Unclaimed Colonies: Anglo-Greek Identities Through the Prism of the Dilessi/Marathon Murders (1870)

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Abstract This paper examines the Anglo-Greek dialogue on Greek and British European identities following the Dilessi/Marathon Murders, a case of kidnapping and murder of three upper class Britons by Greek brigands, which became the European cause célèbre of the 1870s. It focuses on British and Greek narratives of brigandage and uses them to provide some insight into the ways both sides conceptualised modernity. The uses of the Greek, Irish and Scottish past and present in this dialogue formed a discourse in which history, imperialism and romanticism were woven altogether. This paper argues that these intertwined ideas and processes were complicit in the formation of modern British and Greek national identities.

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An Archaeology of Concepts

If we were to draw the political map of nineteenth-century Europe, we may as well have divided the continent into two parts. One would incorporate the dominant states and empires; the other would represent those nations and ethnicities, which were under either foreign rule or foreign economic and political control. This article has as a starting point, the ‘politics’ of the relationship between a powerful empire, Britain, and a weak state, Greece. The relationship is examined through the Dilessi Murders (1870), a significant episode that jeopardised Anglo-Greek relations. The discursive analysis that follows will focus on pre-existing British and Greek colonial and national stereotyping that the episode brought to the fore. The British discourse, which was based on the merging of Irish, Scottish and Greek identities, provoked an answer from the Greek side, which developed an alternative argument. As will become obvious below, the Anglo-Greek dialogue that followed on social evolution and national origins was symptomatic of the processes that were taking place at the time in imperial Britain and the Kingdom of Greece.

The relationship between Greece and Britain was incontestably a power relationship. The Greek kingdom was founded in the 1830s and placed under the protection of three of the Great Powers of Europe (Britain, France, and Russia). These three protectors exercised their influence over the new state, which operated under a corrupt political and administrative system. Amongst the various
internal problems that the Greek state had to solve, was that of brigandage, a form of 'military entrepreneurship' which had outlived the Ottoman period, and which the Greek state itself subsidised.

The first form of this phenomenon appeared during Ottoman rule and was called *klephouria*. The *kléphtes* or brigands were rebels against the Ottoman administrative system, whether this was represented by Greeks, Albanians or Ottoman Turks. In the shared experience of subordination to the Ottomans, almost all the peoples of the Balkan Peninsula had developed this reactive mechanism. Because the *kléphtes* and chieftains contributed to the Greek War of Independence, they became national heroes and their deeds formed part of the Greek historical recollection.

It is difficult but essential to analyse the 'passage' from *klephouria* to *listeía* or brigandage in the Greek state. The historiographical debate on the nature of social banditry initiated by Hobsbawm still generates interesting theses. One common element in them is the connection of brigandage with the process of state-emergence. Within this framework one could safely argue that *listeía* was the result of irregularly confronted and therefore unsolved social problems of the Greek kingdom. The failure of the Greek state to compensate the veterans of the War of Independence (1821–1828), which was directly linked to the pending question of land distribution, forced many ex-*kléphtes* to become outlaws. At the same time, however, political factions, which began to operate within the constitutional framework in the 1840s, used such bands of outlaws to intimidate the electorate. Moreover, these brigands were repeatedly used by the state itself as an irregular army force for the promotion of the Greek ‘Great Idea’ of expansion towards the boundaries of the Ottoman empire. These developments formed the underlying reasons that transformed the phenomenon into an institution. By 1870, when the Dilessi Murders took place, the Greek Kingdom was overrun by brigands who kidnapped Greek politicians and rich travellers and demanded ransom for their release.

This is the socio-political setting in which one has to place the episode that remained in the annals of history as 'the Dilessi/Marathon Murders'. This episode took place in April 1870, when a group of three upper-class Englishmen and an Italian diplomat were kidnapped in Pikérmì, a location close to Athens. Despite the efforts of the Greek government of Zaimis and the British Minister at Athens to negotiate their ransom, three of them were brutally murdered in Sykamenón close to Dilessi. The incident aroused much comment in the Greek and foreign press, not least because of rumours that the Greek Opposition, which was plotting Zaimis’s fall, had an active involvement in the tragedy. The murders released English fury and
frustration against the Greek government and the nation, and brought Greece and Britain to the very brink of a war. Interestingly, in the bellicose rhetoric that the British side used during the episode, Greek brigandage played a central role only contingently. The true focus of the British discourse became the resemblance of Greek and Irish politics and Greek and Scottish outlaws. These associations cannot be ignored because Ireland and Scotland had a rather special place in the British empire. The following sections attempt to explain the importance of this discourse on a number of levels: first, they look at it as a mechanism for British self-definition; second, they juxtapose British and Greek reflections on Irish, Scottish and Greek history; and third, they try to explain how these discursive associations problematised the ambiguous place of modern Greek identity in Europe.

