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Imaging Suli

Interactions between Philhellenic Ideas
and Greek Identity Discourse



IMAGING SULI. INTRODUCTION

Suli or **Souli** (both: soo'lyē), small mountainous district, N Greece, in Epirus. Its inhabitants, the Suliotes, who lived in fortlike villages in the mountains, remained independent during most of the occupation of Greece by the Ottoman Turks. They fought successfully (1790–1802) against Ali Pasha, the Turkish governor of Ioánnina. In 1803, however, Ali Pasha massacred many of them after concluding a false truce. The Suliotes were again decimated in a new rebellion in 1820, when many fled to the Ionian Islands.

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Concept and historical background

From the turn of the century to the Greek Revolution

The weakness of the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries brought forth a new political question of creating new states on Turkish territory, states more or less dependent on the European great powers. At this point the traditional, literary interest in Greece that Europe had developed from the very beginnings of the modern era was updated and became a current affair in international politics. This development brought about the philhellenic movement.¹

The transfer of information between Greece and Western Europe contributed to this process. Travelers from the West described Greek topography, as well as the features and customs of the Greek people, but also they asked about the future of the territories they visited. Already in the last years of the 18th century a project to create an independent Greek state had been postulated, as the example of the English diplomat and traveler William Eton shows.² Travel accounts were published and enthusiastically

1 There is no final consensus among scholars regarding the question of what philhellenism actually is: an individual attitude, a massive social movement, a fashion or a political idea. Its historicity and chronological frames are also currently debated. In this study, I use a broad definition: my approach is based primarily on M. Espagne, G. Pécout, *Introduction*, in: “*Revue Germanique Internationale*”, 1–2 2005. URL: <http://rgi.revues.org/63> [2014–09-25].

In short, the authors propose to gather under the notion of philhellenism three different but related historical phenomena: (1) an intellectual trend that alludes to Ancient Greece as an aesthetic and political model; (2) the political movement aiming to help Greeks in their fight against the Ottomans, particularly during the Revolution of 1821–1830; and (3) the solidarity with the Greeks in the name of the ideals of the Spring of the Nations and of Mediterranean historical identity, lasting till the beginning of the 20th century.

2 Eton’s narration about Greece included in his work *Survey of the Turkish Empire* is analyzed in detail in the first chapter of this thesis. Cf. also L. Droulia, *The Revival of the*

read, and thanks to them the European readership could now have an increasingly detailed picture of Greece and its situation.

Another important factor favoring the Greek case in Europe was the activity of Greeks in the West. Educated members of the Greek diaspora in Italy, France, Germany and Austria informed local intellectuals about the need to create a Greek state. The Greek presence in the tsar's court and army influenced the Russian campaigns in the Balkans in the second half of the 18th century, but Eastern Europe became even more important when the Society of Friends was established by Greek merchants in Odessa (1814). Basing itself on Western patterns of secret political organizations, it aimed at fomenting an uprising against the Ottomans.

News arrived by the same channels in the opposite direction as well, from the West to Greece. The accounts of European travelers and historians were translated into Greek, while merchants and intellectuals of the diaspora corresponded with their Greek friends and passed news on to Ottoman Greece. Thanks to these ties, philhellenism soon echoed in Greece.³

In the present thesis I will trace some of this flow of information between Greece and other European countries. Instead of separating different traditions, I assume a transnational perspective with the aim of reconstructing different components in the vision of Suli, a mountain area in South Epirus. Before the 1790s, the tiny and inaccessible region of Suli was totally absent from print culture. My task is to gather, classify and interpret what was written on this mountain district and its inhabitants in the 19th century.

The geographical position of Suli favors the transfer of information. Suli lies close to the Ionian Islands, which from 1798 were under French rule and from 1815 were a British protectorate. As such, they became a place of intense cultural exchange and a convenient point of departure for European travelers to Greece. What is more, during the 19th century many Suliotes stayed on the island of Corfu, where they could meet politicians, diplomats and intellectuals from Europe. Also, its geographical vicinity to the western shore of the Adriatic Sea sparked an interest in Suli among the Italians and, no less importantly, among the Greek diaspora in Italy.

