

The Historical Review/La Revue Historique

Vol 14 (2017)

The *H*istorical Review
La Revue *H*istorique



VOLUME XIV (2017)

Section de Recherches Néohelléniques
Institut de Recherches Historiques / FNRS

Section of Neohellenic Research
Institute of Historical Research / NHRF

Review of: «ΜΑΧΗΤΕΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΑΣ» ΚΑΙ 1821, Η ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΕΠΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΗ ΣΤΗ ΔΙΕΘΝΙΚΗ ΤΗΣ ΔΙΑΣΤΑΣΗ, Αθήνα: Πεδίο 2016

Michael Festas

doi: [10.12681/hr.16304](https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.16304)

Copyright © 2018, Michael Festas



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:

Festas, M. (2018). Review of: «ΜΑΧΗΤΕΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΑΣ» ΚΑΙ 1821, Η ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΕΠΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΗ ΣΤΗ ΔΙΕΘΝΙΚΗ ΤΗΣ ΔΙΑΣΤΑΣΗ, Αθήνα: Πεδίο 2016. *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique*, 14, 248–251.
<https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.16304>

Anna Karakatsouli,
«MAXHTES THΣ EΛEYΘEPΙΑΣ» KAI 1821,
H EΛΛHNIKH EΠANACTAΣH ΣTH ΔIEΘNIKH THΣ ΔIACTAΣH,
[“Freedom fighters” and 1821:
the Greek revolution in its transnational dimension],
Athens: Pedio, 2016, 341 pages.

Philhellenism, as an intellectual movement with liberal and radical features, was depicted in many fields (arts, literature, and politics) and endorsed in many ways (fundraising, committees, etc.). As such, it constitutes one of the most important aspects in the study of the Greek Revolution of 1821 and has been thoroughly analysed in the Greek and international historiography.¹

In her latest book, Anna Karakatsouli focuses on a specific issue among the various forms of support from the philhellenic movement, “combatant Philhellenism”.

In a western-oriented view (that is not confined to rigid national contexts such as “French Philhellenism” or “British Philhellenism”), the author studies the case of the soldiers and officers that volunteered for the Greek struggle for independence, inspired by their cosmopolitan culture, liberal ideology

and desire to continue a military career after their forced discharge following the Napoleonic Wars. Moreover, the author investigates the contribution of the combatant Philhellenes to the process of diffusing novel ideas in the Greek territory under revolt, while tracing the extent to which the emerging nation-state of Greece was integrated in the crystallisation of the modern European identity.

In her study, Karakatsouli perceives the Greek Revolution not only as a European event, a fact already highlighted in the Greek historiography,² but as a part of an unceasing worldwide revolutionary process: in the beginning of the nineteenth century, a *revolutionary continuum* from the western shores of the Atlantic to the Mediterranean shaped the “Atlantic Revolutions”. Traversing the entire volume, this concept constitutes the author’s major contribution to the study of the revolution.

It is the significance of the aforementioned global dimension of the revolution that delineates the use of relevant

¹ For an overview of the term, George Tolia, “The Resilience of Philhellenism”, *The Historical Review/La revue Historique* 13 (2016), pp. 51-70. See also Loukia Droulia, *Philhellénisme. Ouvrages inspirés par la guerre de l’Indépendance Grecque (1821-1833)*, 2nd. rev. ed. Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation, 2017.

² Petros Pizani (ed.), *Η Ελληνική Επανάσταση του 1821. Ένα Ευρωπαϊκό Γεγονός* [The Greek Revolution of 1821: a European event], Athens: Kedros 2009.

conceptual and methodological tools in her study. Within this framework, Karakatsouli introduces conceptual tools of global history, such as transnationalism and cosmopolitanism, as well the methodology of collective biography, to the historiography of the revolution; in "The Greek Revolution and Transnationalism", the first of seven chapters, she examines the characteristics of global revolutionary movements during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The term transnationalism derives from the realm of international relations and political science and refers to a social phenomenon where people live between two countries, languages and cultures, maintaining a relationship with both. Karakatsouli uses the term in order to describe this transnational group of fighters of an informal "liberal international", which provides the structure for a multinational military corps (a common phenomenon in the European continent during the Napoleonic Wars), and engages in the struggles for independence of other nations, including the Greek one. Moreover, for the author, the use of the term cosmopolitanism emphasises the global-local relation, "under the prism of the interaction between modernism's global dynamics and regional factors" (60). Finally, through the methodological tool of collective biography, the diverse routes of freedom fighters and, in particular, their intersectional points are revealed.

The reconstruction of the often fascinating biographies of the combatant Philhellenes, as illustrated through the book, enables us to place these individuals in wider interpretative concepts and

processes that go beyond their armed participation in the Greek Struggle.

The study of the fighters' biographies and the reconstruction of their past allows us to deepen our understanding of their personal and professional pursuits, their ideological schemes (where were often vague and torn between liberalism and cosmopolitan patriotism), their incentives for and expectations from their involvement in the revolution, as well as their interaction with the Greeks, especially on the battlefield.

