

Historiography Analysis

The United States and the Greek War of Independence

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Introduction

The Greek War of Independence marks the struggle for liberation amongst Greek populations enslaved by the Ottoman Empire between the years 1821-1828. The Greeks desired to create an independent state and escape Ottoman domination. The start of the conflict was caused by several circumstances, including Greek resentment against Ottoman oppression and ethno-conflict. The Byzantine Empire lasted for 1100 years, from 350 to 1453. Ottoman influence and control began to spread over the territories of the Byzantine Empire after the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks in 1453. On March 25th, 1821, Greek nationalists of the Peloponnese declared independence which resulted in a strong sense of nationalism and self-determination after 400 years of Ottoman rule. Soon after, the mainland of Greece and the Aegean islands joined the cause. In 1829, the Treaty of Adrianople was signed, acknowledging Greece as an independent and sovereign state. Many European powers involved themselves in the Greek independence movement for a variety of reasons as the conflict attracted attention from the West.

The Greek War of Independence is often a matter that is studied on its own. However, more recent scholarship is situating the Greek War of Independence within a transnational historical context. The topic regarding the rise of Philhellenism and Western interest in the Greek cause is well-established. There are sufficient literary works such as that of William St. Clair who thoroughly analyzed Northern and Western European perspectives of the Greek War of Independence. During the Greek War, many countries and individuals felt the need to support Greece whether that included humanitarian aid, policy changes, advocacy, or social organizations. In the United States, historians have noted that among a variety of different cities and in political settings, Philhellenism and Hellenic sympathizers were widely apparent.

Approach

Although the scholarship on the United States and the Greek War of Independence does not present any stark disagreements concerning the rise of Philhellenism in the United States, I argue that there is an evolution in research that contributes to a layered understanding of how America and Greece interacted with each other during the Greek War of Independence. I also suggest that the American perspective on the Greeks during their War of Independence led to the othering of eastern qualities of both Greeks and Turks, as well as the idealization of Greek history. For the purpose of this paper, I will be utilizing the “historiographical-evolution approach” to compare four secondary sources “that deal with closely related questions and that show a clear evolution of viewpoints over time” thus creating a larger picture on the subject.¹ To do this, I will first discuss how the scholars have similar foundations in their understanding of philhellenism in America. Then, I will discuss and analyze each source to convey how they add to a large historical understanding of this subject. In this section, I will also include opinions about the strengths and limitations of the authors as well as comparisons and differences between them. In the conclusion, I will restate my argument and propose a future direction for this research.

The four historical works I will be analyzing are by authors, Edward Mead Earle, Paul Constantine Pappas, Angelo Repousis, and Konstantinos Diogos. Published in 1927, Edward Mead Earle is one of the earlier scholars to have studied this subject in his article called “American Interest in the Greek Cause, 1821-1828.” Paul Constantine Pappas in 1975 authored the book, *The United States and the Greek War of Independence*. Angelo Repousis published “The Cause of the Greek: Philadelphia and the Greek War for Independence, 1821-1828” in 1999 and focuses on the city of Philadelphia. Lastly, Konstantinos Diogos wrote “The Greek Vision of America during the Greek War of Independence (1821-183)” published in 2022, and focuses on the Greek perspective of America during the war.

Similarities among the Scholars

It is important to first explain how the scholars share similar foundations as to why the Greek Revolution appealed to so many Americans. The scholars mention how American cities were driven by philhellenic sentiments, which thus, fueled a romanticized understanding of Greek culture and achievement when the war broke out. For example, the city of Philadelphia experienced a “Hellenic Renaissance” in the early 19th century when the Second Bank of the United States was modeled after the Parthenon—“regarded as the first truly Greek Revival building in the United States,” and

1 Jeremy Popkin, *History 650: The Holocaust*, “Hints for Writing a Historiographical Essay,” https://www.uky.edu/~popkin/650%20HolocaustSyl_files/Historiographical%20Essay.html.