For that reason, the stories about Suli provide good material for tracing the interactions between philhellenic ideas and Greek self-image.⁴ Greek intellectuals and the founders of the Greek Enlightenment, such as Rigas Feraios, Christoforos Perraivos

Greek Ideal and Philhellenism. A Perambulation, in: *Filhellenizm w Polsce, Rekonesans*, ed. M. Borowska, M. Kalinowska, J. Ławski, K. Tomaszuk, Warszawa 2007, p. 28.

3 Cf. E. Konstantinou, *Graecomania and Philhellenism*, in: "European History Online (EGO)", published by the Leibniz Institute of European History (IEG), Mainz 2012. URL: [http://www.ieg-ego.eu/konstantinoue-2012-en_\[2014-10-01\]](http://www.ieg-ego.eu/konstantinoue-2012-en_[2014-10-01]); G. Tolia, *Οι αυτοχέες του φιλελληνισμού*, in: *Ελλάδα και Γαλλία τον 19ο αιώνα/La France et la Grèce au XIXe siècle*, ed. E. Chrisos, Ch. Farnaud, p. 253–275.

4 I borrow the concept of interaction from the methodological proposition called *histoire croisée*, an intellectually sophisticated critical approach towards the traditional comparative and transfer studies. (Cf. M. Werner, B. Zimmermann, *Beyond comparison: Histoire croisée and the challenge of reflexivity*, in: "History and Theory", v. 45, no 1 (02.2006), p. 30–50). This methodological proposition focuses on interactions between various objects and is based on the ontological presumptions of constructionism that basically rules out the analysis of a separate unit detached from others. From this perspective, the object of study exists only through its contact with other objects.

and Adamantios Korais contributed to the creation of the philhellenic set of ideas, but they also absorbed ideas from the West in order to construct on that basis their own projects of Greek consciousness. This especially concerns Suli, the story of which became one of the *mythes de fondation* of the modern Greek state.⁵

In order to clarify the central idea of my thesis, I will discuss the first mentions of Suli. To my knowledge, the name Suli appears in print for the first time in Vienna in 1797, in a publication from a Greek press. Rigas Feraios, a Greek writer, political thinker and revolutionary based in Vienna, placed Suli on his *Map of Greece*⁶, while in his poem *War Song* the Suliotes are already presented as famous: “Suliotes and Maniots, famous lions, how long are you going to sleep enclosed in your caves?”⁷ The author alludes to the gallantry of the Suliotes when he calls on the Greeks to take up arms against the Ottomans.

Other mentions prove that the Suliotes indeed had already become famous. Nothing indicates that the English traveler and diplomat William Eton knew of Rigas’ plans regarding Suli. Eton is the author of the first lengthy account of Suli (1798), included in his text *Present State of Greece*, analyzed in detail in the first chapter of this thesis.⁸ Eton’s work in French translation was read by Christoforos Perraivos, a Greek historian of Suli. His *Brief History of Suli and Parga* (Paris 1803)⁹ served as the basic source of information about this region for both Greeks and philhellenes. It was surely known to Adamantios Korais, a Greek Enlightenment intellectual who included information about Suli in a speech on the present situation of Greece delivered in Paris in 1803.¹⁰ In turn, Korais influenced the image of Suli sketched by other travelers to Greece: the German Jakob Salomon Bartholdy (1805)¹¹ and the Frenchman François

For this study it is important that this approach rejects the traditional static models of comparison and of one-way cultural transfer. As a consequence, the juxtaposition of two static objects is replaced with the assumption of their continuous mutual interactions and transformations. The catalog of these interactions is extremely vast, including all kinds of intersections of viewpoints, entities, persons, practices and objects, as well as transformations based on reciprocity, any kind of intertwining, interweaving, etc. All these interactions are depicted through the capacious metaphor of crossing – a contact that creates a change in every object involved in it. In this way I conceive the interactions between two discourses: philhellenism and Greek identity discourse.

