Lord Byron and the politics of the Greek Revolution (1823-1824)*

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When Byron went to Greece, so the often-told story goes, to take part in the Revolution against Ottoman rule, in 1823, he could not have chosen a worse moment. The standard narrative goes like this.

When Byron arrived in Cephalonia in August 1823, a stalemate had been reached in the war against the Turks. The Greek cause was threatening to fall apart in civil conflict. What has since become known as the "first civil war" of the Revolution began at the end of the year and continued until June. A second would break out a few months later and it was only the devastating Ottoman counter-attack, led by Ibrahim Pasha of Egypt, in 1825 and 1826, that forced the quarrelsome Greeks to patch up their differences. Against such a background, what could Byron have done, even if he had lived longer? At the time when he was in Greece, there was relatively little fighting going on against the Turks. In any case, despite the paraphernalia of the pseudo-Homeric helmets commissioned in Genoa, and the military uniform he wore to step ashore at Missolonghi, Byron knew

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perfectly well that he had no training or experience as a leader of fighting men. The war was on hold, the Greeks were in a state of internal chaos. The only thing left to Byron was to die, which he obligingly did. As Harold Nicolson epigrammatically summed it up, in a book written for the centenary of his death and still the most recent full-length treatment of the subject: "Lord Byron accomplished nothing at Missolonghi except his own suicide; but by that single act of heroism he secured the liberation of Greece."[1]

On this view, which remains the prevailing one, Byron ended up like one of the heroes of his own poems: a heroic failure. And as that tendentious word "suicide" must be meant to imply, this is as much as Byron ever meant to do, or in the circumstances could possibly have done.

But it was not like that at all.

Historians in Greece have recently been taking a fresh look at the civil wars of 1823-1825. Through the work of Vasilis Panagiotopoulos, Lysandros Papanikolaou, Nikos Rotzokos, Petros Pizanias, and others, this period of internal conflict is now coming to be understood as a "necessary, unavoidable, a *defining* stage" of the Revolution, in the words of Papanikolaou, in that sense comparable to the period of the Terror in France.[2] According to this new perspective, the two civil wars of those years, whose origin coincided with Byron's arrival in Greek waters in August 1823, were the crucible in which the future political shape of independent Greece would be forged. It was the civil wars that brought into the open the different *political* forms that the Greeks' newly acquired liberty might take in the future, and forced the

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[1] Harold Nicolson, *Byron: The last journey*, new edition with a supplementary chapter (London: Constable 1940 [1924]), pp. ix-x.

[2] Lysandros Papanikolaou, *Η καθημερινή ιστορία του Εικοσιένα* (Athens: Kastaniotis 2007), p. 229; cf. Anemon Productions, *1821* (Athens: Skai TV 2011), DVDs 4 and 5; Vasilis Kremmydas, *Από το Σπυρίδωνα Τρικούπη στο σήμερα: Το Εικοσιένα στις νέες ιστοριογραφικές προσεγγίσεις* (Athens: Parliament of the Hellenes 2007), pp. 72-80; Petros Pizanias (ed. and introduction), *Η ελληνική επανάσταση του 1821: ένα ευρωπαϊκό γεγονός* (Athens: Kedros 2009); Nikos Rotzokos, *Επανάσταση και εμφύλιος στο Εικοσιένα* (Athens: Plethron 1997).

issue of deciding among them. These wars were closely fought, and the outcome was by no means a foregone conclusion.

To simplify a complex situation greatly, these wars were fought between centralisers, or modernisers, on the one side and local warlords on the other. The first group were political rather than military leaders, educated either in the Ottoman system, or in the West, or both, and inspired by the ideas of the Greek Enlightenment and emerging nationalism and liberalism. The second were the military chieftains, the klefts and local leaders that at the time and since have always captured the popular imagination in Greece: simple and direct in their manners and speech, often without much education, but with a strong local power-base and a political understanding based on tradition and localism. During the time that Byron was in Greece, the chief protagonist of the modernisers was Alexandros Mavrokordatos; of the warlords, Theodoros Kolokotronis (the Old Man of the Morea).

According to this new understanding of the civil wars, it was the eventual victory of the modernisers that made possible the recognition of Greece as a sovereign nation-state according to the London Protocol of February 1830, and also determined the nature of the country's political system as it has been ever since.[3]

On this way of looking at things, the very months when Byron was in Greece become the crucial ones that determine the whole *political* outcome of the Revolution. Although the Greek historians mentioned above have not yet made this link, there was everything for Byron to play for, arriving just when the political impasse was coming to a crisis. Far from being the wrong time to come, the years 1823 and 1824 were perhaps the only time in the whole course of the Revolution when the kind of contribution that

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[3] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece, Service of Historical Archives, *The Foundation of the Modern Greek State: Major treaties and conventions (1830-1947)*, ed. Ph. Constantopoulou (Athens: Kastaniotis 1999), p. 30; Roderick Beaton, "Introduction", in: R. Beaton and D. Ricks (eds.), *The Making of Modern Greece: Nationalism, Romanticism, and the uses of the past (1797–1896)* (Farnham: Ashgate 2009), pp. 1-18 (pp. 1-2).

