

“Am I not a Greek?”

The Emergence of the Ideal Type of “Modern Greek”
from Thomas Hope’s *Anastasius* (1819) to Percy Shelley’s *Hellas* (1822)

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HELLENIC REPUBLIC

National and Kapodistrian
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Harvard University
Mahindra Humanities Center
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ΚΕΦΪΜ
ΜΑΡΚΟΣ ΔΡΑΓΟΥΜΗΣ

Love repulsed,—but it returneth!

SEMICHORUS 2d.

Yet were life a charnel where

Hope lay coffin'd with Despair;

Yet were truth a sacred lie,

If Liberty

Lent not life its soul of light,

Hope its iris of delight,

Truth its prophet's robe to wear,

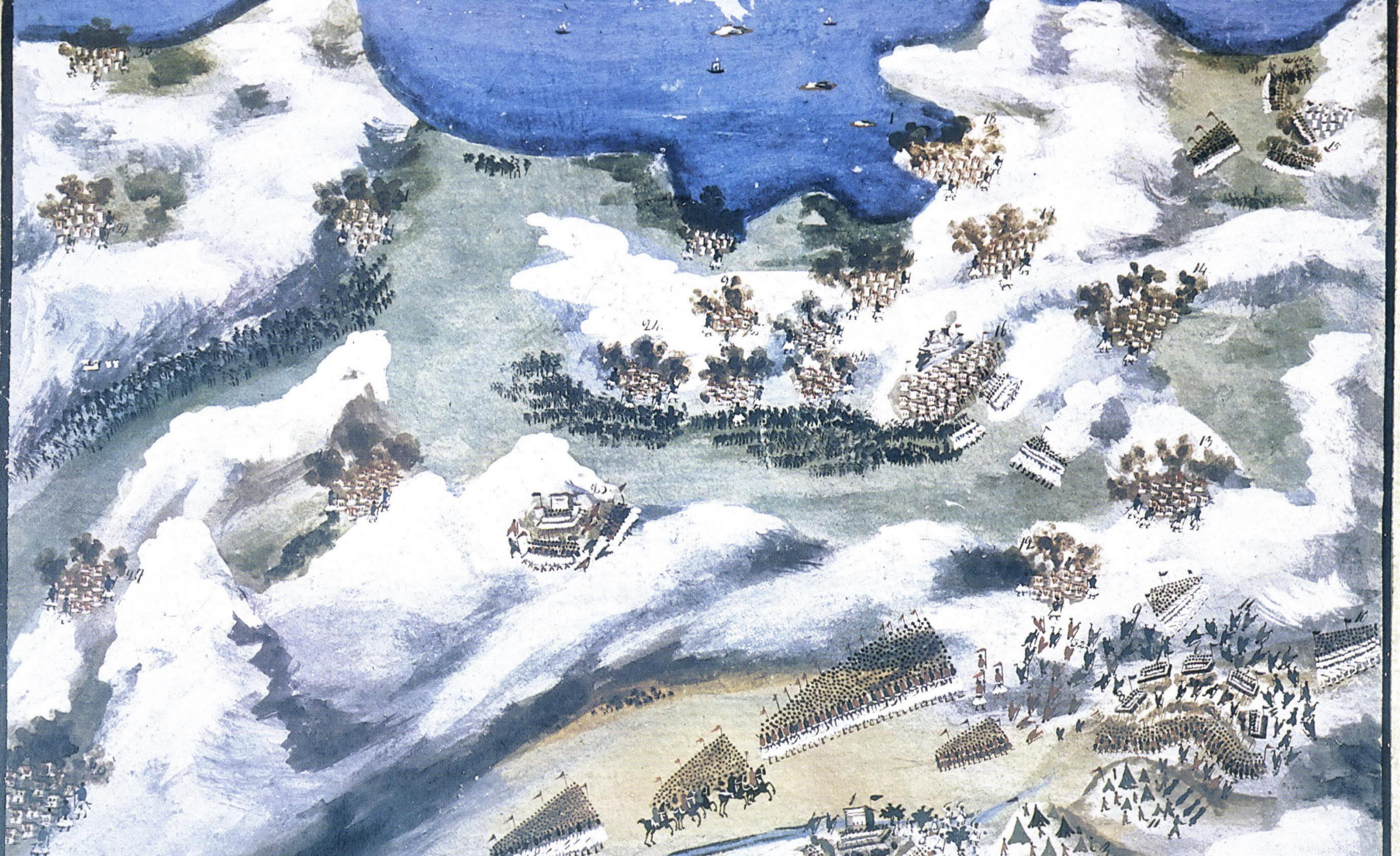
Love its power to give and bear.