- 5 I use the term “myth” in the way proposed by Alexis Politis, cf. A. Politis, *Το μυθολογικό κενό, Δοκίμια και σχόλια για την ιστορία, τη φιλολογία, την ανθρωπολογία και άλλα*, Αθήνα 2000; A. Politis, *Ρομαντικά χρόνια: Ιδεολογίες και Νοοτροπίες στην Ελλάδα του 1830–1880*, Αθήνα 1998.
- 6 Rigas Velestinlis Feraios, *Η χάρτα της Ελλάδος*, Vienna 1797, 5th plate.
- 7 Org. “Σουλλιώταις, καί Μανιώταις, λιοντάρια ξακουστά./ Ός πότε σταις σπηλαίς σας, κομάσθε σφαλιστά”. Cf. Rigas Velestinlis Feraios, *Θούριος*, in: *Νέα Πολιτική Διοίκησης των κατοίκων της Ρούμελης της Μικράς Ασίας των Μεσογείων Νήσων και της Βλαχομπογδανίας*, Βιέννα 1797. Rigas probably drew his information about Suli from Christoforos Perraivos, whom he met in Bucharest in 1793. Cf. Ch. Perraivos, *Σύντομος βιογραφία του αιδίμου Ρήγα Φεραίου του Θετταλού*, εν Αθήναις 1860, p. 16.
- 8 W. Eton, *A Survey of the Turkish Empire*, London 1798.
- 9 Ch. Perraivos, *Ιστορία σύντομος του Σουλίου και Πάργας*, εν Παρισίοις 1803.
- 10 A. Korais, *Mémoire sur l'état actuel de la civilisation dans la Grèce*, Paris 1803.
- 11 J.S. Bartholdy, *Bruchstücke zur nähern Kenntniss des heutigen Griechenlands, gesammelt auf einer Reise im Jahre 1803–1804*, Berlin 1805.

Pouqueville (1805)¹². So, at its very beginning the European vision of Suli was created by three diaspora Greeks, one English traveler, one French military physician and one German diplomat.

A second phase of the diffusion of information about Suli was marked by the travels of Lord Byron, who proposed a completely different view of Epirus and Albania. The Romantic image of the wild, exotic Suliotes that Byron proposed in the second canto of his narrative poem *Child Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812)¹³ influenced especially the Western image of Suli, while the Greek tradition was to some extent resistant to Byronic trends. It may be said that Byronism creates a separate thread in the English tradition of imaging Suli. Another milestone in its history is the outbreak of the Greek Revolution.

The Greek Revolution and philhellenism

The Greek Revolution in 1821 radically intensified philhellenic sentiments. More information about the situation in Greece started to reach Western Europe. Practices revealing a positive attitude towards Greeks and their political affairs became much more frequent. The assemblage of these practices and their results intensified the philhellenic discourse.

The thematic scope of the works that formed this discourse focused on the Greek Revolution, but was not limited to it. In the range of philhellenism one may include also the European reactions to the wars that precede the actual Greek Revolution, as well as later support to the Greek irredentist movement. The philhellenic discourse conceived in this way includes any kind of cultural activity: literature (*belle-lettres* and writings of any kind), visual arts, design (decorations, household articles), music, theater, spectacles and organized events.

Thus, the concept of discourse embraces philhellenism as a whole, in spite of the variety of its realizations, its internal contradictions, and its different local variants. It stresses the integrity of philhellenic works: the themes, values and ideologies that unite them. Indeed, it seems that individual philhellenic works create a common narrative pattern and they do not function beyond it, remaining in strict contact with other works and creating a common meaning.¹⁴

Interestingly, philhellenic texts might be read as voices for the creation of the independent Greek state even when they have no explicit propagandistic character and do not take the form of an open appeal. The discourse determines their actual meaning.

12 F. Pouqueville, *Voyage en Morée, à Constantinople en Albanie, et dans plusieurs autres parties de l'Empire ottoman pendant les années 1798, 1799, 1800 et 1801*, Paris 1805.

13 Byron, *Child Harold's Pilgrimage*, canto 2, London 1812.

14 This approach is accompanied by the *weak ontology* of a literary work and a conviction about the intertextuality of its meaning. (Cf. R. Nycz, *Poetyka intertekstualna: tradycje i perspektywy*, in: *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy*, ed. M.P. Markowski, R. Nycz, Kraków 2006, p. 153–180.) If a piece of literature is not autonomous, if it cannot be understood beyond the context of other works and, finally, if it has no objective, stable sense, independent from any extra-textual factors, it becomes a kind of “intertextual construct”. Its meaning lasts only as long as its context (discourse) remains unchanged. (“Intertextual construct” is a term of Jonathan Culler, Cf. J. Culler, *Komparatystyka literacka – nareszcie (Comparative literature, at last)*, in: idem, *Literatura w Teorii*, trans. M. Maryl, Kraków 2013, p. 325.)

