

## Σύγκριση/Comparaison/Comparison

Αρ. 33 (2024)



### Preliminary Thoughts on the Enshrinement of a Legend: Karaiskakis According to Palamas

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### Βιβλιογραφική αναφορά:

katsigianni, A., & Naoum, I. (2025). Preliminary Thoughts on the Enshrinement of a Legend: Karaiskakis According to Palamas. *Σύγκριση/Comparaison/Comparison*, (33), 226–241. ανακτήθηκε από <https://ejournals.epublishing.ekt.gr/index.php/syγκrisi/article/view/39066>

**Preliminary Thoughts on the Enshrinement of a Legend: Karaiskakis  
According to Palamas**

This article is born out of our intention to inquire into the timeless appeal that the cultural legend of the hero Georgios Karaiskakis exercises on modern Greek poetry, in comparison with other, less-frequently evoked heroes of the Revolution of 1821, and to follow its ideological transformations. This topic is inscribed within the broader field connecting literature and cultural memory (Erl and Nünning 2008), while specifically focusing on the way in which literature constitutes a particular semiotic way of commemorating and narrating the national past through the production of symbolic representations. The connection between ethno-symbolism and modern nineteenth-century revolutions is a comparative field of study that in recent years has brought to the fore the study of heroes/heroines of the 'national pantheon' as a mytho-poetic and mytho-genetic nucleus of national identity.<sup>1</sup>

The 19th century, but to a large extent the 20th also, were the settings par excellence for constructing, inventing and reproducing European 'national heroes', while both romanticism and realism, two central, aesthetic movements that developed over the course of these centuries, nourished highbrow and popular culture with national heroes and 'martyrs'. Within this 'longue durée', every historical period had heroes suitable to it, precisely because the needs of the 'national imagination', through various ideological uses of history, could cover the tripartite function of herological representation: the invocation of an epic past, the personification of national values and the sacrificial transcendence of the community by the 'exceptional individual' (Sokolewicz 1991: 125-136).

In intercultural comparative studies, the 'national hero' is not studied simply as a figure associated with the choice of a 'character', but as a complex cultural category, in which nation, gender, class, tradition, stereotypes and public representations of national identity intersect. Indeed, in one of the foundational studies on the subject, in 1938, Lord Raglan points out ways in which heroes help myth become a dramatic ritual that in the end does not refer to historical persons but to 'types' which the public can recognize as condensed intellectual nodes, precisely because they pre-suppose (and recall) their previous literary forms and cultural uses (Raglan 1938: 225-226). From this perspective, the study of heroes is a quintessentially comparative endeavour, not only because it is connected to corresponding instances in 'national literatures', but because it reveals the palimpsest of national narratives that have left their mark in the public sphere. In other words, if we look at 'national heroes' as a genetic form of bio-narratives that fundamentally constitute more recent and modern 'mythologies',<sup>2</sup> we can cross over, as Dimitris Tziouvas puts it, "from the traditional to the cultural text", which now "contains its receptions, its translations, its interpretations and the discussions it induces." (Tziouvas 2017: 15).

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<sup>1</sup> On this issue, see indicatively Smith (1999); Guibernau and Hutchinson (2004). For the Greek ethno-symbolic approach, see Papatheodorou (2009); Tzouma (2007); Papaspiliou (2021).

<sup>2</sup> We have in mind the classic study by Roland Barthes (2009).

For the present, we will focus only on one case study concerning the representation of Georgios Karaiskakis in the poetry of Kostis Palamas. The choice of this particular hero and this particular poet is not coincidental. As has been noted by many scholars, Palamas' artistic awareness, intensely marked by Greece's humiliating defeat in the Greco-Turkish War of 1897, turned towards the search of a symbol for the individual who serves national goals, while simultaneously standing above the whole society (Kastrinaki 1999: 193-214). In this context, we argue that Palamas chose Karaiskakis not merely as an individual case of a hero of '21, but as a collective incarnation of the 'dreams of [his] people', as the poet himself put it, in his interview of 1923 given to Fotos Giofyllis (Palamas 2019: 223).

Palamas' awe to this particular hero reaches the point of self-identification, as we will see below, and triggers the need for a long-planned poetic composition, which would not reach completion in the end, as well as for the simultaneous diffusion of Karaiskakis' presence throughout the entirety of Palamas' writings. In what follows, we will engage only with certain indicative instances in order to highlight two dimensions of the relationship between Palamas and his hero: on the one hand, the poet's diachronic reception of Karaiskakis' personality, as it took shape in dialogue with the historical sources available at that time, as well as with Palamas' own historical moment and on the other hand, the poetic, fictional conception of the hero in certain characteristic passages in Palamas' work, which are revealing for his own poetics.

### A Constantly Delayed Composition

The impetus for the preliminary hermeneutical thoughts that we will expound below was an archival document, the folder containing the "Song of Karaiskakis" ("Tragoudi tou Karaiskaki"), among the poet's papers at the Kostis' Palamas Foundation. This document suggests a planned, but constantly delayed, poetic composition on Georgios Karaiskakis, which, as can be seen from the folder's paratextual materials, occupied Palamas from 1889 up to 1930. With regard to the title, the poet oscillated between the original, "The Song of Karaiskakis" and an alternative, "The Son of the Nun", which is probably composed around 1904, certainly not earlier, as one may surmise from a note: "The Song of Karaiskakis, epic hymn Or The son of the Nun Karaiskakis, In words..." and further down in italics "*the memoirs of the general Makrygiannis*", which, as we know, Vlahogiannis began to publish in the newspaper *Ακρόπολις* (*Akropolis*) between July and October 1904. What is certain is that from 1889 up to 1930, perhaps even a little later, Palamas was gathering material from historical sources, as well as from the daily press (events and anniversaries), while simultaneously searching for the proper poetic form, "epic hymn..." or "in words...", with his primary reference points being folk poetry but also *The King's Flute* (*I Flogera tou Vassilia*) – also a programmatic composition, which he worked on for a long period together with his poetic designs for Karaiskakis. The catalogue of historical sources (see figs.1 and 2) and the initial structure of the composition for Karaiskakis are to be found in hand-written notes:<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "Το Τραγούδι του Καραϊσκάκη" ("The Song of Karaiskakis"), folder "Πρόσωπα και μονόλογοι" ("People and Monologues"), Archives of Kostis Palamas, Kostis' Palamas Foundation. All translations from the Greek into English are our own, unless otherwise noted.