considered “the Athens of America.”² Support was bound to arise in a place like Philadelphia which was inspired by Greek concepts. When atrocities of the war became of knowledge, many Americans experienced what Paul Pappas refers to as the “Greek fever.” The “Greek Fever” spurred Western support that led major political leaders, American intellectuals, and philanthropists to support the idea of American intervention in the European conflict.³ Across the board, the authors establish that since American politics, government, and intellectualism were inspired by ancient Greek principles modern Greeks were inheritors of their culture.⁴

Earle, Repousis, and Pappas address the “eastern question” that emerged when Greece encouraged the West “to purge Greece from barbarians, who for four hundred years have polluted soil.”⁵ Major Western powers saw an opportunity to dilute the power of the Ottomans as they saw the Ottoman Turks as barbaric and unaligned with Western liberal ideas. The scholars also ask the question of why the Greek War of Independence received attention while other Balkan revolutions did not. The Greek War of Independence drew support in ways that the Serbian Revolution did not. Repousis writes, “Even though the Serbs, like the Greeks, were Christians fighting for similar principles. Unlike the Serbs, however, the Greeks were perceived as the heirs to the classical culture of antiquity.”⁶ Many Americans sympathized with ancient Greek ideals and felt a cultural and intellectual affinity towards them. This connection was ignited by classical schools of thought and academia inspired by ancient Greek education that many Americans had embraced. Therefore, among people with Western cultural roots, the Greek War of Independence was seen as a fight for freedom. Serbia did not have the same classical heritage that captured Western imagination and was not “possessed of a great name.”⁷ Moreover, “As Christians, Americans applauded the uprising of Greek Christians against the infidel Turks, and, as humanitarians, they lamented the suffering of Greek people caught in the midst of a cruel war.”⁸ When major events occurred in the war such as that of the Greek women who died at the battle of Missonloghi, the havoc that wrecked the Greek island of Chios, and the execution of Christian religious priests, Greek self-determination of the Greeks was supported rightly so in America.⁹ Furthermore, all the scholars emphasize the important roles of leaders involved in the Greek War, both American and Greek; for example, Edward Everett (one of the most notable American supporters) in the spread of American phil-

2 Angelo Repousis, “‘The Cause of the Greeks’: Philadelphia and the Greek War for Independence, 1821-1828,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 123 (1999): 334.

3 Paul Constantine Pappas, *The United States and the Greek War for Independence, 1821-1828. East European Monographs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

4 Konstantinos Diogos, “The Greek Vision of America during the Greek War of Independence (1821-1830),” *European journal of American studies* (2022): 2; Edward Mead Earle, “American Interest in the Greek,” *The American Historical Review* 33, no. 1 (1927): 45; Repousis, “The Cause of the Greeks,” 333; Pappas, *The United States*, 28.

5 Earle, “American Interest,” 45.

6 Repousis, “The Cause of the Greeks,” 333.

7 Earle, “American Interest,” 45.

8 Pappas, *The United States*, 28.

9 Pappas, *The United States*, 29.

hellenism for his opposition against American neutrality in the Greek War, as well as the role of Adamantios Korais, a significant Greek leader who vouched for American intervention during the Greek War of independence.

Historical Evolution

Edward Earle

Edward Earle's "American Interest in the Greek Cause, 1821-1827" provides the initial political and social understanding of the United States and the Greek War of Independence using primary sources of American leaders and philhellenes involved in the Greek cause. Importantly, Earle also reveals a bias towards Greeks in American public opinion and desensitization to the potential mistreatment of the Turks.

Committees, campaigns, and memorials were formed in Washington and Massachusetts to advocate for the Greek fighters but the United States Government between 1821 and 1822 believed that it was best if the United States stayed neutral.¹⁰ President Monroe encouraged Greece's liberation through writing but no official assistance was provided at the beginning of the cause.¹¹ Edward Everett, an individual and Harvard professor who authored a highly influential article in the *North American Review* in year 1823, expounded upon a strategic plan of action for Americans who wholeheartedly embraced the Greek cause.¹² Within his article, Everett asserts a course of action for Americans who trusted in the idea of emancipation.¹³ Earle explains how Thomas Jefferson suggested to the Greek revolutionary leader Adamantios Korais, whom he had formed communication with, "that the constitutions of the several states and of the United States, 'being in print and in every hand, might well be taken into consideration when the new nation should come to frame its permanent political institutions.'"¹⁴ John Adams expressed his willingness to contribute to their noble endeavor to the Greek Committee in New York in 1823, offering his modest support and wishing them great success.¹⁵ The fourth former President of the United States, James Madison, earnestly suggested to President Monroe political advice that would recognize the independence of Greece.¹⁶ In the first half of his analysis, Earle outlines American leaders involved in the Greek war. Earle then introduces the establishment of committees and fundraising efforts in the United States to support the Greek cause, highlighting the political and social mobilization of American citizens. He suggests that "the contagion" of enthusiastic support for Greeks occurred throughout cities, churches, and college campuses.¹⁷ Students and committees in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston held meetings to raise money, bring Greek orphans to America, distribute military supplies,