CHORUS.

In the great of the world

The spirit of a might

The flag of Freedom over Chaos,



*We are going
to perish*

Dear Pashas and Beys we are going to perish. We are going to perish; I am telling you! This is not a war against Russia, England, or France. This is a war against the desperate rayah who we treated unfairly, we robbed his property and honor, and he is now rioting against us. And the Sultan, the jerk, is heedless. His advisors are misleading him. We pay good money to find a traitor among the rayahs, but nobody is betraying their goals. What is their secret? Are the rayahs alone or the Powers are helping them? We pay, we impale, we murder them and still we cannot find the truth.

Makriyannis, *Memoirs* (1830s)



John Cam Hobhouse (1813)

Any general revolution of the Greeks, independent of foreign aid, is quite impracticable; for, although the great mass of the people, as is the case in all insurrections, has feeling and spirit enough to make the attempt, yet most of the higher classes, and all the clergy, except as far as expressions of discontent may be taken into account, are apparently willing to acquiesce in their present condition. The Patriarch and Princes of the Phanar are at the devotion of the Porte. The primates of the towns and the richer merchants would be cautious not to move, unless they were certain of benefiting by the change; and of this backwardness in the chiefs of their nation, the Greeks are by no means insensible. The prudence, or timidity, of the chief men amongst them, not only diminishes the probability of an actual insurrection, but takes away from the zeal with which we might otherwise embark in their cause; and when we begin to examine the moral power of the nation at large, we shall not be inclined to indulge in any very sanguine expectation of their future success. The Greeks have in many instances shown a desperate frenzy in distress, and a sanguinary ferocity in prosperity, but are certainly not at all notorious for that cool, determined courage, which is necessary for the accomplishment of any great action.

Hobhouse, *A Journey through Albania* (1813)

John William Polidori (1819)

Having left Rome, Aubrey directed his steps towards Greece, and crossing the Peninsula, soon found himself at Athens. He then fixed his residence in the house of a Greek; and soon occupied himself in tracing the faded records of ancient glory upon monuments that apparently, ashamed of chronicling the deeds of freemen only before slaves, had hidden themselves beneath the sheltering soil or many coloured lichen.

Polidori, *The Vampyre: A Tale* (1819)





Lord Byron (1812)

Fair Greece! sad relic of departed worth!
Immortal, though no more; though fallen, great!
Who now shall lead thy scatter'd children forth,
And long accustom'd bondage uncreate?
Not such thy sons who whilome did await,
The hopeless warriors of a willing doom,
In bleak Thermopylæ's sepulchral strait—
Oh! who that gallant spirit shall resume,
Leap from Eurotas's banks, and call thee from the tomb?

Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto the First (1812)

Lord Byron letter to Thomas More (June 4, 1821)

The Greeks! what think you? They are my old acquaintances – but what to think I know not. Let us hope howsomever.

ANASTASIUS:
OR,
MEMOIRS OF A GREEK;

WRITTEN AT THE CLOSE
OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE-STREET.

1819.



Thomas Hope



Percy
Bysshe
Shelley

HELLAS

A LYRICAL DRAMA

BY
PERCY B. SHELLEY

MANTIS EIM' ΕΞΘΑΛΩΝ ἌΓΩΝΩΝ
(EDIP. COLON.)