Let it begin from its desolation  
that of Greece by Ibrahim the Turk  
and from the invitation of Karai –  
skakis to save it. From his reconcil –  
iation with Zaimis... All of the  
other things – birth and the rest – epi –  
sodically.

However, from the remains of the folder, it becomes evident that in 1921 the centenary of the Greek Revolution, the celebration of which was cancelled because of Greece's involvement in the Asia Minor campaign, the poet finally settled on a composition plan modelled on the epic monologue of Basil the Bulgar Slayer in *The King's Flute*:

the entire poem, an epic monologue by Karaiskakis (just like the Bulgar Slayer's monologue in «Η Φλογέρα του βασιλιά»). -20.4.21.<sup>4</sup>

Palamas refers to this planned composition in a catalogue of his works with the note “for printing”, between 1910 and 1913, as well as in two interviews: in 1921 with K. Dimitriadis and in 1923 with Fotos Giofyllis, already mentioned above (Palamas 2019: 223).

### **Karaiskakis' Charm and Palamas' Ethno-Romanticism**

But what is it that enchants Palamas in this particular hero, to the point that he returns to the figure of Karaiskakis so insistently? And why doesn't he manage to complete the composition he planned, but rather constantly defers it<sup>5</sup> What comes to light is a form of self-identification between the poet and his hero. As he emerges not only from the poet's notes but also from the scattered references throughout his work, Karaiskakis constitutes a guise for Palamas, as the great lyric poet senses a deep, spiritual intimacy with the revolutionary national hero:

Suddenly, when I say that I admire Karaiskakis and I want to fill my song with his life, it doesn't mean, as you meticulously desire to explain it, that I am thinking, considering – who knows what I am doing, I am influenced, I step outside of my natural state, I pursue subjects outside the realm of my life, I don't have sincerity, I speechify and other such things. It means that I have something inside me, in the depths of my soul, something different from my life. In my soul I have something that is almost heroic, that looks like I could be Karaiskakis' brother. Regardless of how much my simple life is in pure opposition to that of the hero. People are not always judged according to their actions; there are some reflections that weigh just as much as actions. And there are some people who don't resemble their lives. Search for

<sup>4</sup> “Το Τραγούδι του Καραϊσκάκη”, folder «Πρόσωπα και μονόλογοι», Archives of Kostis Palamas, Kostis' Palamas Foundation. The emphasis belongs to Palamas.

<sup>5</sup> Also of the characteristic phrase “Karaiskakis captivates me and Solomos astonishes me” («Με συνεπαίρνει ο Καραϊσκάκης και με θαμπώνει ο Σολωμός») with which he begins his essay “Ποιητική Τέχνη και γλώσσα”, Palamas: Η 9.

them in their souls. M e! A poet says to you and his “I” stands leagues apart from his self, a strange dramatic toy. T h a t m a n! The poet cries out to you, and his “that man” is the face mask of him himself. Do you understand? (Palamas: I 87)

Let us not forget that the previous generation of poets of revolutionary romanticism were writing while many of those who had fought were still alive, and thus with the sense of a continuing struggle. The poetry of the Athenian School often mythologizes the heroic achievements of '21, promoting certain figures over others, to whom an unpatriotic air is attributed, as, for instance, A. Soutsos does in his *Τουρκομάχος Ελλάς* (*Turk-fighting Greece*, 1850). More generally, in contemporary public discourse, both poetic and political, rival communities of memory strive to claim the services rendered to the homeland, and the Soutsos brothers play out their role, from this perspective, on the side of Kolletis. On the other hand, a sense of distance from the mythical revolutionary figures gradually develops, as a new generation that is a stranger to struggles, a generation of pygmies, according to the ethnoromantic rhetoric of the time, succeeds the heroes of the revolution, sidelining both the figures themselves and their ideals. This can be seen, for instance, in numerous poems from the collection *Η κιθάρα* (*The guitar*, 1835) by P. Soutsos.<sup>6</sup>

Palamas follows a somewhat different approach. The figure of Karaiskakis may be enshrined in Palamas' broader ethno-romantic framework that views the heroes of the Revolution as descendants of a distant lineage of *giants*, in line with the nationalist narrative of the historian Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos. At the same time, however, Palamas projects on to the form of the unmatched warrior of '21 his own poetic vision: the patriotic poet, with its Tyrtaeism and Pindarism, combined with the lyric poet, together with its Kassianism and contrition. It is within this poetic dichotomy that Palamas' reception of Karaiskakis operates, a reception which is also certainly associated with the ideological and linguistic demands of the era. For example, Palamas connects the festive entrance of the laurel-wreathed demotic language with the “Ύμνος την Ελευθερίαν” (“Hymn to Liberty”) as a victory for Karaiskakis and Kolokotronis (Palamas: B 345). In the collection *Πατρίδες*, Rumelia, Morea, Romiosyne (*Ρωμιοσύνη*), “the breath of Digenis that has been poured for the everywhere, moulds/ Kanaris, Karaiskakis and Kolokotronis” (Palamas: Γ 19). Karaiskakis is associated with Garibaldi in the poem of the same name,<sup>7</sup> but also with Skanderberg in *Σατιρικά γυμνάσματα* (*Satirical exercises*) 15 and 16: “but no Karaiskakis came out of the destruction” (Palamas: E 265-266). Palamas the patriot swears an oath on many entities, including the divine land of Romanity (*Ρωμιοσύνη*): “by your ancient and youthful palikars, / – all those numerous Phokas, Karaiskakis and Leonidas, –/ by Olympus the klepht, by the green shoots,/” (Palamas: E 486)· a land connecting Leonidas's victory in antiquity with Byzantium and Phokas, as well as with the figure of Karaiskakis in the modern era. The younger hero becomes for the poet the crucial link that supports the

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed analysis, see Stavropoulou (2022).