**Greece and Ireland: how the colonial mind classifies violence**

The way the Irish Question was introduced in the discussion on the Marathon Murders is significant. In many British parliamentary debates\(^7\) generated by the massacre, the repeated use of the term *banditti* instead of brigands, gave shape to an interesting discourse. Although the root of the term is the Italian verb *bandire*, meaning to exile or banish,\(^8\) its nineteenth-century English connotation was usually much more specific. 'Banditti' was the exotic label attached to *Ribbonmen*, the early nineteenth-century secret societies that operated within the Irish rural context. These societies were proscribed mainly because they resisted the government’s law, although their members were not proper rebels, since they probably had no conception of overthrowing the state. Their protest was for land redistribution in Ireland; their hatred aimed towards the British government; their interest in the national cause was rather ill defined. *Ribbonism* or *Whiteboyism* had an ambiguous political and national programme. They were spasmodic rural movements, rather than purely nationalist organisations.\(^9\)

The origins of such associations between Irish and Greek politics date back to the 1860s when the *Fenians*, an Irish secret brotherhood with branches on the other side of the Atlantic, challenged the political stability at the core of the British empire. Organised for the purpose of winning Ireland’s independence by force, the Fenians revealed Irish-American nationalism in its full ambiguity. Fenianism was rooted more in the hard life of the Irish immigrants than in Irish Catholicism in Britain, which unambiguously became a form of Irish self-definition against the English oppressor. Eventually the Fenians became the only organisation in the history of the United States, which attracted so much public
attention. The Fenians invaded Canada in the 1860s for the purpose of using it as a stepping-stone for the invasion and liberation of Ireland.

These developments were not welcome in Britain. In 1868 Gladstone had admitted privately that the existence of this secret ‘society’ had grave importance for questions of policy-making for Ireland.\(^{10}\) In a contextual approach this organisation emerges ‘not as a manifestation of indefeasible nationality, but rather as the product of a range of political, social, economic and intellectual-sentimental factors, and of assorted contingencies of personality, time, place and interest’.\(^{11}\) Fenianism could be, and was in fact, attributed by historians to the rapid changes in the economic life of Britain in the mid-Victorian era, which made a deep impact on Ireland. The new railway networks, the rapid industrialisation, the subsequent increase of urban populations and the massive emigration of the Irish to England and North America transformed the social and cultural structures of the country.

Nevertheless, the equation of Greek brigandage with Irish Fenianism shows that in our case the nationalist legend matters more than any accurate historical analysis and interpretation of this Irish movement of protest. That legend formed part of Irish and English perceptions of Irish nationalism and has strongly suggested that Fenianism was only another manifestation of the ‘phoenix flame’,\(^{12}\) that is the awakened, or resurrected, Irish nationhood. Such romantic assumptions of innate Irish national consciousness that were linked with it\(^{13}\) existed in Greek culture over the same period and were propagated abroad. It was not only that the Greek nation was seen as a resurrected entity from the flames of the War of Independence, but also that the brigands-\(\textit{listës}\) had been irreparably identified with Greek expansionism. On the other hand, Greek brigandage was never an international organisation; in fact it was not an organisation at all. But the fact that the British observer saw in it an institution that disturbed ‘Europe’s peace’\(^{14}\) provided the essential starting-point for comparisons with Fenianism. Finally, one should never forget the Fenians’ involvement in the Irish Insurrection of 1867,\(^{15}\) which helped the British observer to maintain analogies with the ‘nationalist’ Greek brigands.

The British commentators on Dilessi had a fascination with the supposed similarities and differences between the Irish and the Greeks. When Greek governmental actors began to address in the Greek press network accusations against the opposition in the Kingdom, and vice versa, the \textit{Pall Mall Gazette} observed:

\[\text{The late Daniel O’Connell maintained that whenever an Irishman had to be roasted there was always another hand ready to turn the spit. We are far from complaining}\]
that the analogous state of things should exist in Greece, as the information elicited by these differences can only tend to complete the picture, which the Greeks are unconsciously drawing of themselves. The more we know about them, the better our chance of successfully dealing with a state of things, which is a standing disgrace to Europe.16

If we bear in mind that O’Connell was the leader of Catholic emancipation and that he was linked by his contemporaries to the foundation of the revolutionary organisation of Young Ireland, then the journalist’s acid comments imply a preoccupation with imperial problems and a profound subordination of the Anglo-Greek relationship to them. Interestingly, the journalist repeated the comment that the Greeks are a ‘disgrace to Europe’.

Unfortunately, when the British were engineering these arguments, they did not anticipate the development of counter-hegemonic thinking from the Greek side. Immediately after the Dilessi Murders, the journalist Jean Lemoinne published a pro-Greek article in the French newspaper Journal des Debats in which he attacked the bellicose members of the Gladstone government who wanted to restore British honour after Dilessi with an occupation of Greece. But his comments on British inability to suppress Fenianism helped the Greeks to organise their counterblast. The journalists of Aión, a Greek pro-government newspaper, wrote the very same day Lemoinne published his article:

Is the Greek government the first one that cannot eliminate internal evils? Can the situation in Ireland convince somebody that governments are powerful and that they are in a position to solve domestic irregularities as they wish? It is true that there is no rural crime close to London; but if the Fenians want, they can commit massacres even there. Tallaghill is not that far from Dublin, and it is very likely that the gangs of Fenians are lurking somewhere in the suburbs of the big cities . . .17

Some days later, the same Greek newspaper reported that the agency of The Times in London, as well as those of other newspapers, had to be guarded by police forces because the editors had received threatening letters from the Fenian brotherhood. In addition, eight counties in Ireland had to be declared in a state of siege after a series of murders.18 When in May, Woolwich dockyard had to be guarded as well, from the fear of new Fenian attempts to blow up the powder magazines close to it, the tone of the Greek commentators hardened.19 ‘There are, in the bosom of the most moral, the most civilised and well-organised societies, social plagues, that form the accumulated heritage of history that science cannot heal’.20 If England cannot cope with such ‘plagues’, then how can she accuse the newly born Greece of a similar failure?