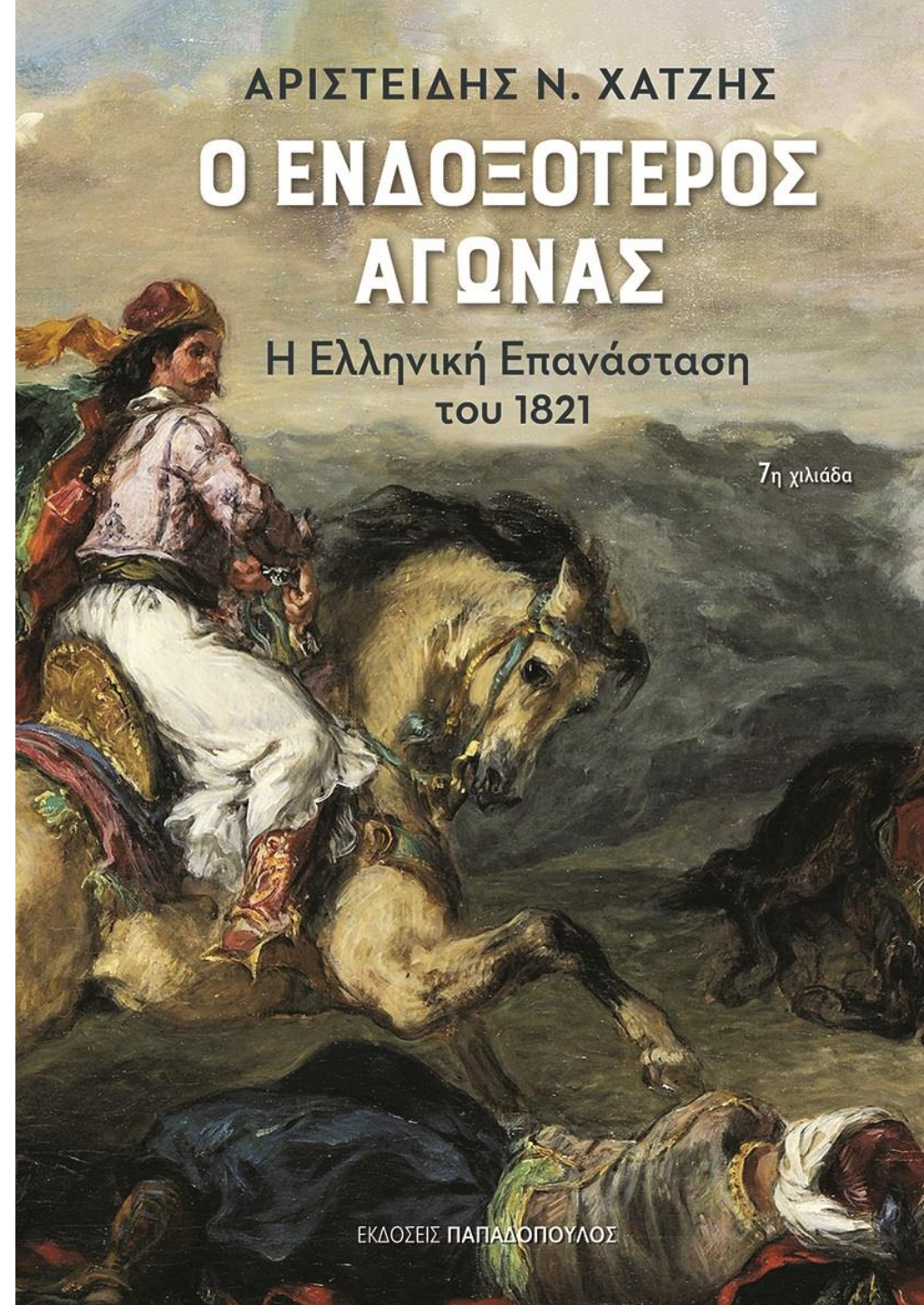
LONDON

CHARLES AND JAMES OLLIER VERE STREET
BOND STREET

MDCCCXXII

*The Noblest Cause: The 1821
Greek War of Independence*
forthcoming, 2022

A Greek translation by Nick Roussos has been published in
November 2021.