<sup>7</sup> The “wild violet of Phalero; [...] wouldn't its pure, light wine / sweeten the anger of Karaiskakis, Fabvier's path?” (“άγρια φαληριώτικη βιολέττα · [...] τάχα και δε θα γλύκανε τ' αγνό αλαφρό κρασί της / του Καραϊσκάκη το θυμό, το δρόμο του Φαβιέρου;”) Palamas: E 164.

belief in the unbroken continuity of the Greeks, as well as the belief in submission to a higher goal (patriotic, but also poetic).<sup>8</sup>

Palamas also links him “with the particular grandeur of the Revolution [...] after Karaiskakis is Kolettis” (Palamas: Δ 485-486, 487). It is not insignificant that Karaiskakis is here linked with Ioannis Kolettis, not only because the general was a member of Kolettis’ network – Kolettis intervened so that Karaiskakis would be granted amnesty at his condemnation in 1824 – but he is also generally the politician who employed the figure of Karaiskakis to highlight the contribution of those of Epirus (Rumelia) to the revolutionary struggle.

Kolettis was the one who, as prime minister, in 1847 recommended that the celebration of 25 March take place at Karaiskakis’ memorial at Phalero, thus eliciting sharp reactions in the press and reviving old civil conflicts. This connection, however, does not mean that Palamas necessarily took a position as a poet in the memorial claims and conflicts of local and political authorities. Nevertheless, he cannot but perceive his revolutionary hero through the prism of irredentism and the Great Idea (*Μεγάλη Ιδέα*), a proponent of which is Ioannis Kolettis. However, contrary to P. Soutsos’ drama on Karaiskakis’ death where the poet stresses the ongoing discord between the Greeks, Palamas, wants to exalt Karaiskakis above the rival claims over memory between the Rumeliot (of Epirus) and the Peloponnesians, rendering him rather a symbol of *reconciliation* in the face of new struggles.<sup>9</sup>

### Karaiskakis’ Conversion and the Historical Sources

Precisely within this context of ethno-romanticism and the Great Idea, Palamas, as a careful student of historical sources – he read both Greek and foreign sources, primary texts, Peloponnesian and Rumeliot documents and demotic songs – while at the same time selective,<sup>10</sup> discerns yet another dimension to the narratives

<sup>8</sup> In his “Σύντομα σημειώματα”, Karaiskakis, together with Kolokotronis and Miaoulis, is associated with Leonidas. See Palamas: ΣΤ 229. In his “Ηρωικά πρόσωπα και κείμενα” (“Heroic figures and texts”) we read: “Heroic fighters with an armed mind. We know that the hero of the Mills [=Makrygiannis], together with Karaiskakis, and with Miaoulis, are the three summits; the high-priests, as it were, in the liturgy of national heroism. We know that the field marshal of Rumelia could appear as a branch straight off those Achilles’ tree”, Palamas: Η 55 and 62.

<sup>9</sup> Christina Koulouri offers a wide-angle cultural view on the formation of commemorative strategies, as well as conflicts, between different or even rival commemorative communities that formed around the Revolution of ’21. More specifically, we whole heartedly agree with the observation at the beginning of the chapter “Ηρωες, μνημεία και ανδριάντες” (“Heroes monuments and statues”) that public acts of commemoration do not necessarily serve as proof of collective memory, but as an example of how individual or political memory may intervene in social memory and/or contradict it. In the same chapter the author refers extensively to the strategic handling of Karaiskakis’ memory by I. Kolettis, calling to mind as well that in 1835 Otto chose for his maturation ceremony and ascendance to the throne to be celebrated with the transferal of Karaiskakis and those who fell during the siege of the Acropolis to the memorial at Phalero – perhaps again at the guidance of Kolettis, who was then serving as Minister of the Interior. From this perspective of commemorative handling, Palamas’ choice of Karaiskakis acquires for us even greater interest and may explain both the duration of his engagement with Karaiskakis, as well as his inability to complete his great, laudatory composition. See Koulouri (2020), especially 115-124.

<sup>10</sup> For instance, he chooses Fotakos’ memoirs, whose narrative turns out to be more inclusive from a national perspective, but not Spiliadis’ as well, who “differentiates himself from the dominant ethno-romantic narrative of the second half of the 19th century, as he associates himself with the ideological tradition of radical enlightenment”. On this, see Rotzokos and Tzakis (2014) 150-162.

surrounding Karaiskakis: the transformation of his hero “from a devil to an angel” *by means of* his involvement in the revolution. Karaiskakis *became* a hero; he *became* an angel; having been a thieving mercenary that is *he was transformed to a revolutionary*, and from then on he threw himself with his whole soul into the idea of the Revolution. This *conversion* is a central construct in Karaiskakis’ biography by Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, and being a sensitive reader, Palamas recognizes it:

You haven’t fulfilled, he said to him, up to now your debt to the homeland as much as you should have, Karaiskakis; may God enlighten you so that you will do it from here on. – I don’t deny it, Karaiskakis answered, as he assumed his usual boldness. When I desire I become an angel, and when I desire I become a devil. From here on, I have decided to become an angel.

The above exchange between Karaiskakis and Vasilios Boundoures of Hydra, and primarily Karaiskakis’ reported answer, is one of the most widely disseminated phrases and sayings attributed to the Rumeliote hero. It was published in the biography of Karaiskakis authored by Paparrigopoulos, who claimed it was conveyed to him by “witnesses present at the scene” in June 1826, on the day that the Administration assigned the leadership of the campaign to break the Ottoman siege of Athens to Karaiskakis (Paparrigopoulos 1867: 70).