10 Earle, "American Interest," 46.

11 Earle, "American Interest," 46.

12 Earle, "American Interest," 47.

13 Earle, "American Interest," 47.

14 Earle, "American Interest," 49.

15 Earle, "American Interest," 49.

16 Earle, "American Interest," 49.

17 Earle, "American Interest," 50.

and support Americans who fled to serve in the Hellenic army.¹⁸ I believe Earle does an effective job with the primary sources he utilizes from leaders like Thomas Jefferson and Adamantios to outline political involvement among major leaders and citizens in the Greek War and sources from committees and students that outline the outbreak of American philhellenism. However, Earle uses only American sources which limits the research by only an American perspective.

Earle's analysis also shows a reasonable approach to studying the United States and the Greek War. Towards the end of his article, he offers insight into the contrast of reactions towards the Greeks and Turks. He suggests that "although eloquent and verbose on the subject of Turkish atrocities, were silent concerning the brutalities of Greek armed forces."¹⁹ Massacres of Turkish people in "Galatz, at Jassy, at Moenmvasia, at Navarino, at Tripolitza," were ignored and not reported in the American press.²⁰ While Earle introduces to the reader the formation of committees and philhellenism to aid Greece, he also introduces a nuanced understanding of reactions towards Greeks and Turks by suggesting the consequences of "blackening the Ottomans and whitewashing Hellenes"—an idea constructed by Lord Byron.²¹ As a result, atrocities committed by Greek Christians were deemed justified. This problem that Earle outlines reflects impartiality when approaching the subject.

Paul Pappas

The next scholar, Paul Constantine Pappas is considered to have 'fathered' the subject of the United States and the Greek War of Independence, as he is one of the only to have authored a book about the subject. His book, *The United States and the Greek War of Independence*, published in 1975, explains the outbreak of the revolution, European involvement, overall American philhellenism, and Greek appeals for aid. It is important to note that Pappas utilizes a variety of sources from America, Greece, and France. This book is made up of eight chapters that are quite brief. What sets Pappas' books apart from the authors is that he traces the changes in American policies that shift American government from being neutral to becoming involved in the Greek cause.

Pappas provides a more complete analysis of this neglected subject, but to some extent, it lacks depth. For example, Paul Pappas touches on this subject stating that in the American press, Turkish atrocities were often excluded, but he does not provide more information on this dynamic in his literary work, as does Earle.²² I believe further examination as to why Greek atrocities were ignored or justified the relationship could have enhanced his book. It is important to relay that multiple book reviews of Pappas' *The United States and the Greek War of Independence* reveal that his work is rather an anti-climactic analysis. One reviewer states that the book "does not break

18 Earle, "American Interest," 54-60.

19 Earle, "American Interest," 62.

20 Earle, "American Interest," 62.

21 Earle, "American Interest," 62.

22 Pappas, *The United States*, 30.

new ground,” but does provide concise explanations to American concerns over the Greek War of Independence.²³ Although in my opinion, Pappas may include redundant information about the nature of philhellenism and sympathy in America, I believe he does break new ground, especially in his later chapter called “The Case of the Frigates” and his emphasis on American relations. The Case of the Frigates is the instance in which Greece asked America for ships that would help them in the cause against the Ottoman Empire by building their naval power. Important leaders in the transaction of the Frigates explains, is Alexander Contostavlos, “a wealthy Chiot merchant” who was appointed by the Greek government to help in these operations, Adamantios Korais, and Edward Everett. Pappas described the complex mishandling of the frigates on both Greek and American parties that required the help of US government action that would permit “the construction of armed ships for foreign countries” as well as the purchase of the ships.²⁴ American fears revolved around the idea that the commissions of these frigates would negate American neutrality, but the US Congress in 1926 agreed that one of the frigates could be purchased.²⁵ Due to monetary misunderstandings, Pappas explores how the case of the frigates led to the fundraising of purchasing these vessels and international diplomatic efforts that required the help of Greek Committees in America and the US government.