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*In an age in which whatever prelates
to the regions, once adorned by the
Greeks, and now defaced by the
Turks, excites peculiar attention.
[excerpt from the Preface]*

Metternich

Do you know an English novel called "Anastasius"? In it there is a description of the Greek character [...] which is very good and accurate, as indeed is everything in this book relating to Oriental, and especially Greek, customs. You will find there Capo d'Istria word for word, exactly as he is.



Byron's envy (1st stage)

*Anastasius good but no more written by a
Greek — than by a Hebrew*



Byron's envy (2nd stage)

I thought Anastasius excellent — did I not say so?



Byron's envy (3rd stage)


Byron spoke to-day in terms of high commendation of Hope's 'Anastasius'; said that he wept bitterly over many pages of it, and for two reasons, — first that he had not written it, and secondly that Hope had; for it was necessary to like a man excessively to pardon his writing such a book — a book, he said, excelling all recent productions, as much in wit and talent, as in true pathos. He added, he would have given his two most approved poems to have been the author of 'Anastasius'.

Lady Blessington, *Conversations with Lord Byron* (1834)



Shelley on *Don Juan*

(letter to M.W.S., Aug. 10, 1821)



It sets him not only above, but far above, all the poets of the day – every word has the stamp of immortality. I despair of rivalling Lord Byron, as well I may, and there is no other with whom it is worth contending.

Shelley on *Anastasis* AND *Don Juan*

I am reading Anastasis. One would think that L.B. had taken his idea of the three last Cantos of Don Juan from this book. That, of course, has nothing to do with the merit of the latter, poetry having nothing to do with the invention of facts. – It is a very powerful, and very entertaining novel, and a faithful picture, they say, of modern Greek manners.

(letter to M.W.S., Aug. 10, 1821)

Shelley on Alexander Mavrocordato

All public attention is now centred on the wonderful revolution in Greece. I dare not, after the events of the last winter, hope that slaves can become freemen so cheaply; yet I know one Greek of the highest qualities, both of courage and conduct, the Prince Mavrocordato, and if the rest be like him, all will go well.

[letter to Horace Smith, September 14, 1821]



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A LYRICAL DRAMA

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ΜΑΝΤΙΣ ΕΙΜ' ΕΞΘΑΛΩΝ ἈΓΩΝΩΝ
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Hellas, preface by Shelley

The modern Greek is the descendant of those glorious beings whom the imagination almost refuses to figure to itself as belonging to our kind, and he inherits much of their sensibility, their rapidity of conception, their enthusiasm, and their courage. If in many instances he is degraded, by moral and political slavery to the practice of the basest vices it engenders, and that below the level of ordinary degradation; let us reflect that the corruption of the best produces the worst, and that habits which subsist only in relation to a peculiar state of social institution may be expected to cease so soon as that relation is dissolved. In fact, the Greeks, since the admirable novel of "Anastasius" could have been a faithful picture of their manners, have undergone most important changes; the flower of their youth returning to their country from the universities of Italy, Germany, and France, have communicated to their fellow-citizens the latest results of that social perfection of which their ancestors were the original source. The munificence and energy of many of the Greek princes and merchants, directed to the renovation of their country with a spirit and a wisdom which has few examples, is above all praise.

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TO
HIS EXCELLENCY
PRINCE ALEXANDER MAVROCORDATO

LATE SECRETARY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

TO THE HOSPODAR OF WALLACHIA,

THE DRAMA OF HELLAS

IS INSCRIBED

AS AN IMPERFECT TOKEN

OF THE ADMIRATION, SYMPATHY, AND FRIENDSHIP

OF

THE AUTHOR.

PISA,
November 1st, 1821.

Anastasius I

and in the first Russian war he employed all his spare money in fitting out a small vessel to cruise against the enemy; —for so he chose to consider the Russians, in spite of all their amicable professions towards the Greeks. As a loyal subject of the Porte, and an old servant of the French government, he felt no sort of wish to be delivered from the yoke of the Turks; and he looked upon those barbarians of the North, who cared no more for the Patriarch of Constantinople than for the Pope of Rome, as little better than rank heretics, not worthy of being treated even like his silk worms, which every year he got carefully exorcised before their spinning time.