It is this conversion that so moves the poet because it allows him to emphasize the submission of the individual to the national interest, to outline the “decisive angel”, without erasing his devilish side. In this conversion, moreover, he returns to his last portrait of Karaiskakis, in the commemorative prose work entitled “Ο γιος της καλογριάς” (“The Son of the Nun”) in 1927 (Palamas: ΙΓ 178-183: 181). There Palamas draws on the description of the historian Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, who

with a more objective eye and the most skilled pen outlines the portrait of the patriot: tireless, short, skinny but agile with the quickest and most expressive, clear, lively eyes [(i.e.) Karaiskakis but also his] dramatic fight in the depths of his soul [where] he defeats temptation. An impatience and indefatigable effort [that] eats away at his entire existence. Sarcastic, unbridled in his words – great and excellent in his works.

Thus, it is precisely the conversion, or the binary opposition of Karaiskakis’ character and behaviour that becomes the object of Palamas’ intense reflection, imprinted as a poetic stance and identified with the unrefined, daring poetic ego of the poet: “An awareness [of sin] hounds me mercilessly”, the poet writes (Palamas: Δ 303), expressing his Kassianism, and he uses Karaiskakis’ by then famous expression in order to tell his own story: “Whenever I desire I become an angel, whenever I desire I become a demon”, associating it with memories and references to his disobedient behaviour as a child. In other words, Karaiskakis constitutes both the raw material that the revolution itself molds into a hero, as it emerges from Paparrigopoulos’ telling, as well as the raw material for poetry, or for art generally, as in the faint sketch by the philhellene artist Karl Krazeisen that

offers, after Karaiskakis' death, his glorious portrait in a colored lithograph. (See fig.3).

### The Challenge of a Composition and the Diffusion of Inspiration

According to Palamas, the figure of Karaiskakis has not occupied "Greek poetry as much as it should have": "But the last Digenis, Karaiskakis, is still waiting on someone to sing his achievements", Palamas writes (Palamas: ΣΤ 503). Solomos, Kalvos "apparently do not even suspect his grandeur, while Valaoritis devotes to him one dry half-verse" (Palamas: ΙΓ 182). The hero's legend was crafted by the verse-poets of *katharevousa*; Paraschos wrote his memorial, while the first proponent of romanticism in Greece, Panagiotis Soutsos, was his only true hymn-writer, with his drama titled *O Georgios Karaiskakis* (1842). Historians and prose-writers Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, Christophoros Perraivos, G. Vlahogiannis, Rados, Spyridon Trikoupis (who composed Karaiskakis' fiery eulogy in 1827), and Nikolaos Dragoumis in his *Historical memories (Istorikes anamniseis)* – they all honored the hero. It is in the pages of simple chronographers, of the more reflective historians, concerning the "mercenary enchantment", where poetics is intertwined with historical truth that "always has a strong dose of subjectivity", as Palamas himself notes, that the poet finds the ideal channel for his planned composition titled "Το Τραγούδι του Καραϊσκάκη" ("The Song of Karaiskakis").<sup>11</sup> Within "the wide cage of flexible conclusions (of poetics and historical truth)", as he himself again observes, "the poet can walk freely in order to elevate the hero with two faces, the angel and the demon Karaiskakis, to the sphere of the ideal."<sup>12</sup> But perhaps this is exactly what simultaneously makes it difficult for him to be processed as a symbol of national identity in public discourse.

In the years to come, the designs for the composition take various forms but lead to only a few verses, such as e.g. those in demotic style:

And at the close of the nine seasons and the nine months  
The son of the Nun, Karaiskakis, arrived.  
(12.3.30) ("Το Τραγούδι του Καραϊσκάκη", Archives of Kostis Palamas, see fig.4)

Verses from Palamas' own drafts for the "Τραγούδι του Καραϊσκάκη" were eventually absorbed into the "Πρόλογος" of the *Φλογέρα του Βασιλιά*, which

<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, A. Soutsos, in the prologue to the poem "Διθύραμβος εις την εικοστήν πέμπτην Μαρτίου" ("Dithyramb on 25th March, 1868"), insists on the need for a harmonizing poetic narrative, as he refers to the senseless method "of our prose historiographers", who reduced the greatness of the struggle by describing the civil conflicts, in order to emphasize the value of his own poetic work and his brother's in maintaining historical memory and inspiring the younger generation. Scholar shighlight that the "Dithyramb" constitutes an "antidote to the history of Spyridon Trikoupis". See Stavropoulou (2022) 77-78. Naturally, we should not imagine from the above that the Soutsos brothers stood at a distance and did not participate, following a different agenda, in the political strategies of shaping collective memory.

<sup>12</sup> See The phrase "memories of narrators, of naïve soldiers in the struggle, of excited imaginations, of lyric poets, of unverified legends, of exclusive reflections [...] that are distant from the clouds of myth or from the solid ground of the real" ("Αι αναμνήσεις» [Memories"], Palamas: Δ 485-486-487). See also, "Το τέλος του ανεμόμυλου Α. Παλιού καιρού" ("The end of the windmill I. Old times"), Palamas: Δ 48-57:57.

simultaneously made a claim on Palamas' poetic inspiration.<sup>13</sup> The poet's admiration and awe seeps into his sonnets "Πόλεμος θάρχιζε" ("War would begin") and "Ο ντουλαμάς απάνω του άλικός" ("The heavy woolen coat red all over him") from the collection *Δεκατετράστιχα* (*The Fourteen Verses*, 1919).<sup>14</sup> In the first, Karaiskakis is descending the mountain, which becomes a golden staircase, with thieves and pirates in an impressive image of glorious divine visitation, of an epiphany, while in the second, the poet humbly falls at the hero's feet and desires to burn his books and every last trace of wisdom in his light".