One easily notices that despite their vibrant and convincing arguments, the Greeks initially remained trapped in the web of a
typical Western European discourse whose primary binarism is constructed and construed on the basis of ‘progress’. Significantly, however, British commentators insisted on the dangerous element that Greek brigandage introduced in Europe and compared this with the homologous state of affairs between Ireland and Britain. It was as if the Greek and the Irish marginal identities had been placed under the same category. But, nevertheless, the British had provided the Greeks with raw material that they could transform into a language of resistance. Before we therefore proceed to further contextualise this association we have to examine some Greek responses.

A good example is a pamphlet written by Colonel Πάνος Κορωνάιος during the Dilessi crisis. Koronaïos’ disquieting argument was constructed on the idea that British interference was responsible for internal Greek disorder, because it held back the political regeneration of the Greek Kingdom. England had the right to deprive Greece of her freedom as much as France and Russia had the right to interfere in the ‘civil conflict between England and Ireland’.

Because even there [i.e. in Ireland] violence is exercised under the power of a minority [i.e. England] of the same ‘family’ while we admit our fault and we want to make up for it. And we will, there is no doubt, before England manages to diminish the existing malfunctions in her very heart.

This is a pretty bold argument because it presents England and Ireland as ‘sisters’ and their rupture as civil conflict. The family trope that Koronaïos used in this instance shows that Irish identity is for him essential for British self-narration.

Even bolder than Koronaïos’s was the statement made by Ἰωάννης Γεννάδιος (John Gennadios), whose treatise Notes on the Recent Murders by Brigands in Greece became the apologia of the Greek nation. Stressing that Britain has different moral laws for the strong, like herself, and the weak, like Greece, he proceeded to say:

And what need we say of Ireland? Will England with that appalling spectacle before her [i.e. Fenianism] taunt poor Greece? England, who with her enormous power, her centuries of political life and experience, and in the midst of her immense prosperity, has failed ignominiously, not only in making life secure, but even in governing that unhappy country in a decent way. The assassinations committed there were once upon a time considered “agrarian outrages”. But now men are “tumbled” even for the dismissal of a servant.

Again in this passage England is identified with order and progress and Irish disorder with rural life. However, the ability of British administrators to govern Ireland is questioned. The way Gennadios associated the Dilessi episode with contemporary British anxieties is beautifully illustrated in his attempt to transform British arguments
into a boomerang. One of the most controversial aspects of the Dilessi affair was that the Greek government had refused to grant an amnesty to the brigands and save the captives, because such an action was anti-constitutional.25 The British government attacked Zaimis for his refusal. But Gennadios argued the following:

An analogous case would have been, if a body of Fenians had carried off to the mountains of Kerry a couple of Americans, and, as the conditions of their release, demanded an amnesty in favour of themselves, and other Fenians in prison – say, Rossa – both for past crimes and for that offence. Would Englishmen grant it, and how would they answer any remonstrances of the American government, urging such a course? But we forget the bitter truth and there is one law for the strong and another for the weak.26

Here Gennadios complicates the plot, by introducing the question of Anglo-American tensions in the picture. It may be unfair to associate the British press in general with violent counterattacks: *The Scotsman*, for example, a Scottish newspaper widely read in Edinburgh, did not hesitate to defend an argument similar to that of Gennadios. *The Scotsman* explained that an analogous episode in Britain and a demand by another country upon her to take unconstitutional action would have presented the British government with a dilemma.27 But some newspapers in London chose to react to Lemoine’s comments which introduced the subject of Irish disorder in the Dilessi debate. Intriguingly, at the beginning the British journalists directed their anger for such attacks against the French journalist Lemoine, and not the Greeks. *The Daily News*, the pro-Gladstone newspaper with the most moderate policy, translated Lemoine’s article and silently accepted the comment.28 *The Morning Post* and the *Daily Telegraph* adopted a more polemical style. *The Morning Post*, a rather pro-Turkish newspaper, expressed discontent towards the French journalist and refused to discuss ‘so ridiculous a thesis’.29 On the other hand, the *Daily Telegraph* found it imperative to engage with this question. In an article Greek brigands were named ‘Fenians after the continental fashion’ and false patriots.