Anastasius II

In my fits of heroism, I swore to treat the Turks as he had done the Trojans, and for a time dreamt of nothing but putting to the sword the whole Seraglio—dwarfs, eunuchs, and all. These dreams my parents highly admired, but advised me not to divulge. “Just rancour,” they said, “should be bottled up, to give it more strength,”—Upon this principle they cringed to the ground to every Moslemin they met.

Anastasius III

and thus was I, hapless Greek, compelled, in the space of four days, to bear the yoke of four different nations—French, Venetians, Maynotes, and Turks.

Anastasius IV

“You fool,” [...] Had you accepted the High Admiral’s proposal, you would immediately have received some inferior appointment, and in that you would have been left to waste the remainder of your life. Your first promotion would have been your last. Despised by the Turks and shunned by the Greeks, you would have found support no where; and must henceforth have lived not only degraded, but what is worse, forgotten. Has it never struck you,”’ added he in a whisper, as if afraid of being overheard,” that if much were to be gained by a Christian turning Moslemin, there are others besides yourself sufficiently reasonable not to stick at the difference between Kyrie eleison, and Allah, Illah, Allah?”

This observation set all reply at defiance. I laid by my sword, and resumed my coffee-tray.

Anastasius V

[Stephan Mavrogenis'] character presented a singularity among Greeks in public situations, wondered at by all, and disapproved of by most, that of being a perfectly honest man. His enemies rejoiced at it, though his friends still kept hoping that he was not too old to mend.

Anastasius VI

Now [...] it behoved me [...] with all possible speed to become a Mohammedan. Should there happen to be any personal advantage connected with this public duty; should my conforming to it open the door to places and preferments, from which I otherwise must remain shut out; should it raise me from the rank of the vanquished to that of the victors, and enable me, instead of being treated with contempt by the Turkish beggar, to elbow the Greek prince, was that my fault? or could it be a motive to abstain from what was right, that it was also profitable!

The arguments appeared to me so conclusive, that I had only been watching for an opportunity to throw off the contemptuous appellation of Nazarene, and to become associated to the great aristocracy of Islamism. [...]

Thus it was that the doctrine of pure reason ended in making me a Mohammedan: but with a pang I quitted for the strange sound of Selim, my old and beloved name of Anastasius, given me by my father.

Anastasius VII

Here I rubbed my eyes. “Am I alive,” cried I, “and awake; and do I hear a Greek, and under the yoke of the Turks, talk of a social compact,—of an agreement intended for mutual benefit, support and protection,—as of a thing actually subsisting; as of a thing that should regulate his conduct to his masters?”

Anastasius VIII

I understand, the P—'s and the C—'s of the present more enlightened period boast in their recent publications: and in the thick darkness which surrounded him, Spiridion was almost the only person I could have named, who attached more importance to morality than to dogma, and who insisted more upon inward principle than outward practices.*

* Psalidas and Coray, possibly?

Anastasius IX

*“Glorious sun of the East!” cried I with
faultering tongue, “balmy breath of the Levant
warm affections of my beloved Greece,—adieu
for ever! The season of flowers is gone by: that
of storms and whirlwinds howls before me.
Among the frosts of the North I must seek my
future fortunes: a cradle of ice must rock my
future hopes. For the bleak wastes and black
firs of Gothic climes I am going to exchange the
myrtle groves of Grecian valleys; and perhaps
on the further borders of the chilly Neva it may
be my fate to cherish the last remembrance of
Ionia and of Chio!”*

Anastasius X

Determined to shake off as much as possible all that marked the native of the East, and to adopt all that might assist me to assimilate with the children of the West, I proceeded from the inward to the outward man.

“The Prince comes in his new dress.”
(Mary W. Shelley, Diary entry, May 16, 1822)

Anastasius XI

Fair as seemed this beginning, the understanding between the two nations was short-lived. The Greeks expected the Russians alone to accomplish the whole task of their deliverance. The Russians had laid their account with a powerful co-operation on the part of the Greeks. Each, alike disappointed, threw on the other the blame of every failure.