Finally, Palamas transmits other thoughts and material in his two short but dense prose texts on Karaiskakis. The first is entitled "Γεώργιος Καραϊσκάκης" ("Georgios Karaiskakis"), and he describes him as follows:

Something black and grand. A fez like a little red hat. Straight mustache, harsh, like it was made of brass. Hair flowing onto his shoulders this way and that. The rough exterior of Rumelia to its fullest extent. Something of an archangel, of the morning star, of a brigadier general, of a field marshal. The angel and the demon, whose harmonious combination he boasted that he was [...]. (Palamas: ΙΣΤ' 337-340:337).

In this prose passage he proposes reshaping Karaiskakis' life as a dramatic trilogy, this time with the first part focusing on Katsantonis' right-hand man, Ali Pasha's servant, the unbridled Karaiskakis, sick and dying, hounded by the Administration. The second part would include his pardon by the Government, the salvation of Messolonghi, the revolutionary's self-denial, while in the third part his glory would be recorded, his conversion, the lifting of the siege of Athens, his heroic death, the homeland's grief.

The second prose text, which we mentioned already above, is entitled "Ο γιος της καλογριάς" ("The Son of the Nun"), and was composed on the 100th anniversary of the hero's death, in 1927. The narration is based partly on factual events and partly on Palamas' imagination, and his primarily post-Romantic view of art, which also includes the element of insight:

In 1918, on 22 March, as the sun rose on the feast of the Ascension I saw the general Karaiskakis in a dream. We were besieged in Messolonghi; he descended from the mountain that was suddenly illuminated as he came down. He was coming down to save us.<sup>15</sup> He stood out from among his company of chief mercenaries and leaders; he was all movement and fire. I presented myself to him, kissed his hand; he said something to me that either I didn't make out or no longer

<sup>13</sup> See the verse "Muse of the bellicose, enormous homeland, awake!/ All fires are out", etc. See also the diplomatic reading of the preceding verses by Pylarinos (Palamas, 2019) but even earlier, in relation to the "Πρόλογος" (Prologue) of *Φλογέρα του Βασιλιά* (*The King's flute*), 225-227.

<sup>14</sup> See "Ο ποιητής Κωστής Παλαμάς και το ελληνικόν πνεύμα" ("Kostis Palamas the poet and the Greek spirit") Palamas: ΙΔ 124, where we read: "Afterwards, I'm preparing the 'Τραγούδι του Καραϊσκάκη'. I consider this hero to be a strong and complex personality, full of contradictions. I do not know if I will have the last word on this issue. But on the figure of Karaiskakis I will focus the dreams of my People. Indeed, before I present him entire in my work, as a herald and foreshadowing, I have provided two sonnets in the *Δεκατετράστιχα* (The 14 Verses), where I present Karaiskakis' epic form".

<sup>15</sup> See the similarly laudatory scene in the sonnet "Πόλεμος θάρχιζε".

remember. I became bold; I said to myself: “How clearly he differs from the rest!” I went to fight. I waited for Turkish fire hour after hour and, turning to my companion, my assistant at the line, an old classmate – Archimedes Papadopoulos was his name – I said to him: “Kiss me because this may be the last time that we take fire”, and we bent down and kissed (Palamas: IF 178).

Here again we have the “epic and lyric protagonist in the national tragedy of seven years, the incomparable, mystic, two-faced and enigmatic” Karaiskakis, the one who inspires Palamas. This is the one he identifies with and wishes to immortalize.

In particular, Karaiskakis’ death constitutes a milestone for the poet, as we can see from the passage quoted above. Palamas, intentionally to be sure, makes no reference to the rumours of friendly fire<sup>16</sup> and betrayal that led the hero to his death; rather, he wishes to extract him from the trail of civil strife. Betrayal is an element that post-war poetry will make especial use of, mainly under the weight of the trauma of the Civil War.<sup>17</sup> On the contrary, in Palamas’ poetic imagination, Karaiskakis’ death seals the future and the national cohesion. His sacrifice enters him into the book “of life”, where the poet “whether he sings to us of Odysseus’ travels, or the brilliance of Beatrice or of Karaiskakis [...] represents for us a life”.<sup>18</sup>

### The Invasion of the Current and the Cancellation of the Composition

But what is it that cancels the initial idea for the composition? Up to now our approach has focused entirely on Palamas’ dialogue with the sources, where, as it seems, he follows the same method for composing his material as in *Φλογέρα του Βασιλιά* (*The King’s flute*). However, the war of 1897, and primarily the Macedonian Struggle as a contemporary national priority, turns his poetic spirit towards *Φλογέρα του βασιλιά* (*The King’s flute*), which in this case appears to overshadow the reflective poetic relationship of Palamas to Karaiskakis. On the other hand, the cancellation of the anniversary of the Revolution because of the Asia Minor campaign, as well as a host of other smaller and greater events, distance the poet ever more from his planned composition. Primarily, though, it was the end of World War I, which signaled the destruction of the Great Idea.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> These rumours circulated among his officers and soldiers immediately after the incident and are recorded in the first biographies of Karaiskakis (D. Aignan, K. Paparrigopoulos). Although not confirmed by historical research, they contributed to the formation of the mythical image of Georgios Karaiskakis as a national hero. See Tzakis D. (2009), *Γεώργιος Καραϊσκάκης*. Στη σειρά βιογραφιών με γενικό τίτλο “Οι Ιδρυτές της Νεώτερης Ελλάδας”, διεύθυνση σειράς Β. Παναγιωτόπουλος, Αθήνα 2009, σ. 107 κ.ε.

<sup>17</sup> Katsigianni A., Naoum I. (2024), “Γεώργιος Καραϊσκάκης: Οι περιπέτειες ενός εθνικού συμβόλου στη νεοελληνική ποίηση (πρώτο σχεδιάσμα)”, M. Morfakidis Filactós - E. E. Marcos Hierro (eds.), *Grecia, 200 años de construcción de una identidad: historia, lengua, literatura y cultura*, Granada, Sociedad Hispánica de Estudios Neogriegos, Granada, 153-172.