A man can be a rebel without being a brigand [. . .] spasmodic and nomadic patriotism has this in common with brigandage – that its beginning is lawless and its end is the subversion of the law [. . .] The makers of little rebellions [. . .] would do well to take this lesson to heart; and we can only hope that, even as war steamers have proved adequate to extirpate piracy, and railway locomotives have scattered brigands wherever they have come across them, as the opening-up and development of the moral high roads of civilisation of education of progress, of constitutional government, of a freer press, and of justice, may ere long teach ‘student cliques’ and patriotic associations ‘limited’, that about the very worst way of helping their country is to break its laws and disturb it [sic] peaceable inhabitants.30
The account of the virtues of Western civilisation given in this passage (education, progress, constitution, technology) remind the British reader of his privileged place in the scale of civilisation; the cherished division of ‘we’ versus the ‘others’, provides reassurance. Again, ‘uncivilised’ movements, such as the Irish and the Greek, are considered backward – perhaps ‘rural’ (once again?) – phenomena. At the same time one notices the fear the journalist expresses that Greek brigandage was dangerously confused with ‘nationalist movements’. The journalist’s refusal to continue this game of identification leads him to draw distinctions between patriotism and outlawry. We should not forget, though, that the journalist writes after the committing of a crime in Greece with serious political repercussions. The more brigandage appears to be a stigma on ‘civilisation’, primitive ‘lawlessness’, the more it is disconnected from serious national aspirations, the better the British government’s decision on the fate of Greece is legitimised. The chain effect works perfectly: for, if Greek brigands are rogues and not patriots, so it is the case for the Fenians.

But behind this discourse, one can see a much more profound link between Greek and Irish identity. Both brigandage and Fenianism attain their value in the discourse only because they are synecdoches for Irish and Greek national identities respectively. The fact that Greek *listeia* became a problem only after the end of the War of Independence, suggests that the British discourse on Greek political disorder is a discourse on modern Greek identity – and, through substitution, or slippage, on Irish identity. The discourse was part of the long-standing British colonial tradition. We are informed in the 1933 edition of *The Oxford English Dictionary* that associations of Ireland, Greece and disorder appeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century in British sources. The ‘unruly districts’ of Ireland were often termed ‘Grecian’. Interestingly, *The Standard* (3 September 1872) argued that the term ‘Greek’ was ‘colonial slang for the Irish’.31 What the Greeks and the British commentators had in mind when they engaged in this dialogue on disorder is more obvious now. The former could see in the Irish cause something of their nationalist cause. The auxiliary role brigandage and Fenianism and the obtrusive role England played in this cause were incontestable. For the British on the other hand, Greece deserved to be treated as a colony. Greek brigandage and political disorder were read against the role the ‘unruly’ Irish played in the British empire: that of an internalised ‘other’,32 so essential for British imperial self-definition.

To fully grasp the importance of the notion of ‘internalised otherness’ we have to examine the role of Irish and Greek identities in the geopolitical map of Europe. First of all, the way that the

peripheral position of Greece in Europe was discussed in the Dilessi episode resembles the place of the Balkans in the nineteenth-century European imagination. In her recent work Maria Todorova explained that the marginal geographical position of the Balkans and their subjection to the ‘Oriental’ Ottoman empire was of primary importance in the dominant Western discourse. The power relationship between Balkan peoples and nations and Western European countries found its symbolic counterpart in the presentation of the former as the European ‘other’: irrational, backward and contaminated by Oriental vices. It is suggestive that the British press stressed that Greek brigandage and irredentism ‘disturbed’ Europe. The implicit argument of this comment was that modern Greece was not to be considered a fully European country.

It was not a coincidence that Ireland, another peripheral country, stepped into the same discourse. There had been a long-tradition of depicting Irish identity as non-European, ‘black’. This is not a minor point, indeed. Race studies have shown that the idea of race and racial oppression can only be explained in terms of a substantive, ‘operative element’, since ‘the distinction between racial and national oppression turns on the composition of the group that represents the ruling elite’. Put simply, it is common practice for the ‘oppressor’ to recruit part of the dominant elements of the subjected native populations and incorporate them into the ruling apparatus; most of the time, this ends in integration of the recruited into the recruiting element. The rest of the oppressed population remains a different ‘race’. Seen under this light, ‘colour’ is a sociogenic rather than a physical category. This idea is supported by the fact that when colour differences are absent, the dominant group justifies its (colonial) authority over peoples or communities by stressing instead of their wrong ‘phenotype’ their ‘uncivilised behaviour’. Although the Irish were not represented as ‘black’ in the Dilessi discourse, they were named ‘uncivilised’ and they were almost identified with a half-Oriental, half-European nation: the modern Greeks.

Evidently the British press managed to kill two birds with the same stone: by talking about Greece, journalists expressed their concern about Irish behaviour, which was classified as dangerous and non-European. The importance of ‘colouring’ the discourse on Greek and Irish disorder was great, because both the Greeks and the Irish were white and Christian. This manoeuvre was very clever although the subtleties of the British argument make it confusing. The rationale became more obvious when the Anglo-Greek dialogue changed focus and examined the relationship between Scottish and English outlaws and Greek brigands.
Romantic pretensions and dangerous rogues: Scotland and Greece in Anglo-Greek discourses

This symbolic violence, which was forced on nomenclatures that had to do with actual political violence, was complemented by another chain of associations. This second discourse was grounded on similarities and differences between Scottish outlawry and Greek listéia, and was examined by both Greek and British commentators following the Dilessi Murders. The separation of this discourse from that on Irish politics is artificial, because the two were closely intertwined. But before we try to pull them together, it is better to examine them separately.