Anastasius XII

*In my despondency, my eye caught a piece of broken marble, gorgeously emblazoned with chivalresque insignia. But if the side which lay uppermost displayed the plumed crest of a Gothic knight, the reverse still bore the remains of an Hellenic inscription. It was a work and a record of the ancient Greeks, and had no doubt been brought from the opposite shore, where the ruins of Cnidus furnished the knights of Rhodes with an ample quarry for the monuments of their feudal vanity. At this sight, my own national pride returned in all its force. "And does it then belong to me," cried I, —trying by a sudden start to rouse the dormant energies of my mind— "to envy the borrowed greatness of Goths and barbarians, only able in their fullest pomp to adorn themselves with the cast-off feathers of my own ancestors! **Am I not a Greek?** And what Grecian blood, even where remotest from the source it runs in the smallest rills, is not nobler than the base stream that flows through the veins of these children of the West, whose proudest boast is to trace their names to the obscurity of ignorance and the night of barbarism, whose oldest houses only date as of yesterday, and whose highest achievements are the exploits of savages!" [the emphasis is mine]*

Edward Trelawney

As you have lately written a poem, "Hellas," about the modern Greeks, would it not be as well to take a look at them amidst all the din of the docks? I hear their shrill nasal voices, and should like to know if you can trace in the language or lineaments of these Greeks of the nineteenth century A.D. the faintest resemblance to the lofty and sublime spirits who lived in the fifth century B.C. An English merchant who has dealings with them told me he thought these modern Greeks were, if judged by their actions, a cross between the Jews and gipsies.



Edward Trelawney

They took little heed of the skipper [...] They squatted about the decks in small knots, shrieking, gesticulating, smoking, eating, and gambling like savages.

“Does this realise your idea of Hellenism, Shelley?” I said.

“No! but it does of Hell,” he replied.



Edward Trelawney

Shelley talked to him about the Greek revolution that was taking place, but from its interrupting trade the captain was opposed to it.



Edward Trelawney

“Come away!” said Shelley. “There is not a drop of the old Hellenic blood here. These are not the men to rekindle the ancient Greek fire; their souls are extinguished by traffic and superstition. Come away!” — and away we went.



Edward Trelawney

Trelawny – a kind of half Arab Englishman – whose life has been as changeful as that of Anastasius and who recounts the adventures of his youth as eloquently and well as the imagined Greek.

Mary Shelley to Maria Gisborne (9/2/1822)