The second canto of Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is a good example: at the time of its creation it was not a philhellenic manifesto on the part of its author. Still, this text may have functioned as such within the frames of the discourse.¹⁵

Moreover, philhellenism conceived in this way is not focused exclusively on literature of high artistic quality and does not hide its political involvement. The performativity of many philhellenic works is clearly shown by their titles: *Adresse au peuple anglais, par un ami des Grecs*; *Appel au Français en faveur des Grecs*; *au Sultan*; *Discours sur les services que les Grecs ont rendus la civilisation*; *Marche des Troupes Grecques Pour le Forte-Piano*, etc.¹⁶ Philhellenism often engages non-artistic spheres of public life (religion, politics and ethics) and has a precise political aim: to influence public opinion and bring real help to the Greeks.

The ideological aftermaths of philhellenism are interesting because of their role in the process of the creation of identities, whether the European identity or national ones. Philhellenic discourse was used to create a sense of community, but it was also used to build otherness. In that sense, it harmonizes with Greek identity discourses and its echoes would last for the whole century.

The most spectacular episodes of the war against Turkey became central themes of many philhellenic works and formed a kind of philhellenic repertoire of heroes and their deeds. The map of the commonplaces of European philhellenism contains such episodes as the massacres of Chios (1822) and Psara (1824), the destruction of the Ottoman flagship at Chios by Constantine Kanaris (1822), the death of Markos Botsaris at Karpenisi (1823), the fall of Missolonghi (1826) and the death of Georgios Karaiskakis (1827).¹⁷

In most cases we can trace how philhellenic themes spread. Usually, the path leads from scholarly or utilitarian texts (accounts, memoirs, histories) to strictly literary and artistic works. It sometimes happened, moreover, that an outstanding realization of one theme would attract other authors. In this manner numerous paraphrases, translations, copies, lithographs, etc. were created and enforced the spread of philhellenism. I shall give one example from the legends of Suli: an episode from the *History of the Greek Revival* (1824) of François Pouqueville¹⁸ inspired the famous Romantic painter Ary Scheffer to create the monumental oil painting *Femmes Souliotes* (1827).¹⁹ Then, this painting was a source of inspiration for other painters, such as Virgilio Diaz (1830)²⁰ and Constance Blanchard (1838).²¹

15 L. Droulia, *The Revival...*, p. 32.

16 I have chosen several titles published in 1821 from the *Repertoire* of L. Droulia: *Philhellenisme, Ouvrages inspirés par la guerre de l'indépendance grecque 1821–1833, Répertoire Bibliographique*, Athènes 1974.

17 G. Heß, *Missolonghi. Genèse, transformations multimédiales et fonctions d'un lieu identitaire du philhellénisme*, in: "Revue Germanique Internationale", 1–2 2005, URL: <http://rgi.revues.org/92> [2014–08–01].

18 F. Pouqueville, *Histoire de la Régénération de la Grèce*, Paris 1824.

19 A. Scheffer, *Les femmes souliotes, voyant leurs maris défaits par les troupes d'Ali, pacha de Janina, décident de se jeter du haut des rochers*, 1827, oil on canvas, 3.54 x 2.48 m, Paris, Louvre.

20 N. Díaz de la Peña, *Les femmes souliotes*, ~1830, oil on canvas, 1.00 x 0.56 m, Bordeaux, Musée des Beaux-Arts.

21 C. Blanchard, *Des Femmes Grecques Refugiées sur un Rocher. Se voyant poursuivies par les Turcs, qui viennent de massacrer leurs époux et leurs pères, elles prennent la résolution*

Still, even the *History of the Greek Revival* is to some extent fictionalized. The title alone indicates that the whole narration is subject to the claim of a historical process of how Ancient Greece was revived in modern times. Therefore, it is inscribed into a certain universal scheme, a historiographical cliché. Pouqueville's work indeed might be read as a novel, with its narrator, plot threads, episodes and characters.