The analysis will begin with an article by George Finlay, the Times correspondent in Athens and a philhellene of many decades’ standing. In this article Finlay, a Scot himself, elaborates on Greek inability to meet the terms of and prerequisites for (European) order:

> Our own history in the last century, not only in the Highlands but in the neighbourhood of London, may convince us of the possibility of an honest nation tolerating a system of organised robbery, and we might refer for a parallel with the state of Greece to the earlier annals of England and of Germany, showing honest and laborious burghers and peasants oppressed and harried by robbers claiming to be heroes.38

Again, we are faced with a classification of different phenomena in the same category and on a single scale: contemporary Greek brigandage is identified with earlier Scottish ‘disorder’ and English anarchy. The whole system operates on the notion of evolutionist anthropological time, a scientific artefact based on the assumption that the observer belongs to a higher stage in the cultural ladder when he analyses phenomena that for him may belong to history, but are identified with, and are believed to constitute the present of the observed. The standpoint of the British observer is always higher, so that he can supervise Greek culture.

The enthralment this exercise exerts on George Finlay falls within the ambit of his work on Greek history. His deep knowledge of Greek affairs did not prevent him from tying political disorder and cultural ordering to a single thread. In his journalistic analyses of brigandage he built up a system of labelling by comparing the career of the Dilessi brigands with that of Scottish cattle-dealers and outcasts of the eighteenth century.39 But his inclination to analyse the romantic aspects of Greek brigandage is traced in his earlier works, such as the History of the Greek Revolution, which was published in the early 1860s, and is related to the Kléphti of the pre-Revolutionary period. A quite striking reference is found in the first volume of this historical work:
The spirits of oppressed peoples were always attracted by independent life, even when if it was lawless. The Greeks heroised their chieftains and transformed them into a sort of ‘Robin Hood’. They exaggerated their deeds and extended their life span as myths in ancient years. The patriotic Klephts in demotic poetry though are recent artefacts.40

Here Finlay makes a reference to the Robin Hood myth which he uses to develop a discourse on the origins of the Greek Kléphti. This discursive logic permeated British Dilessi journalism through and through, and provided the basis for the simultaneous analysis and assessment of the mythistorical, mythical and historical,41 aspects of Greek brigandage. Robin Hood and Rob Roy, the most important legendary outlaws, were constantly exhumed from the storeroom of British experience and were used to illustrate the graces of the Greek brigand:

The character of the robber chief, notwithstanding the cold-blooded cruelties of which it is capable, is regarded with the leniency, not to say admiration, which has in England been extended to outlaws of a very different class:

A famous man was Robin Hood
The English ballad singers’ joy;
But Scotland has a thief as good,
She has, she has her brave Rob Roy.42

It must be stressed again that both Rob Roy and Robin Hood were mythistorical constructs. Although Robin Hood had been remodelled through the centuries, one important single element engraved on the British recollection was his supposed struggle against Norman invaders.43 Rob Roy’s story was more ambiguous, but equally interesting. He owed his fame in England to his resemblance to Robin Hood. He was a cattle dealer for a period and later on, as an outlaw, he had his own protector, the Duke of Argyle. Admittedly, the mythistorical description of Rob Roy, and his dealings with sources of legitimate power may have played a role in the construction of the discourse.44 We should imagine that such a discourse expands geometrically: the triptych Rob Roy-Dilessi brigands-Robin Hood is a substitute of the three-faced nature Greek brigandage possesses, the gallant/romantic aura, political networking and national resistance.

However, if one combines spatial representation with the presence of evolutionist time then one should go even further, and ask why Greek brigandage is seen through the lens of a British past.

The way the phenomenon of brigandage is opened up is nothing more than the common historical practice of introducing a series of continuities and discontinuities in history’s ‘linear sequence’45 – and I refuse to use the term development, the phantom of which still haunts historiography. We should not underestimate what the
Dilessi observers did: by introducing this or that event as a rupture or an important moment in the history of outlawry (Rob Roy and Robin Hood’s stories), *they are in a position to make history*. And the history they make is impregnated by what truly matters for them. *It is the observer’s history that unfolds in such comments.*

This is the fascinating world of academic ‘disciplines’ as it evolved mainly in a non-academic environment. Such disciplinary processes were concomitant with questions of alienation and the fear of identity loss. Max Weber pointed out first that capitalist modes of action are followed by a conceptual rearrangement of the known world, which reaches its sad ‘perfection’ in the rationalisation of human experience.46 Contra the classical Marxist thesis, for Weber different spheres of human experience are rationalised in different directions. In modern, rational disciplinary milieus ‘national’ myths such as that of the Scottish outlaw can become the object of research. In a rational world, however, practices of myth-making (e.g. transforming the Scottish outlaw into a warrior with a noble cause) would normally be discarded as non-scientific and irrational. But modern disciplinary thought can still idealise past forms of Otherness. Because these myths acquire the significance of lost values we can safely argue that irrationality is still present in the modern world. In fact idealisation provides ‘a compensation on the symbolic level for the political and economic processes that have destroyed the traditional fabric of non-Western societies.’47

Bearing these comments in mind, we can see the driving force behind British interest in the history of *klephtouriá*. British need to
idealise Greek brigandage through Scottish banditry emerges in a contingent way as a resistance mechanism to the discourse on Irish-Greek disorder. If this discourse provides the British administrative machine with a rationale, the discourse (a product of human reason) on the romantic Scottish outlaw and the Greek brigand hero betrays a nostalgia for the past. At the same time the connection between Scottish history (which is examined as part of a British past) and
contemporary Greek brigandage poses the anthropological question of comparative social evolution. Greece is thus presented as a backward country vis-à-vis modern Britain. The two conflicting narratives (of Irish and Scottish identities) can be considered as a symptom of British modernity.