<sup>18</sup> “Ένα βιβλίο ‘της ζωής’”, Palamas: ΣΤ 318. Cf. also: “And you, holy, [...] /Book! / Your first page is the noose/ of the Patriarch,/ and your last page is the bullet/ that consumes the heroic Son of the Nun,/ and the golden name on your cover: TWENTY-ONE. [...] /await the blooming of five Marches yet, as long as it takes for the festival of your one hundred year anniversary to shine”. (“Στ’ άρματα” [To arms], from the collection *Βωμοί* [*Altars*], 1915, Palamas: Z 139).

<sup>19</sup> See also the “Πρόλογος” (“Prologue”) to the *Πεντασύλλαβος* (*The 5 Verses*, 1925), where Palamas with perhaps some bitterness recognizes: “The *Τραγούδι του Καραϊσκάκη* (*The Song of Karaiskakis*) or the *Καλλίμαχος* (*Callimachus*), which for some time have ignited the [poet’s]

The topicality of the shattered desire for national identity overcomes the internal poetic need. The times had changed, and a national poet ought to always be the barometer of both the time and the place. In other words, it is Palamas' internal conflict itself (both national *and* lyric) that, while it conceived this composition, also cancelled it. It was not the time for high tones. Shortly, Greekness would begin to find its bearings in the fragmentary, more closed and reticent poetic generation of the 30s, which in its turn would undertake to mythologize a different figure from the Revolution: General Makrygiannis. Perhaps whatever heroic there was to say had been said, and whatever had not been said seemed from then on to be out of place. In an ironic coincidence, the exact same thing happened in the case of Karaiskakis' statue in Athens, concerning the construction and placement of which a long discussion began in 1929,<sup>20</sup> on the anniversary of Karaiskakis' death, but which it seems is no longer relevant since the statue of him on horseback finally found its place in the public domain (alas!) in 1968, under a military regime (fig.5).

### **Palamas and the Fate of Heroism**

In one of his concluding observations on Karaiskakis, Palamas presents the nucleus of the initial, but lasting interest for this particular hero: "Carlyle defines the great man as the 'savior of his age'. Karaiskakis is the great man for Carlyle" (Palamas: ΙΣΤ' 34). There is no doubt that Palamas' search is connected to an emblematic moment in the history of ideas. The book by the historian and aesthetic philosopher Thomas Carlyle *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841) played a decisive role not only in the typology of heroes but also in the very function of poets as new 'spiritual heroes' of modernity, who ought to preserve the ideal of heroism, in contrast with the cold age of mechanical progress. In his historical work on the French Revolution, Carlyle argued, in opposition to Michelet and Tocqueville, that the revolution was not the result of economic inequalities caused by the 'Ancien Régime', but rather the "marvelous declaration of an oppressed spirituality", which existed already within the spirit of the people who

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imagination would have been the natural successors to *Φλογέρα του Βασιλιά*. And yet none of these." (Palamas: Z 439-440).

<sup>20</sup> We can follow the beginnings of the discussions from the pages of the *Εστία*, through which one of the members of the Committee, Zacharias Papantoniou, exchanged views with Yannis Vlahogiannis. The Committee received the order to point out the most suitable place in the region surrounding the Zappeion, where the horse-riding statue could be set up. On the other hand, Vlahogiannis considered that it was inappropriate for the likeness of the "Son of the Nun" to complement the "Fisherman", the "Little mower" and the other sculptures that make up the outdoor collection of the Zappeion. The statue's location should be "conspicuous" in order to call to mind the hero's story. Indeed, he made a counter proposal: the formation of a Pantheon of Heroes on the Pedion tou Areos, on the model of the Luxembourg Garden in Paris, which constitutes a literary Pantheon. Papantoniou disagreed with the argument that the Field Marshal should not be squeezed into some small square or to asphyxiate "among the skyscrapers that are today being erected around him", concluding that the only square that could receive him was Syntagma square, which however was already unfortunately occupied by the tasteless, in his opinion, sculpted complex "Theseus saves Hippodamia" by Johannes Pfuhl (today in Viktoria square). The disagreements put the plans on indefinite hold, and the issue essentially resurfaced in 1960 with the formation of the Funding Committee for the erection of the monument, under the presidency of Konstantinos Tsatsos. An artistic contest was held, and the sculptor Michael Tombros was proclaimed winner. The Authorities' disagreements over the location were again interminable! The unveiling ceremony finally took place in 1968, during the dictatorship.

were rising up.<sup>21</sup> Carlyle's theory of heroism fed with philosophical reflection a new version of the hero, who expresses the collective body, but simultaneously deviates from it, in relation to certain ethical qualities and leadership functions that the hero accomplishes.<sup>22</sup>

To cut a long discussion short and conclude somewhat briefly, in the person of Karaiskakis, Palamas saw a new version of historical truth which combined popular religious sentiment, orality, wartime engagement, ethical grandeur and the reflection of the revolutionary hero in the 'heroic poet' of later generations, who would compose the 'song' of the hero. Participating in the European discussion of his day on the fate of heroism, Palamas was searching for the destiny of a new patriotism in an age that no longer required fustanellas but new heroic gestures, where the anonymous heroes were dying en masse in the trenches.

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<sup>21</sup> See Sorensen and Kinser (2013), *Thomas Carlyle:4*

<sup>22</sup> Of course, it is may be not necessary to recall the eclectic affinities apparent between Nietzsche's thought and Carlyle's, even if the anti-romantic critique of the former on the latter highlights the 'ethical perfectionism' of Carlyle's herological model (Meakins 2014: 258-278). On the other hand, Palamas' engagement with Karaiskakis as a 'spiritual hero' of his people could always be examined with in the broader framework of Yannis Apostolakis' critique of Palamas' poetry (*Η ποίηση στη ζωή μας [Poetry in our lives]*, 1923) and its inability to express the "heroic human being", as Solomos does (Moullas 1994: 65-69; Tziouvas 1994: 37-55; Boukalas 2019).