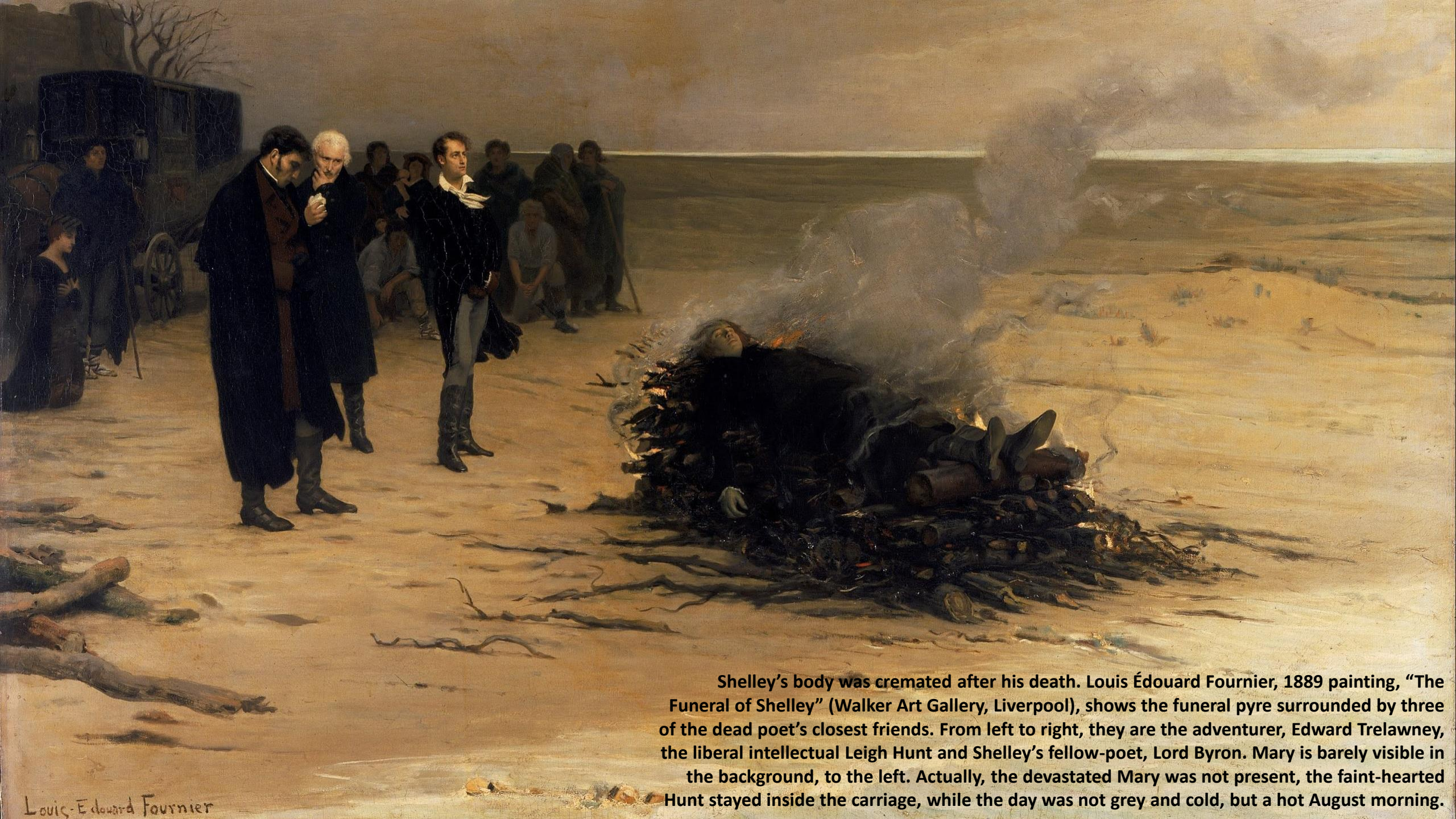


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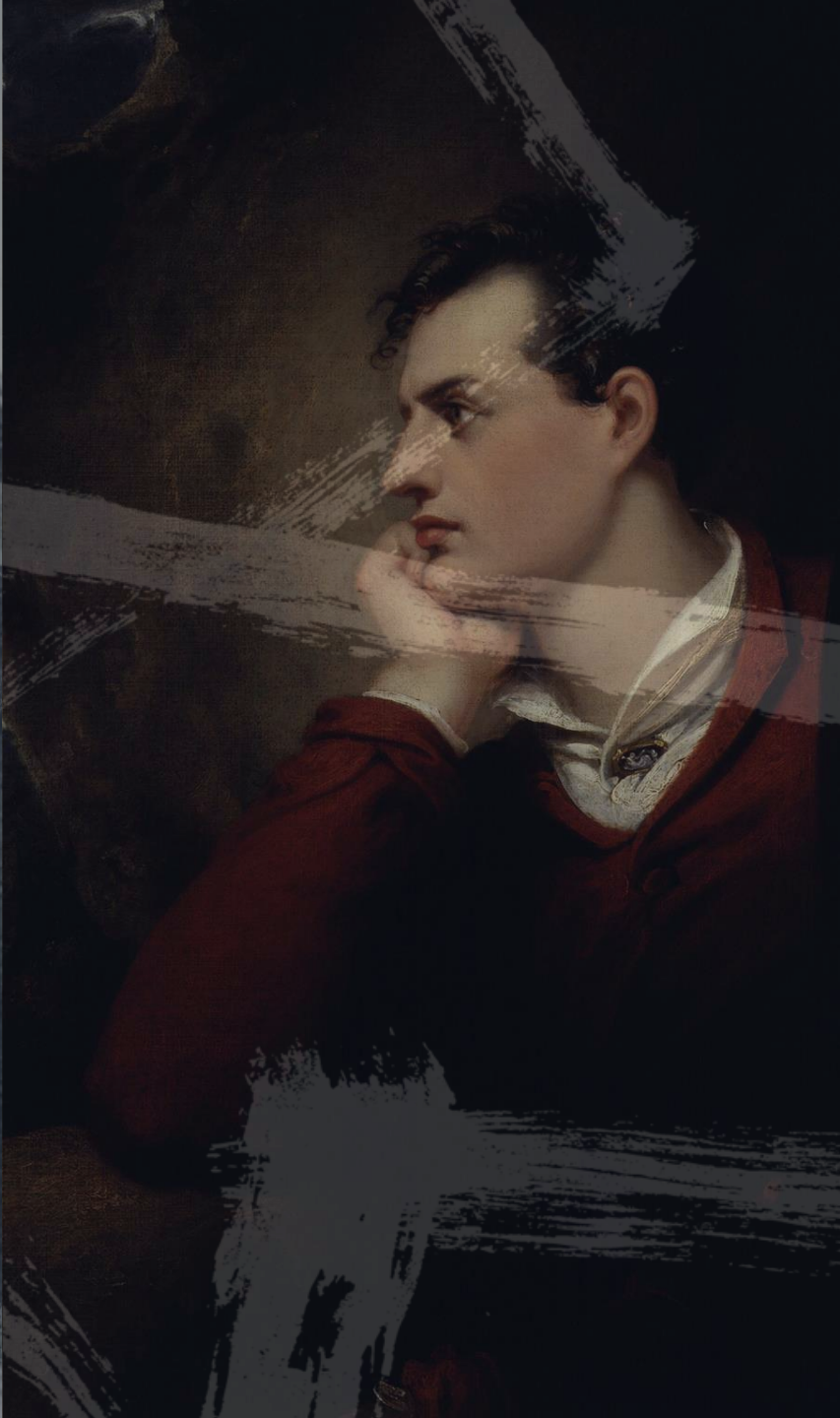
As word as to your wooden god, Mavrocordato. He is a miserable Jew, and I hope, ere long, to see his head removed from his worthless and heartless body. He us a mere shuffling soldier, an aristocratic brute – wants Kings and Congresses; a poor, weak, shuffling, intriguing, cowardly fellow; so no more about him. (Trellawney to M.W.S, April 30, 1824)





Shelley's body was cremated after his death. Louis Édouard Fournier, 1889 painting, "The Funeral of Shelley" (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool), shows the funeral pyre surrounded by three of the dead poet's closest friends. From left to right, they are the adventurer, Edward Trelawney, the liberal intellectual Leigh Hunt and Shelley's fellow-poet, Lord Byron. Mary is barely visible in the background, to the left. Actually, the devastated Mary was not present, the faint-hearted Hunt stayed inside the carriage, while the day was not grey and cold, but a hot August morning.

Louis-Edouard Fournier



Gazette de France (late April 1821)

For some years past, an extraordinary movement had been manifesting itself in Greece. A swarm of young men were in the habit of migrating from it every spring, and settling in the west. The universities of Germany and Italy were chiefly solicited for their sojourn. There they were wont to prosecute their studies with uncommon zeal and perseverance, and with that intense application to argumentation and syllogistic deduction which distinguished the schools of ancient Greece. Having gone through the usual routine of education, many of them proceeded to Paris and London, to finish their studies, and to acquire some other accomplishments as those capitals could afford under the auspices and tuition of propagandists and genuine radicals. They then returned home inflated with the most exalted ideas of the ancient glory of their country, with the accumulative grievances under which it labored, with the sweets of liberty, and with the necessity of effecting a revolution in it by open force and without delay.

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Thank you!

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KEFiM

Markos Dragoumis

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Yet were truth a sacred lie,

If Liberty

Lent not life its soul of light,

Hope its iris of delight,

Truth its prophet's robe to wear,

Love its power to give and bear.

In the morning of the world,

The spirit of the night was full

The flag of Freedom over Chaos,