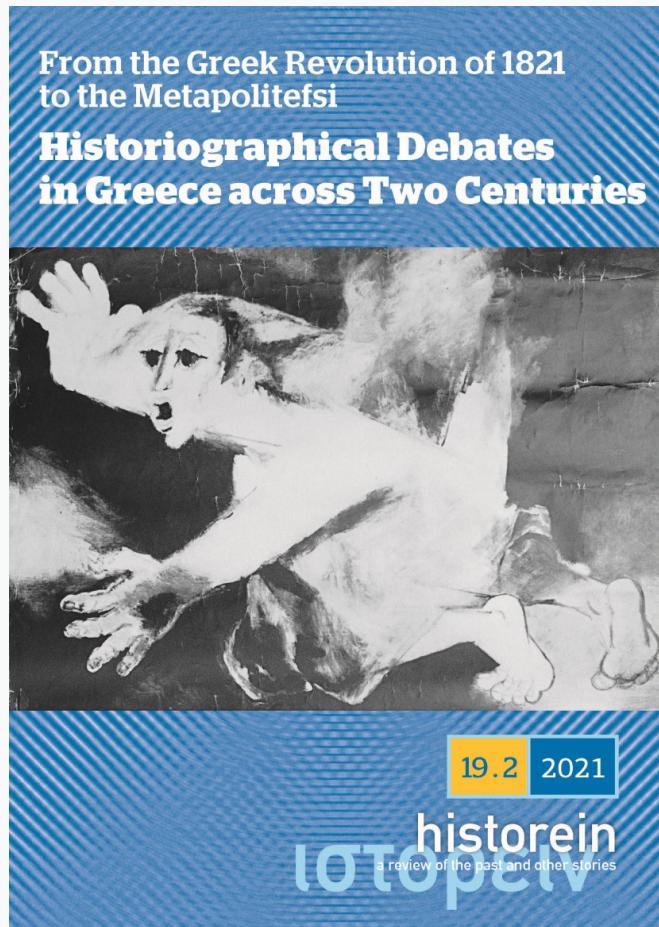


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From the Greek Revolution of 1821 to the Metapolitefsi: Historiographical Debates in Greece across Two Centuries



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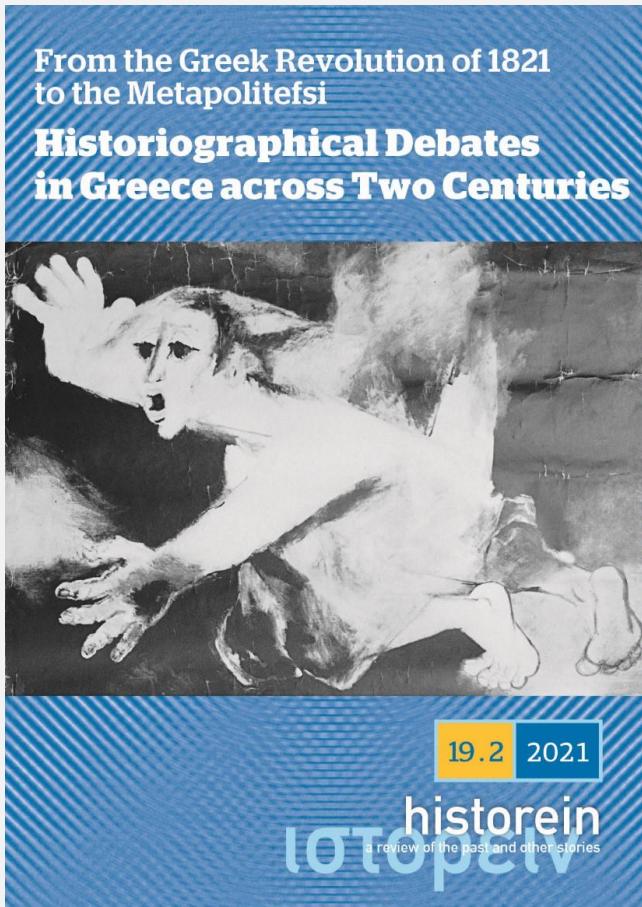
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## **From the Greek Revolution of 1821 to the *Metapolitefsi*: Historiographical Debates in Greece across Two Centuries Introduction**

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# From the Greek Revolution of 1821 to the *Metapolitefsi*: Historiographical Debates in Greece across Two Centuries Introduction