Furthermore, to some degree the narration is based on Pouqueville's previously written accounts from Greece. However, a critical reading of these travelogues will reveal that the author did not actually reach many places in person. Sometimes he projected his own imagination and expectations onto the lands he visited, rather than observing them carefully or interacting on equal terms with their inhabitants. Consequently, in spite of the documentary aims of the author, Pouqueville's *History* may be analyzed as a fictional narrative and examined together with Ary Scheffer and other poetic or artistic realizations of the philhellenic idea. Works of such a different character may be categorized together by the concept of a Legend.

The concept

I use the term "legends of Suli" for images and narrations on Suli and its inhabitants the Suliotes.²² The main elements of the legends of Suli are stereotypical images of Suliote men and women, literary visions of the landscape of Suli, biographical legends of famous Suliotes and historiographical legends about the Suliote wars and the fall of Suli. These themes intertwine, creating a single complex legendary image of Suli and its inhabitants. In this work, my aim is to trace and reconstruct this image based on sources of any kind, from accounts of travelers to Greece, through historical works and memoirs, to fictional literature, poetry, drama and a wide variety of works in the visual arts.

The construction of the legends was favored by certain historical factors. First, the Suliotes were basically illiterate and they did not write their own history (in the form of chronologies, chronicles, memoirs, acts and so forth). Secondly, the greatest European interest in Suli started in the 1820s, after the outbreak of the Greek Revolution and more precisely after the death of its hero Markos Botsaris in 1823. Thus, numerous scholars and travelers who wanted to reconstruct the course of the fall of Suli had to rely on oral narrations, necessarily distorted after more than two decades had passed. Third, the travelers who were the authors of the majority of early works about Suli might have misunderstood the cultural and political reality of Epirus. They hardly ever knew the Greek language, not to mention Albanian, and in most cases they were dependent on their guides. Moreover, the travel accounts they published

de se precipiter dans les flots avec leurs enfants, exhibited at Salon 1838, no. 135, Toulouse, Musée des Augustins.

22 In literary studies the term "legend" is defined in various ways. For this work most important thing is that the legendary images and narrations are consolidated by the tradition and created under the influence of not exclusively scholarly means, mostly by literature and art. Therefore, the legends speak about historical subjects, but they are not necessarily true. However, they are always plausible. It results from the fact that legends try to be convincing, because they were created in order to realize certain social functions. About different uses of the term in literary studies, cf. M. Staniszkis, K. Maciąg (eds.), *Między biografią, literaturą i legendą*, Rzeszów 2010.

in their countries of origin depended on the demand of the local book markets. The expectations of this readership to hear of exotic, mysterious and unexplored lands and cultures undoubtedly shaped the image they presented.

Another crucial factor in the creation of the legends of Suli are ideologies, world-views and the authors' personal aims. It often happened that Suli and the Suliotes were presented in works of art and in texts that had not only an informative but also (or primarily) a persuasive character. Persuasion is a crucial feature of philhellenism, a cultural movement focused primarily on action and engaged in the present political situation.²³ For this reason, numerous philhellenic texts take on the style of an appeal in order to sway European public opinion. The Suliotes may represent the Greeks or embodied values, and the misery of these mountaineers may be related in order to move readers and force them to take a stance in political discourse, or even act in favor of the Greeks. In politically dependent lands, such as Poland or in the Italian peninsula, the Suliotes might have served as an example to follow.

The tenor of Greek texts is similar. Both Rigas Feraios, the first Greek intellectual who mentions Suli, and Christoforos Perraivos, the main Greek contributor to the creation of the legends of Suli, speak of the Suliotes in order to call on their compatriots to raise and fight for independence from the Ottomans. Also, after the Revolution, when the Kingdom of Greece had been created, demand for patriotic texts formed the Greek image of Suli.

As a result, the Suliotes were constantly subjected to literary processes, the most important of which was idealization, and more precisely a specific form of it, antiquation. In short, the Suliotes were shown as representing supreme patriotic values, as universal paradigms of proper human behavior. Often, Greek and philhellenic authors attributed to them the features of ancient Greeks, usually the famous military virtues of the Spartans, such as courage, valor and readiness to sacrifice, but also virtues linked to the ethics of Classical Republicanism, such as equality, justice and obedience to the law.