Who were these freedom fighters? Obviously, they were not a homogeneous group with common beginnings and intentions. On the contrary, the differences regarding their involvement in the Greek Struggle are explicitly pinpointed. These differences are critically associated with the timing of their arrival in Greek territory. Briefly, we may distinguish three types of fighters: firstly, the young spontaneous volunteers who arrived at the outbreak of the revolution (1821-1823); then the experienced officers who undertook leading positions in the Greek forces; and, finally, the third-phase Philhellenes, who arrived after the battle of Navarino (1827), when the philhellenic movement shifted primarily in a humanitarian-charitable orientation and the revolution's outcome was inextricably linked to international politics and diplomacy.

The following two chapters, the "Mediterranean parallels" of Spain and Italy, examine the revolutionary movements in those two countries from 1820 to 1823. Despite their specific differences, both cases share characteristics with the Greek Revolution: the involvement of foreign fighters,

guerrilla warfare and international implications would determine their course. These chapters feature the networks of communication that the Spanish, Italian and Greek revolutionaries generated through correspondence, the appeals for financial support and the reinforcement with military supplies and corps. Moreover, they highlight that in both cases, after the defeat of the liberal movements, a significant number of political exiles resorted in London.

The fourth chapter, entitled "The centre: London", discusses the activity of the exiled liberal revolutionaries from Spain and Italy within the framework of the radical political culture that had been thriving in Britain since the eighteenth century and the gradual shift of British interest towards the eastern Mediterranean during the building of its Second Colonial Empire. Undoubtedly, the capital of this empire would evolve into the melting pot of liberalism, radicalism and, eventually, Philhellenism. Apart from the romantic poets and intellectuals who would endeavour to influence the European public to adopt a favourable attitude towards the Greek independence struggle, the London Philhellenic Committee would contract the loan agreements, the so-called "sovereign loans", for the continuation of the struggle, indicating Britain's forthcoming pivotal role, both on the financial and political-military level.

The following chapter, "In the field: Greece", focuses on the Greek territory under revolt, investigating the interaction between the Greeks and the foreign fighters. The author maintains this interaction was based on mutual suspicion as a result of the stereotypes the

Greeks and the fighters had of each other. In particular, Karakatsouli uses the term "crypto-colonialism", as proposed by social anthropologist Michael Herzfeld, to describe the fighters' stance towards the Greeks. From this perspective, this reciprocal influence between local and cosmopolitan becomes a major contradiction, shaping this "taxing meeting" between the Greeks and the Europeans that was mainly played out on the battlefield, where guerrillas fought alongside organised tactical combat troops.

Efforts were made to bridge the gap between the two divergent perspectives regarding military tactics. The choice of British leaders for the military at land and sea became a turning point in the war. Not only was it an effort to create tactical military corps, but it also indicated the inextricable reliance of Greek affairs on British foreign policy.

Thus, in the sixth chapter, Karakatsouli, through the study of the intervention of officers in the Greek struggle, mainly the Anglo-Irish Sir Richard Church (1784-1873), British Thomas Cochrane (1775-1860), Thomas Gordon (1788-1841) and Frank Abney Hastings (1794-1828), and French Charles Favier (1782-1855), seeks to reconstruct their intersected routes and their military contribution to sea and land battles.

In the last chapter, "Epilogue: Utopia or Dystopia?" the aforementioned "taxing meeting" – caused by the cultural interaction between the Westerners, freedom fighters included, and the emergence of a Greece that endeavoured to become a modern national state established on western standards – is studied not in a political, military

or economic context, but through literature. It analyses the modern Greece as depicted in Mary Shelley’s “dyschronic” novel *The Last Man* (1826) using the conceptual tools of colonialism and orientalism.

Karakatsouli’s significant contribution lies in her proposal of an approach that is both alternative and innovative to the historiography of Philhellenism and, by extension, of the Greek Revolution. This stimulating study is accomplished using innovative methodological and conceptual tools. On the one hand, these tools enable us to go beyond the hitherto perception of the romantic Philhellenes who selflessly contributed to the struggle for independence. On the other, Karakatsouli’s work places the Greek Revolution of 1821 in several crisscrossing frameworks: the national, the Mediterranean, the European and the global. A translation of this book

into English would undoubtedly assist in bringing the global dimension of the Greek Revolution to a wider audience. Indeed, the interaction between the rebellious Greeks and the westerners in the military, political, economic and cultural field constitute promising topics in the international academic dialogue on modern Greek, European and global history.

Anna Karakatsouli’s book has been published at a very interesting juncture, since academic research ahead of the bicentennial of the Greek Revolution constitutes a thriving field for current Greek historiography. The need for a “new Philhellenism”, within the context of Greek debt crisis, recurs in social and political discourse, and “modern-day freedom fighters”, who engage themselves in the struggles of other nations, have become a widespread phenomenon.

Michael Festas

Institute of Historical Research / NHRF