### Acknowledgements

Our collaboration in writing the present article necessitated both research and a careful, sensitive reading of Palamas' corpus, as well as the theoretical foundation and interweaving of the questions being investigated. If we can separate the two desiderata into research roles, Anna Katsigianni contributed more to the former, while Ioanna Naoum more to the latter. We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to the Kostis' Palamas Foundation for generously providing us with archival material, to emeritus professor K. G. Kasinis for his significant contribution in transcribing difficult passages in hand-written manuscripts, and the archivist Sophia Moustou, for her support. We also owe thanks to the Cultural Center Kostis Palamas (Στέγη Γραμμάτων Κωστής Παλαμάς), at the University of Patra and the Association of Philologists in the Region of Patra for our participation in the proceedings of the interdisciplinary, online conference *Όψεις της ελληνικής επανάστασης του 1821 (Aspects of Greek Revolution of 1821)*, 15-17 October 2021; to the Scientific and Organizing Committee of the Second International Scientific Conference, «'Απ' των Κυθήρων τα νερά κι απ' τους αφρούς της Κύπρος', 'Μεθύστε με τ' αθάνατο κρασί του '21'. Κωστής Παλαμάς και κυπριακά γράμματα» ("From the waters of Kythera and from the foams of Cyprus', 'Get drunk with the immortal wine of '21'. Kostis Palamas and Cypriot letters"), 22-24 October 2021, within the framework of celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Greek Revolution held by the Literature and Criticism Association of Cyprus and the Group "Ηχώ της Κύπρου" ("Echo of Cyprus"), Cyprus. Finally, we thank the University of Patra and the Topalis' Foundation for our participation in the Online anniversary Workshop, "Το '21 μετά το '21. Λογοτεχνικές αναπαραστάσεις και ιστορική μνήμη" ("21 after '21. Literary Representations and Historical Memory"), 20. 11. 2021, as they gave us the opportunity to announce the first results of our common project on the symbolic reception of Karaiskakis. We also owe special thanks to our dear colleague Yiannis Papatheodorou, for our fruitful discussions.

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## Περίληψη

Άννα Κατσιγιάννη – Ιωάννα Ναούμ

### Προκαταρκτικές σκέψεις για την κατοχύρωση ενός θρύλου: Ο Καραϊσκάκης σύμφωνα με τον Παλαμά

Η σύνδεση του εθνοσυμβολισμού με τις νεωτερικές επαναστάσεις του 19<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα αποτελεί ένα συγκριτολογικό πεδίο μελέτης που, τα τελευταία χρόνια, έχει φέρει στο προσκήνιο τη μελέτη των ηρώων/ηρωίδων του «εθνικού πανθέου» ως μυθοποιητικό και μυθο-γενετικό πυρήνα της ίδιας της εθνικής ταυτότητας. Ο 19ος κυρίως και σε μεγάλο βαθμό ο 20ός αιώνας, υπήρξαν οι κατεξοχήν αιώνες κατασκευής, επινόησης και αναπαράστασης των ευρωπαϊκών «εθνικών ηρώων». Από την άποψη αυτή, η μελέτη μας φιλοδοξεί να ενταχθεί στο πεδίο μελέτης των «εθνικών ηρώων» ως μιας γενετικής μορφής βιο-αφηγήσεων που συγκροτούν ιδρυτικά τις νεωτερικές και τις μοντέρνες «μυθολογίες». Στο πλαίσιο του, επικεντρωνόμαστε σε μια μόνο μελέτη περίπτωσης (case study), που αφορά στην αναπαράσταση του Γεωργίου Καραϊσκάκη στην ποίηση του Κωστή Παλαμά. Ο συνδυασμός του ήρωα και του ποιητή δεν είναι τυχαίος. Όπως έχει διαπιστωθεί, η καλλιτεχνική συνείδηση του Παλαμά, στιγματισμένη έντονα από την ταπεινωτική ήττα του 1897, στρέφεται σε μια νέα αναζήτηση και αμφιταλάντευση: στην αναζήτηση του ατόμου που υπηρετεί τους εθνικούς στόχους ενώ, παράλληλα, στέκεται πάνω από το κοινωνικό σύνολο. Πιο αναλυτικά, η γοητεία που ασκεί ο συγκεκριμένος ήρωας στον Παλαμά φτάνει σε σημείο ταύτισης, όπως θα δούμε παρακάτω, και του υπαγορεύει την ανάγκη για μία επί μακρόν σχεδιαζόμενη ποιητική σύνθεση η οποία δεν ευοδώνεται, αλλά και στην παράλληλη διασπορά της παρουσίας του Καραϊσκάκη στο σύνολο του έργου του. Η προσέγγισή μας επιχειρεί να συνδέσει δύο διαστάσεις της σχέσης ανάμεσα στον Παλαμά και στον ήρωά του: αφενός, τη διαχρονική πρόσληψη της προσωπικότητας του Καραϊσκάκη από τον ποιητή, όπως αυτή διαμορφώνεται σε διάλογο με τις διαθέσιμες στην εποχή του ιστορικές πηγές αλλά και με τη σύγχρονή του ιστορική συγκυρία και αφετέρου, την ποιητική μυθο-πλαστική σύλληψη του ήρωα, σε ορισμένες χαρακτηριστικές στιγμές στο έργο του Παλαμά, αποκαλυπτικές για την ίδια την ποιητική του. Αφορμή για τις ερμηνευτικές σκέψεις που διατυπώνουμε στη συνέχεια, αποτελεί ένα αρχαικό τεκμήριο, ο φάκελος με το «Τραγούδι του Καραϊσκάκη» που απόκειται στα κατάλοιπα του αρχείου του ποιητή, στο Ίδρυμα Κωστή Παλαμά. Πρόκειται για μια σχεδιαζόμενη, διαρκώς αναβαλλόμενη ποιητική σύνθεση για τον Γεώργιο Καραϊσκάκη η οποία, όπως φαίνεται και από το παρακειμενικό υλικό του φακέλου, απασχολεί τον ποιητή από το 1889 ως το 1930. Ο ποιητής ταλαντεύεται ανάμεσα στον αρχικό τίτλο, «Το Τραγούδι του Καραϊσκάκη» και σε έναν εναλλακτικό, «Ο γιος της καλογριάς» και πάντως σε όλο αυτό το διάστημα συλλέγει υλικό από ιστορικές πηγές αλλά και από την επικαιρότητα (εκδηλώσεις, επέτειοι, ημερήσιος τύπος), ενώ ταυτόχρονα αναζητά την κατάλληλη ποιητική μορφή για να διοχετεύσει την ευαισθησία του, «επικός ύμνος...» ή «σε λόγους...», με άξονες κυρίως το δημοτικό τραγούδι αλλά και τη *Φλογέρα του Βασιλιά*, προγραμματική, επίσης, σύνθεση, την οποία για ένα μεγάλο διάστημα επεξεργάζεται παράλληλα με το ποιητικό σχέδιο για τον Καραϊσκάκη. Η σύνθεση δεν ξεπερνά ποτέ ορισμένους σκόρπιους στίχους και ποιητολογικούς στοχασμούς τόσο για ενδογενείς λόγους (η φιλοδοξία του Παλαμά διοχετεύεται στη *Φλογέρα του Βασιλιά*), όσο και εξωγενείς