Still, the image of Suliotes is capacious. They might be depicted as remote from European culture, exotic and simple mountaineers. This image of orientalized "Others" was proposed by Lord Byron and continued by the British poets who remained under Byron's influence. It is completely understandable that in the writings of the philhellenes, Suli is often presented according to the most common 19th-century literary cliché: it is romanticized and sentimentalized. Moreover, in some extreme cases, it is sacralized, presented as a sacred thing, as a place where God interferes in history.

By these processes Suli becomes part of an imagined literary and artistic reality. Historical persons and places are transformed into characters, recorded in poetical language. In a book on Polish historiographical legends, Bolesław Oleksowicz states that the legend of a hero is organized by a figure of synecdoche. From the hero's life one chooses only the most important episodes that substitute for the complete biography. The legend is rooted in historical reality, but by means of metaphor it creates an independent narration, characterized by such features as precise arrangement of the presented reality, theatricalization of the most important episodes and a universal meaning.²⁴

23 Cf. L. Droulia, *The Revival...*, in: *op. cit.*, p. 26.

24 B. Oleksowicz, *Legenda Kościuszki. Narodziny*, Gdańsk 2000, p. 23.

Still, the case of the legends of Suli is particular. I assume that it is closely connected to the history of Suli, but I do not juxtapose a legend with a “historical truth.” There are several reasons for this choice. First, it stems from the character of the early historiography of Suli, written by amateurs rather than professional historians and based on oral narrations and not on primary sources. As a result, various histories of Suli are treated as the groundwork for the legends of Suli, not as their opposite. Secondly, today the state of knowledge about Suli was established mostly by the 20th-century Greek scholars, basing their work on historical archives that were inaccessible to the philhellenes and historians from the early 19th century. Consequently, the legends of Suli embrace its vision as a whole, the complex of images of any kind connected to Suli. Certain theoretical approaches, such as historicism and reflexive anthropology, provide tools to describe historical narrations and travelogues as literary, artistic texts. Consequently, these approaches do not require historical research. Thirdly, I do not juxtapose legend and “historical truth” for a practical reason. I believe that in order to understand the legends of Suli, it is not necessary to discuss whether they are actually true or not.

As a consequence, even when the authors of the legends obviously contradict the facts established by contemporary scholars, I follow their point of view and seek to enter into their narrations. A good example is the usage of term “Turks” for the enemies of the Suliotes. Undoubtedly, the Suliotes fought against the local Albanian population, who were mostly but not exclusively Muslims. Yet, many philhellenes mistook the Suliote wars for the Greek Revolution against the Ottoman Empire and they took Albanians for Turks. Usually, I repeat their approach, since the negative European stereotype of a lascivious, cruel, infidel Turk serves as an opposition to the candid image of the Suliotes. Albanians of Muslim faith do not evoke this kind of connotation in the work of European authors.²⁵

After the revolution

European philhellenism abated when the Greek Revolution had ended and the Kingdom of Greece had been created (1832). However, Suli did not suddenly disappear from European literature. The legends of Suli, already formed, continued to inspire European authors thanks to the universality of their message. To some extent, the legends succeeded in adapting to the changing political situation. The references to Suli in English and French culture remained present until the end of the century in works created under the influence of Byronism and Orientalism. In addition, with the passage of time, more and more travelers reached Suli and the mountains of Epirus came to be included in popular English travel guides.

Nonetheless, in the second half of the 19th century, Suli was not a pressing political issue, and both authors and readership often had scant knowledge of it. Consequently, the image of Suli could be freely transformed. In Edmond Gondinet’s French play *Libres!* (1873),²⁶ Suli is merely an oriental setting for a fictional love

25 It is worth mentioning that these stereotypes differ in the Greek tradition. In the Greek traditional shadow play, the Karaghiozis Turks are usually presented as noble and benevolent, while Albanians are malicious and cruel.

26 E. Gondinet, *Libres! drame en Cinq Actes, huit tableaux*, performed in Théâtre de la Porte-Saint-Martin, Paris 1873, in: idem, *Théâtre Complet*, v. 5, Paris 1896, p. 158–349.