It is thought-provoking that on this occasion the Greek counter-attack works within British discourse, but modifies it, by introducing new segregations and ruptures. John Gennadios, the author of the Notes, is using the same popular ballad for Robin Hood and Rob Roy when he proceeds to defend his country against British accusations, but he adds:

Rob Roy was a hero, and there existed a noble spirit of competition between England and its Northern neighbour in the way of outlawry, as we learn from the popular ballad [...] In all these [English] ruffians [however], there is nothing of that patriotic feeling which excused formerly the Greek klepht, and absolutely no redeeming trait as may be found in the more degenerate [Greek] brigands of today ...48

Here Gennadios replaces British discourse with a Greek one: that on the production of history of klephtouríá. Rob Roy is not compared with the Dilessi brigands, but with his nobler Greek equivalent, which is the Kléphí of Greek Independence. That breaks the cipher of British evolutionist historical approach, since Rob Roy, a mythistorical persona is used as the raw material for the transformation of a historical persona, the Kléphí, into a myth. It is also evident that Gennadios introduces a split between Scottish and British histories, which is missing from British commentary. The second story this practice tells us is even more interesting: romanticisation of brigandage shows that Greek thought is neither pre-capitalist, nor backward. To talk about your heroes with a tinge of nostalgia shows that you have already fallen prey to the claws of modernisation.

Charles Tuckerman, the American Minister at Athens, was another contemporary authority who promoted this pattern in his treatise Brigandage in Greece, destined to become one of the most influential works on Greek politics in the Greek and the Anglo-Saxon world. I use the opinion of an American here because the Greeks mobilised it against British press commentary. Tuckerman supported the idea that brigandage in Greece was an exceptional phenomenon, because it was not the child of today.

It was born in the Turkish oppression, when restless men fled to the mountains to secure the only independence vouchsafed them. Although the outlaw who now takes advantage of impenetrable defiles of the mountains to evade pursuit is without that nobility of character, which the ancient Klepht possessed, he has the same strategy and cunning, and from the same mountain fastness can defy the pursuit of any soldiers ...49
Despite his attempt to demystify the Greek brigand, Tuckerman retains a romantic element in his description, which is stressed even more when he explores the attraction this ‘reckless and good-natured adventurer’ exercises over the rural communities of Greece.

A witty Greek attack was organised some years later by the Greek translator of Tuckerman. Tuckerman had used Robin Hood in his reflections on the development of klephtouría into a corrupt political system, in which blackmail, intrigues and murder prevail. His Greek translator – a bureaucrat of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – did not translate the word ‘blackmail’ into Greek, but he added in a footnote to the text:

This [i.e. blackmail] is part of English and Scottish tradition, because, as you notice, the proper word for the description of the process can be found in the vocabulary of those languages; on the contrary, in our language the term does not exist, and there is no fear or reason to be invented.

Tuckerman’s translator deserves congratulations for his linguistic remarks, although they are based on a lie: the word ekviasmos, although of a different etymology, is used to convey practices of ‘blackmail’ in Greek. It is intriguing though that the way the Greek translator posits the question of ‘blackmail’ creates a new scale of civilisation on which Greece has a privileged place, because she appears to be morally superior to her British ‘prosecutors’.

The romanticisation of the Greek Klephtí should be seen as part of a wider and more important narrative concerning Greek historical continuity. Western classicism had resulted in the construction of an idealised vision of Hellenism: in the Western European imagination ancient Greek civilisation was associated with democracy, freedom and philosophy. In fact, Western philhellenism, this ideological movement that supported Greek emancipation from Ottoman rule, originated in the classic-mania of the Western Europeans. The impression of Western philhellenes was that by contributing to Greek liberation they would assist in the revival of the ancient Hellenes. Consequently, not only were the realities of post-independence Greece forgotten but they were also loathed and criticised because they could not embody the philhellenic ‘dream’. Because the Neohellenes did not fulfil Western demands for progress, they were deemed to be less worthy than their Hellenic ‘forefathers’. These tensions formed part of a historical problematique on the (dis)continuity of Greek culture which affected Neohellenic modes of self-narration. Neohellenic response to Western criticisms was the institutionalisation and examination of these narratives; the ultimate aim was to claim linear descent from the Hellenes.
There were, however, some elements in Neohellenic culture, which could not easily fit into this project. Especially the peasantry ‘presented a potential embarrassing contrast to the idealised image of Greece which the European supporters of Greek nationalism [...] had entertained so long.’ Because of that, the Greek institution of folklore, which studied the life of rural communities, worked mainly with historical tools. Its mission was to prove that the Greek peasantry retained clear traces of the Hellenic heritage. This is the function of the romantic image of the Klephts in the aforementioned discussions. Brigandage itself is an ‘agrarian phenomenon’ even in the previous discourse on Irish Fenianism which is regarded as ‘dangerous’. It is idealised when it enters the sphere of human disciplines of historical ethnography!