που αφορούν στις νέες ιστορικές συνθήκες του Α΄ Παγκοσμίου Πολέμου και της Μικρασιατικής Καταστροφής.

Ωστόσο, μας ενδιαφέρουν οι λόγοι για τους οποίους ο Παλαμάς στρέφεται στον Καραϊσκάκη βλέποντας σε αυτόν το είδωλό του. Το βασικό μας επιχείρημα είναι διττό: Αφενός, μέσα στο εθνορομαντικό και μεγαλοϊδεατικό πλαίσιο, ο Παλαμάς ως προσεκτικός αναγνώστης της ιστοριογραφίας και των ιστορικών πηγών της Επανάστασης του 1821 (διαβάζει Έλληνες και ξένους, εκδόσεις πηγών, Πελοποννήσιους και Ρουμελιώτες αγωνιστές, έγγραφα και δημοτικά τραγούδια) αλλά συνάμα και επιλεκτικός, διακρίνει μια διάσταση που μοναδικά ο Κ. Παπαρηγόπουλος προβάλλει στη μόνη ηρωική εξάλλου βιογραφία που συγγράφει για τον Καραϊσκάκη. Αυτή είναι η μεταστροφή/η μεταμόρφωση του ήρωα «από διάβολο σε άγγελο» μέσα από την εμπλοκή του στην επαναστατική δράση. Αυτή η μεταστροφή είναι που συγκινεί τον ποιητή, γιατί του επιτρέπει να τονίσει την υποταγή του ατομικού στο εθνικό συμφέρον, να σκιαγραφήσει τον αποφασισμένο άγγελο χωρίς να παραγράψει τη διαβολική του υπόσταση. Ταυτόχρονα αυτή η διττή υπόσταση του Καραϊσκάκη, όπως ο ίδιος ο ποιητής παρατηρεί, του επιτρέπει να «μπορεί να περπατά ελεύθερος ο ποιητής για να υψώσει τον ήρωα με το δίδυμο πρόσωπο, τον άγγελο και δαίμονα Καραϊσκάκη, στη σφαίρα του ιδανικού» και να κινηθεί «στο πλατύ κλουβί των ελαστικών συμπερασμάτων της [ποιητικής και της ιστορικής αλήθειας]».

Αφετέρου, δεν υπάρχει αμφιβολία πως η αναζήτηση του Παλαμά συνδέεται με μια εμβληματική στιγμή μέσα στην ιστορία των ιδεών. Το βιβλίο του ιστορικού και αισθητικού φιλοσόφου Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic History* (1841) είχε παίξει καταλυτικό ρόλο όχι μόνο στην τυπολογία των ηρώων αλλά και στην ίδια τη λειτουργία των ποιητών ως των νέων 'πνευματικών ηρώων' της νεωτερικότητας, που οφείλουν να διασώσουν το ιδανικό του ηρωισμού, σε αντίθεση με τη ψυχρή εποχή της μηχανικής ανάπτυξης. Στο ιστορικό έργο του, μάλιστα, για τη Γαλλική Επανάσταση (*The French Revolution*, 1837), ο Carlyle υποστήριζε, αντιρρητικά προς τον Michelet και τον Tocqueville, πως η επανάσταση δεν ήταν το προϊόν των οικονομικών ανισοτήτων που είχε προκαλέσει το 'Παλιό Καθεστώς' αλλά η «θαυμαστή διακήρυξη μιας καταπιεσμένης πνευματικότητας», η οποία ενυπήρχε ήδη μέσα στη λαϊκή ψυχή των εξεγερμένων. Υπό αυτό το πρίσμα, στο πρόσωπο του Καραϊσκάκη, ο Παλαμάς έβλεπε μια νέα εκδοχή «ιστορικής αλήθειας», που συνδύαζε τη λαϊκή θρησκευτικότητα, την προφορικότητα, την εμπόλεμη δράση, το ηθικό μεγαλείο αλλά και την αντανάκλαση του επαναστατημένου ήρωα στον μεταγενέστερο 'ηρωικό ποιητή', που θα έφτιαχνε το "τραγούδι" του για αυτόν. Συμμετέχοντας στη σύγχρονη του ευρωπαϊκή συζήτηση για τις τύχες του ηρωισμού, ο Παλαμάς αναζητούσε τις τύχες ενός νέου πατριωτισμού, μόνον που η εποχή του δεν είχε πια ανάγκη από φουστάνελες αλλά από καινούργιες ηρωικές χειρονομίες, καθώς οι ανώνυμοι ήρωες πέθαιναν μαζικά στα χαρακώματα των πολέμων.