Continuing the discussion that started in the 16th volume of *Historein* (2017, edited by Effi Gazi), the current issue focuses on important debates concerning Greek historiography across the two-century existence of the Greek state. Based on new perspectives and questions posed by recent academic research in Greece, this issue explores and revisits fundamental themes of Greek history. The featured articles do not aspire to cover each and every debate about the Greek past, but to focus on some of those that connected academic historiography to the public sphere across a broad time span, and generated multiple discourses about the past: first of all, who is entitled to discuss the past, and what does the distinct professional identity of the historian entail, according to various political and social developments; second, how was the most important event in the creation of the Greek state – the Greek Revolution of 1821 – historicised while still being past-present, and while being ever present in the public sphere; third, how was the memory of the most prominent Greek politician of the twentieth century – Eleftherios Venizelos – formulated through historiography, political uses and commemorations; finally, how was the last dictatorship of the Greek twentieth century (1967–1974) historicised, in conjunction with the planning for the future of democracy in Greece, and with the search for historical culprits. In these articles, the central research question is the afterlife of historical figures and events, aiming to examine how the recent past turns into history through the nexus of historiographical, political and other discourses in the public sphere. These debates profoundly influenced modern Greek historical consciousness, legitimising discourses about the past and generating powerful symbols.

More specifically, a central question about Greek historiography that has not been thoroughly addressed concerns the very nature of this intellectual endeavour: in his article, Vangelis Karamanolakis asks “who was the historian” during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This seemingly basic question concerns the emergence of the historian as a distinct academic and professional field in Greece – a development that is intricately connected to the national policies of the Greek state and to the persistence of the “historian-philologist” until 1974. Through an overview of historical studies, institutions and intellectual traditions across two centuries, Karamanolakis examines the professional, social, political and methodological profile of academic historians in Greece, arguing that

the professional historian as a distinct discipline, especially concerning modern Greek history, emerged after 1974, resulting in the formation of a small, dynamic community which has participated vocally in the public sphere.

The emergence of academic historiography is intricately connected to the formation of national narratives. In the Greek case, one of the most prominent loci of this narrative is the Greek Revolution of 1821. In his article, Panagiotis Stathis explores the afterlife of this seminal event from 1821 until 1922 as the founding condition of the Greek state. The historiisation of the Greek Revolution began immediately after the formation of the state via memoirs, political debates and historical accounts, through which, on the one hand, the revolutionaries sought to legitimise their position, and, on the other, the state attempted to consolidate its founding myth. Throughout the decades, the Revolution obtained an extraordinary symbolic power, and opposing factions made selective use of it, searching their “ancestors” in the revolutionary past. Thus, the Greek Revolution, as a historiographical and political stake, formed or supported directional guides for political practices in the present.

The gradual historisation of events and periods is a very frequent phenomenon, which dictates and consolidates important aspects of whole historical periods in the hearts and minds of the people. A prominent mechanism of this procedure is the making of the historical reputation of past important figures. In Greek historical culture, concerning the first half of the twentieth century, Eleftherios Venizelos (1864–1936) shines as the definitive “founding father” of the modern Greek state. Christos Triantafyllou examines the transformation of Venizelos posthumously from a fiercely divisive figure to an almost unanimously praised politician who expanded the state’s borders and implemented deep modernising reforms. Focusing on the period from 1945 to 1967, the author argues that Venizelos was frequently used both as a symbol in contemporary political debates, and as a metonymy in various attempts to contextualise the history of the first half of the twentieth century. An important part of these attempts was the corpus of public narratives produced about Venizelos and his era, either as historiographical accounts, or as autobiographical texts. In fact, this discourse left its mark on Greek political and historical culture for a number of decades.

Apart from glorious moments in the national narrative, historiographical debates often deal with the legacy of catastrophes and deviations. The military dictatorship of 1967–1974 is definitely such a case, as shown in Eleni Kouki’s article. Both during and after the dictatorship, the question of the nature of the dictatorship, its connection to previous historical periods and its place in the evolution of the Greek state sparked vivid debates among intellectuals, academics, politicians and activists. The historisation of the “junta”, Kouki argues, was not a natural or linear development, but the result of different and conflicting views about the past and the present, both in the academic and in the public

sphere. Moreover, several concepts about the dictatorship's character that are today perceived as obvious were articulated from 1967 to 1989 through complex cultural processes. These interpretations shaped not only the perceptions of Greek society about the dictatorship, but about the whole of Greek history, since the nineteenth century.

Nowadays, with the celebration of the Greek state's bicentennial, the exploration of how the national past was debated, historicised and narrated through historiographical and political means holds an interesting position: by examining how certain pasts entered the national canon, how events and figures were pantheonised, and how history and memory wars were conducted, we may be able to assess why and how nation-states commemorate themselves and formulate narratives about the shared past. Using the past as a symbolic resource, the agents of political and social power seek to provide the definitive version of how and why did we arrive at the present. Simultaneously, these official versions of the past are constantly contested by opposing social forces, which frequently manage to have their versions merge with, incorporated into or stand alongside those of their opponents. It is through these procedures, namely historiographical debates such as these explored in this issue of *Historein*, that the past turns into history.

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