It was not a surprise then that in the scholarly debate on Greek brigandage the classical and the philhellenic projects were happily married. I will begin with the most obvious effects of this coincidence, which were manifested in the genealogical discourse on brigandage. The British press for example considered the whole Greek nation as ‘a race of Klephts’ that represented nothing other than the relics of a glorious Hellenic past. The Daily Telegraph used specific passages from Edward Gibbon’s Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, in which the author quoted a scholar who had ‘proved’ that the Homeric heroes were robbers. Gibbon had been part of the circle of scholars that affected the British way of thinking upon history and recurring phenomena, which explains why the journalists evoked him as an explanation of Greek inclination to ‘murder’ in 1870.

Such genealogical approaches were not unusual in British anthropological discourse. We can trace them back to the doctrine of ‘survivals’, an idea that was used extensively as a guide to the development of major areas of spiritual culture by E.B. Tylor in his Primitive Culture in 1871. Tylor argued that things which seemed arbitrary or meaningless to the ‘civilised world’ may have had a practical function centuries ago, but their survival in the less ‘progressive’ sects of modern societies (e.g. the rural populations) made them useless and incomprehensible to the observer. According to this theory, the European peasantry became a crucial link between modern civilisation and primitive savage man. In this sense Greek brigandage was a ‘survival’, a ‘relic of the past’ which had to be subjected to analysis.

It is also worth presenting a similar Greek attempt at historicising Greek brigandage. After the Dilessi Murders, the Athenian Literary Society of Parnassos organised a forum at which its distinguished member Dimitrios Pantazis delivered a talk. Pantazis’s argument was constructed upon the hypothesis that Dilessi and Oropós present the Greeks with two cases of dangerous historical topoi, ‘which had
always been atrocious and sites of crimes, as it will become obvious
from what we will proceed to explain.\textsuperscript{59}

Pantazis let Herodotus, Thucydides and Strabo speak on behalf
of the Greek nation. The core theme of the talk became the relationship
of the inhabitants of these two sites with the Athenians and with the
pirates. Thus brigand ‘inclination’ to murder was historically
constructed as a relationship between core and periphery, capital
and ‘country’. In other words, the Dilessi brigands became the ‘other’
of ancient Athenian civilisation, and through it, they became the
object of research for Neohellenic observers. Pantazis realised the
pitfalls of his analysis, since the ‘Arvanitákis\textsuperscript{60} band of Dilessi were
mountaineers, but he was not disheartened. Instead, he tried to
prove that the inhabitants of Oropós moved to the interior of the
country in order to protect themselves from the ancient pirates, ‘the
Arvanitákis of the sea’.

It is not necessary to hinge on details. What matters is that
Pantazis’s narrative established a genealogy of Greek brigandage
which asserted the argument of Greek historical continuity. In this
genealogy, the \textit{Hellenic past’s otherness successfully stood in
metonymically for the otherness of Neohellenic ‘low culture’}. The
argument had successfully managed to integrate folklore and
historical observations \textit{and} to use them to exclude the ‘otherness’
of brigandage from ‘civilised’ Neohellenic qualities: the brigands were
the ‘savages’ of the Greek nation.

\textbf{Symbolising identities: Greek ancestry and British self-narration}

The Marathon Murders did not eventually precipitate Greece and
Britain into a war, which would have been calamitous for both of
them, though for different reasons. However, the crossfire of their
aftermath, which took the form of discussion of imperial problems or
historical chronicles, had an implicit political content. A series of
discursive associations between Greece and Ireland represented
both countries as ‘uncivilised’, justifying thus their relationship of
subordination with Britain. A second series of discursive
associations between the Scottish and English past, and the Greek
present posited questions of historical evolution and ancestral
origins. In fact, the Irish and Scottish discourses did not differ.
Scottish Highland civilisation stood in the nineteenth-century
British imagination ‘for wilderness, if a civilised, tamed and
controlled wilderness’.\textsuperscript{61} Again, therefore, the otherness of the
Highland or of English legendary outlaws symbolised the otherness
of the Neohellenes in modern European culture.\textsuperscript{62} What was not
discussed explicitly was that in the nineteenth century there were no
clear-cut distinctions between Scottish and English identities. This
leads one to think that according to the British logic Greece (like Scotland) would become an integral part of Europe in the future.

On the other hand, the Greek commentators on Dilessi proved to be vigorous and creative opponents because they managed to deconstruct British hegemonic thought. By using British critiques of Irish and Scottish disorder, they reflected on their own history and current political condition and ‘inverted’63 thus the British discourse. The hermeneutic method the Greek commentators on Dilessi used did not necessarily contest the British argument; instead, it used the otherness of modern Greek culture as a resistance mechanism: either brigandage was represented as a form of national movement, or it was examined as a ‘Hellenic survival’ of an irrational age. Both narratives were consistent with the Neohellenic schizophrenic attitude: the Greeks were and were not part of, wanted and did not want to belong to, Europe at the same time. Their persistence in preserving the hallmark of their otherness transformed them into a Scottish and Irish ‘Oriental race’ – an essential, but problematic, constituent of British imperial and national self-narration.

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Notes


4 See for example Koliopoulos, Brigands with a Cause, chapter 1.


6 Mellon, 28 April 1870.

7 The Times, 29 April and 21 May 1870. The Daily News, 16 May 1870; The Daily Telegraph, 4 June 1870.


14 *The Times*, 8 February 1868.

15 In 5 March 1867 there was an unsuccessful Fenian rising in Kerry, Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Tipperary and Clare, which was regarded as the beginning of an Irish struggle for independence. See Foster, *Ireland*, pp. 390–395.

