); Despina Themeli-Katifori, *To γαλλικό ενδιαφέρον για την Ελλάδα στην περίοδο του Καποδίστρια 1828–1831* [The French interest in Greece under Kapodistrias, 1828–1831] (Athens: Epikairoiti, 1985).
- ⁹ Dimakis, "Philhelléniques," 63.
- ¹⁰ Alexandre Dumas, *My Memoirs*, vol. 4, *1830 to 1831*, trans. E. M. Waller (New York: Macmillan, 1908), 40–41.
- ¹¹ Konstantinos Polias, "The Philhellenic Dimension among Philosophers and Intellectuals in Europe during the 18th and 19th Centuries," *Society for Hellenism and Philhellenism*, 22 November 2019, <https://www.eefshp.org/en/i-filelliniki-diastasi-tis-filosofias-kai-tis-dianoisis-stin-eyropi-kata-to-18o-kai-19o-aiona-konstantinos-polias/>; Evangelos Konstantinou, "Graecomania and Philhellenism," *European History Online*, 23 November 2012, <http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/models-and-stereotypes/graecomania-and-philhellenism>, accessed 11 April 2020.
- ¹² Dimakis, *La Guerre*, 22.
- ¹³ Edward Blaquièr especially praised French authors like Chateaubriand, Constant, de Pradt, Say, Raybaud, Raffeneil, Bignon and Artaud for their contribution in clarifying this point in his article "La Grèce après sa cinquième campagne en 1825," *La Revue Encyclopédique* 84 (December 1825): 22–23.
- ¹⁴ St Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free*, 55–57.
- ¹⁵ Dimakis, *La Guerre*, 19. Chateaubriand had been the French representative at the Congress of Verona in 1822 that approved the French intervention against Spanish liberals. He also served as foreign minister from January 1823 to June 1824 and oversaw the Spanish campaign.
- ¹⁶ Dominique Frédéric Dufour de Pradt, *Parallèle de la puissance anglaise et russe* (Paris: Bechet Ainé, 1823), 188.
- ¹⁷ Dominique Frédéric Dufour de Pradt, *De la Grèce dans ses rapports avec l'Europe, suivi d'un mot sur la Grèce, ou Réflexions sur la dernière brochure de M. de Pradt* (Paris: Bechet Ainé, 1822), 59, 72–74.
- ¹⁸ Guillaume de Bernier de Sauvigny, *La Restauration* (Paris: Histoire/Flammarion, 1955), 170.
- ¹⁹ Hervé Mazurel, "Désirs de guerre et rêves d'ailleurs: la croisade philhellène des volontaires occidentaux de la guerre d'indépendance grecque (1821–1830)" (PhD diss., Université de Paris I, 2009), 400.
- ²⁰ Anna Karakatsouli, "Μαχητές της Ελευθερίας" και 1821: Η Ελληνική Επανάσταση στη διεθνή της διάσταση ["Freedom fighters" and 1821: the Greek War of Independence in a Transnational Approach] (Athens: Pedio, 2016), 18–19.
- ²¹ Persat, *Mémoires*, 62.
- ²² St Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free*, 281.

- ²³ Maxime Raybaud, *Mémoires sur la Grèce pour servir à l'histoire de la guerre de l'indépendance, avec une introduction historique par Alph. Rabbe* (Paris: Tournachon-Molin Libraire, 1824), 1:496.
- ²⁴ Albert Boime, *Art in an Age of Counterrevolution, 1814–1848* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 194.
- ²⁵ Themeli-Katifori, *To γαλλικό ενδιαφέρον* [The French interest], 17–18.
- ²⁶ Jean Dimakis, “La ‘Société de la Morale Chrétienne’ de Paris et son action en faveur des Grecs lors de l’insurrection de 1821,” in “*Philhelléniques*,” 145–66.
- ²⁷ Themeli-Katifori, *To γαλλικό ενδιαφέρον* [The French interest], 19.
- ²⁸ St Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free*, 267.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 265–66.
- ³⁰ Alexandre Dumas, *My Memoirs*, vol. 3, *1826 to 1830*, trans. E. M. Waller (London: Methuen, 1907), chap. 1, 14–15.
- ³¹ St Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free*, 272–73.
- ³² Boime, *Art*, 194.
- ³³ St Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free*, 269.
- ³⁴ Themeli-Katifori, *To γαλλικό ενδιαφέρον* [The French interest], 172.
- ³⁵ Karpos Papadopoulos, *Ανασκευή των εις την ιστορίαν των Αθηνών αναφερομένων περί του στρατηγού Οδυσσέως Ανδρούτσου του Ελληνικού τακτικού και του συνταγματάρχου Καρόλου Φαβιέρου* [Refutation of what is said in the History of Athens about General Odysseas Androutsos, the Greek tactical army and Colonel Charles Fabvier] (Athens: Petros Mantzarakis, 1837).
- ³⁶ St Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free*, 128.
- ³⁷ Themeli-Katifori, *To γαλλικό ενδιαφέρον* [The French interest], 16.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 37–39.
- ³⁹ St Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free*, 288.
- ⁴⁰ Shannon Selin, “General Lallemand: Invader of Texas,” *Imagining the Bounds of History*, <https://shannonselin.com/2014/05/general-charles-lallemand-invader-texas/>. Despite his turbulent trajectory and his questionable business activities, Lallemand’s name is immortalised on the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.
- ⁴¹ Henry Casimir de Rham, *Report of the Evidence and Reasons of the Award between Johannis Orlandos & Andreas Luriottis, Greek deputies, of the one part, and Le Roy, Bayard & Co., and G.G. & S. Howland, of the other part* (New York: W.E. Dean, 1826); Robert Sedgwick, *An Examination of the Controversy between the Greek Deputies and two Mercantile Houses of New York, etc.* (New York: J. Seymour, 1826).
- ⁴² Ernest Labrousse, “Comment naissent les révolutions,” *Actes du Congrès historique du Centenaire de la Révolution de 1848* (1948). Cited in Pamela Pilbeam, “The Economic Crisis of 1827–32 and the 1830 Revolution in Provincial France,” *Historical Journal* 32, no. 2 (1989): 320.
- ⁴³ Themeli-Katifori, *To γαλλικό ενδιαφέρον* [The French interest], 100–7.
- ⁴⁴ Richard B. Grant, “Sequence and Theme in Victor Hugo’s *Les Orientales*,” *PMLA* 94, no. 5 (1979): 894–908.

- ⁴⁵ Evelyn Martinengo-Cesaresco, *From Songs from the East: Translations from the Poems of Victor Hugo* (New York and London: White and Allen, 1887), 55.
- ⁴⁶ Hélène Blais and Florence Deprest, "The Mediterranean, a Territory between France and Colonial Algeria: Imperial Constructions," *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire* 19, no. 1 (2012): 40–44; Manuel Borutta and Sakis Gekas, "A Colonial Sea: the Mediterranean, 1798–1956," *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire* 19, no. 1 (2012): 4.