The United States and the Greek War for Independence, 1821-1828 offers an overall analysis of the multifaceted American involvement in the Greek War for Independence, highlighting the contributions of philanthropy, diplomacy, and public opinion in determining American involvement in the war. All of these matters are organized into one space which is helpful to a new a historians exploring this topic. Pappas adds to the literature by exploring diplomatic and international efforts between Greece and America.

Angelo Repousis

The next scholar, Angelo Repousis published “The Cause of the Greek: Philadelphia and the Greek War for Independence, 1821-1828” in 1999. Repousis established the appeal for relief in Greece by focusing on the city of Philadelphia and the creation of the Philadelphia Greek committee. The Philadelphia Greek Committee specifically focused on missionary work and providing for struggling Greeks during the movement. Although Pappas and Earle talk about the acts of relief committees taking place in East Coast America, Repousis reveals the specific complexities and nuances of the Philadelphia Greek committee.

Matthew Carey, a popular philanthropist in Philadelphia organized the Greek Committee and appointed fellow philhellenes and clergy members to help the Greek cause.²⁶ Like Edward Everett, Matthew Carey had the same effect on Philadelphians. Repousis emphasizes that the quality that bonded the committee and Philadelphia phil-

23 Robert L Daniel, *The Journal of American History* 72, no. 4 (1986): 949–50.

24 Pappas, *The United States*, 103.

25 Pappas, *The United States*, 104.

26 Repousis, “The Cause of the Greeks,” 344.

hellenes was the basis of Christianity. Nonetheless, Repousis describes how the Philadelphia philhellenes experienced many obstacles trying to support of the Greeks since many leaders in the city doubted that “the Greeks were as virtuous as their glorious ancestors.”²⁷ A crucial point that Repousis makes is that many Americans in Philadelphia who saw the Greeks portrayed as enslaved persons, disassociated them from their ancestors and viewed them as not worthy of help.²⁸ Hence, philhellenes argued that the Greeks would reaffirm their former legacy and that their purpose was to uplift the Greeks to their prior prestige.²⁹ Soon after, the Philadelphia Greek Committee was instrumental in organizing relief operations, providing supplies, and raising money. The Greek Committee encouraged American citizens and Philadelphians to help the Greeks by fundraising through theater and concerts and stressing to “help clothe and feed their naked and starving brethren in Greece.”³⁰ Reportedly, the Greek Committee achieved successful campaigns in Greece, however, “reports of piracy and disunion among the Greeks made it difficult for philhellenes to glorify the Greeks.”³¹ Importantly, Repousis addresses how leaders of the philhellenic movements that were sweeping Philadelphia would excuse the mistreatment of Turks in published newsletters. He incorporates the faults of the Greek Committee having biases into his research. Overall, Repousis’ analysis focuses more on the humanitarian efforts made by Philadelphians than on the involvement of the American government or its connection to the war, which I argue contributes to the existing literature. In 1828, the Greek committee in Philadelphia dissolved but relief work through philhellenic organizations continued and became “a practical expression of sympathy for suffering humanity.”³²

Konstantinos Diogos

The last scholar, Konstantinos Diogos wrote “The Greek Vision of America during the Greek War of Independence (1821-183)” published in 2022. Diogos contributes to research on the United States and the Greek War of Independence by offering an examination of the beliefs that Greeks possessed towards America. While Earle, Repousis, and Pappas focus on American interest in Greece, Diogos’ analysis centers on the argument of those who regarded the American model as an inspirational political model for Greece.