16 *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 July 1870.

17 *Aión*, 27 April 1870.

18 *Aión*, 30 April 1870.

19 *The Levant Herald*, 22 May 1870; *Aión*, 25 May 1870.

20 *Aión*, 7 May 1870.

21 Pános Koronaios was appointed in 1869 to suppress brigandage in Acarnania. The report he produced with the results of his venture was published in the same year, under the title *Reflections on the Establishment of Order*. It was a very perceptive work, in which, however, one can detect allusions to the political extensions of brigandage that resemble those he made in 1870 (Koliopoulos, *Brigands*, pp. 176–177).

22 Koronaios’s reflections appeared in the newspaper *Independence Grecque* (23 May 1870) first, but were translated into Greek and published in the form of a pamphlet over the same year. The quoted passage is from his pamphlet *Addressed to the English State* (Athens: Psylliákos & Co. 1870), p. 29.

23 John Gennadios was the son of a famous Athenian family. His father was an eminent Greek scholar and his mother was from the Benízelou Athenian family. At the time of the crisis he was employed in the commercial enterprise of the Rhális Brothers in London, but the publication of the notes forced his employers to dismiss him. Nevertheless – unofficially – Gennadios received financial help from his Greek boss after the publication of the Notes. Interestingly, the Notes were translated into Greek in 1871. This may suggest that he was in contact with Athens and the Greek government at the time of the crisis. Gennadios’s interference in the episode attracted the attention of the American ambassador at Athens, Charles Tuckerman, and it may not be a coincidence that he was first proposed as a second secretary in the Greek embassy at the United States. In fact, Gennadios’s successful diplomatic career after the Murders is often linked to his involvement in the Dilessi crisis (See L. Tricha, *Diplomacy and Politics. Kharilaos Trikoupis – John Gennádios, Correspondence* (Athens: Eter’a Ellinikó Loghoteknikó ke Istorikó Arkh’u 1991), pp. 17–20).


25 For the constitutional question see *The Morning Post* and *The Times*, 25 April 1870. The kidnapping was not regarded as a political offence and according to the constitution of 1864 the King could grant an amnesty only for political offences (E. Kofos, ‘The Period of Retrenchment (1869–1870),’ in *History of the Greek Nation* (Athens: Ekdòtiki Athinon 1980), p. 306.

26 Gennadios, *Notes*, p. 33.

27 *The Scotsman*, 24 May 1870. The Scotsman’s response to the Dilessi
crisis may also have to do with the fact that its argument was addressed mainly to a Scottish readership.

28 The Daily News, 28 April 1870.
29 The Morning Post, 29 April 1870.
30 The Daily Telegraph, 4 June 1870.
33 M. Todorova, Imagining the Balkans (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
36 Ibid., pp. 31–34.
37 The same association between the Irish and the Greeks can be found in a different context: that of the relationship between the Ionians and their British colonial administrators. The British also named the Ionian Greeks ‘Mediterranean Irish’ who could be treated as savages, thus justifying British rule. Though in the case of the Ionian Islands we deal with actual colonisation, it is significant that we can find the very same argument in a slightly different context. For an analysis of the argument one can consult Tom Gallant’s forthcoming book Experiencing Dominion: Culture, Identity and Power in the British Mediterranean (The University of Notre Dame Press, March 2002). I am grateful to Tom Gallant for giving me the permission to use his unpublished work in this article.
38 The Times, 6 May 1870.
39 The Times, 3 June 1870.
41 By ‘mythos’ I refer to the theory Roland Barthes developed in his Mythologies (London: Verso, 1993). Brigandage is ‘an empty and restored speech (the content of the concept changes to serve a different political cause) in the British discourse’. By ‘history,’ I refer to the Foucaultian practices of counter-memory the British commentators implement in their writing (something I will proceed to analyse).
42 The Pall Mall Gazette, 16 May 1870; see also The Daily News, 26 April and 16 May 1870.
43 J. C. Holt’s work Robin Hood (London: Thames and Hudson 1989) provides some information on various versions of the myth (pp. 7–13); for the Anglo-Norman conflicts and the legend there are some useful comments in Chapter VII (pp. 183–184).
44 For the literary/mythological version of Rob Roy and the story as it was handed down to and then re-shaped in Victorian culture, one can consult Walter Scott’s novel Rob Roy (London: Nimmo 1890), especially the Introduction (vol. I).
48 Gennadios, Notes, p. 132.
50 Ibid., p. 127.
52 The ‘blackmail’ to which the translator refers was the tribute anciently extracted on the Scottish border by chiefs who offered immunity from pillage – a practice that did not differ from the protection Greek brigands offered to villagers.
55 The Times, 3 May 1870.
56 The Daily Telegraph, 4 June 1870.
59 Palingenesia, 13 May 1870.
60 This was the name of the brigand chiefs of the Dilessi band.
63 ‘The symptom is in itself, through and through, signification, that is to say, truth, truth taking shape. It is to be distinguished from the natural index in that it is already structured in terms of signified and signifier, with all that that entails, namely the play of signifiers. Even within the concrete given of the symptom, there is already a precipitation into signifying material. The symptom is the inverse side of the discourse.’ (J. Lacan, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954–1955 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1988), p. 320 (Emphasis mine). See also Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1976), pp. 107–108).

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