Diogos highlights the manner in which the Greek revolutionaries and intellectuals perceived America as a potential collaborator in their pursuit of self-determination. Diogos explains how the American government was a point of focus in Greek political discourse during the Revolution.³³ Diogos also writes about how different political and military individuals in Greece pursued America during the course of the

27 Repousis, “The Cause of the Greeks,” 349.

28 Repousis, “The Cause of the Greeks,” 350.

29 Repousis, “The Cause of the Greeks,” 350.

30 Repousis, “The Cause of the Greeks,” 356.

31 Repousis, “The Cause of the Greeks,” 357.

32 Repousis, “The Cause of the Greeks,” 363.

33 Diogos, “The Greek Vision.” 2.

war. For example, Adamantios Korais (a point of evidence for many of the scholars) perceived the American archetype as a veritable source of political inspiration for a Modern Greek state.³⁴ Korais was influential in Greek-American communication during the war as he writes in personal notes that “it would be most fortunate... if the Greeks could draft their future constitution... by following in all things the political system of the Anglo-Americans.”³⁵ Moreover, Diogos’ research adds to the existing body of knowledge by exploring the Greek conceptualization of America. This analysis serves to display the underlying motivations behind the Greek expectations of American assistance and its influence on the trajectory of the war. This is something that both Pappas and Diogos explore but Pappas seems to support the idea that America’s philhellenism led the Greeks to inquire for official help while Diogos supports the idea that Greeks “were eager to learn more about this peculiar and wonderful country...and upon this knowledge to build their own myths, aspirations, and vision about the United States” to draw inspiration.³⁶

Conclusion

This historiography paper explores the relationship that existed in the early 19th century between the United States and Greece during the Greek War of Independence 1821-1829. The area of study analyzes the diplomatic, intellectual, and humanitarian aspects of American involvement in this crucial time of Greek history. In this paper, I trace the historiographical evolution of the United States’ involvement in the Greek independence struggle, highlighting its relevance on its effects on diplomatic relations and the legacy of philhellenism in American political and cultural discourse.

To restate my argument, each scholar adds research that contributes to an overall picture of how the United States and Greece interacted during the revolution. Edward Earle adds the initial political understanding by emphasizing American leaders, the reactions of American philhellenes, and exposes potential biases towards Greeks. Paul Pappas offers the most complete analysis of introducing the subject by using both Greek, American, and French evidence to outline American Sympathizers, Greece in the International scope of America, and American political involvement in the Greek War. Although Pappas does not necessarily break ground in terms of the nature of philhellene movements in America, he does provide an adequate understanding of Greco-American relations. Angelo Repousis builds upon the topic of American sympathizers through a focused interpretation on how the city of Philadelphia interacted with the Greeks during the war and what they accomplished in order to raise funds and provide services to the Greeks. And Lastly, Konstantinos Diogos offers an alternate perspective of the United States and the Greek War of Independence by emphasizing the *Greek* perspective of America. I do acknowledge that there are some gaps in the literature that need to be expanded upon. Throughout the essays, we see

34 Diogos, “The Greek Vision,” 6.

35 Diogos, “The Greek Vision,” 7.

36 Pappas, *The United States*, 27; Diogos, “The Greek Vision,” 2.

that among the scholars, there is a lot of crossover in terms of the events and figures they reference. Nonetheless, although they share similarities, they contribute something different to the conversation.

Throughout the scholarship that I found, I saw progress on the lengths many Americans were willing to go to support the Greek cause and the way Americans and Greeks influenced each other during this time period. I believe that further exploration of this subject, fully addressing the different reactions to Greeks and Turks (and even other Christian revolutions), is also worthwhile. I would also question why the identity of the Greeks was open to western interpretation whereas the Turks were not. I feel as though the scholarship on this subject does not convey the most captivating features of Greek history, such as ignoring Greece's eastern qualities and operating within a framework that accepts it. As Earle suggests, why is it that modern Greeks of the war were closely associated with qualities of Greek antiquity when at that point in time they were more closely related to the Byzantine Empire?³⁷ While the authors I reviewed touch on this aspect, I believe it can be explored more to reveal the role of the United States in the events and language surrounding the formation of the contemporary Greek nation.

37 Earle, "American Interest," 61.