Byron was actually qualified to make could really have counted. And it did.

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To see how this came about, we need to look in parallel at the dates and events that define Byron's brief career in Greece, and the dates and events that define the first civil war of the Revolution. The coincidences that result are truly extraordinary. Nobody can be credited with creating these: that was simply the way things fell out, history in the making. But given these coincidences, a context suddenly emerges in which a newly arrived and largely unsuspecting Byron could seize the opportunities as they arose. At the same time, even without him necessarily even being aware of it, Byron's very presence in Greece and his repeated insistence that he would give everything in his power to what he called the "Cause", in these circumstances was bound to carry enormous political weight in the finely balanced internal struggle for power between the modernisers and the warlords.

Byron's decision to go to Greece came surprisingly late. In February 1823, almost exactly two years after the outbreak of the Revolution, a Committee was formed in London to raise money and organise political support for the cause. One of the Committee's first actions was to write to Byron, to solicit his support. Then on 5 April, a delegation from the Committee called on him in Genoa, where he was living at the time. Byron responded with cautious enthusiasm. Five days later, on the east coast of the Peloponnese, the second National Assembly of the Provisional Greek government would convene at Astros. Its deliberations would soon lead to the political impasse that ushered in the first civil war.

1823		*BYRON*	*GREEK REVOLUTION*
April	5	GENOA: Visited by representatives of London Greek Committee	
	10		Second National Assembly begins at Astros, near Nafplio; beginning of slide towards civil war
June	± 10	Final decision to go to Greece	
	14		New Provisional Government appoints commissioners to raise loan in London
	22		Mavrokordatos writes to British Foreign Secretary George Canning
July	16	Sails from Genoa	
	21	Arrives off Livorno	
	22	Off Livorno	TRIPOLITSA
	23	Takes delivery of letters from Bishop Ignatios for Mavrokordatos and others	Mavrokordatos elected president of Legislative Body, to strong objection from Kolokotronis
	24	Sails from Livorno for Cephalonia	Clash between Mavrokordatos and Kolokotronis
	26		Kolokotronis threatens Mavrokordatos and orders him out
August	3	Arrives in Cephalonia	
	9		Legislative Body leaves Tripolitsa for Salamis

1823		***BYRON***	***GREEK REVOLUTION***
October	27	At Metaxata, CEPHALONIA	Government mandate to Mavrokordatos to direct operations at Missolonghi
December	12	At Metaxata, Cephalonia	Mavrokordatos arrives at Missolonghi
	29	Departs Cephalonia for Missolonghi	
1824 January	4	Arrives at MISSOLONGHI	Two rival governments established in Greece, Legislature at Kranidi, Executive at Nafplio
	18		Complete break between Legislature and Executive; the latter moves to Tripolitsa
	23		Deputation from Greek government arrives in London to negotiate loan
February	15	Suffers seizure	
	17		Agreement for loan signed in London
March	22		News of loan reaches Greece
April	2		Government forces regain Acrocorinth
	9	Goes riding in rain, catches fever	
	15		Government forces regain Tripolitsa
	19	Dies	
June	5		Government forces regain Nafplio. End of 1st civil war

Byron's decision to involve himself personally in the Greek Revolution was taken on or about 10 June 1823. Again within days, and again without any causal connection, the new Greek legislature in Tripolitsa (modern Tripoli) had determined to send a deputation to London to seek to raise a substantial loan from British banks and private subscribers. It was the first practical step towards internationalising the Greek conflict, and one of its prime movers was Alexandros Mavrokordatos. Also within days, Mavrokordatos took a further step towards widening the struggle by appealing directly to Great Britain: he wrote long letters to the Foreign Secretary, George Canning, and other public figures, including Byron, though Byron would be in Cephalonia before this letter reached Genoa.

Byron set sail from Genoa for Greece on 16 July. On the way he stopped off at Livorno. There he took on board a set of letters of introduction, written for him in Greek by the former Bishop of Hungary and Wallachia, Ignatios, who while living in Pisa had become the spiritual mentor of Mavrokordatos and others in Greece who thought like him.[4] Leaving Livorno on the twenty-fourth, he arrived in the Ionian Islands, then under British rule, on 3 August. While Byron was at sea and heading, as he hoped, for the seat of the Greek government, that seat was being violently rocked by Kolokotronis. In a series of confrontations over three days, just as Byron was leaving Livorno, Kolokotronis accused Mavrokordatos of plotting to sell out Greece to foreign interests, and finally threatened him to his face. As Kolokotronis' words were later reported to Byron: "if he found him again intriguing he would mount him on a donkey and have him whipped out of the Morea".[5] Within days of Byron establishing himself temporarily

[4] National Library of Scotland: John Murray Archives (George Gordon, Lord Byron, Correspondence and Papers) Ms. 43550, subfile 1, nos 13-18 (all dated 21 June [OS /3 July] 1823).

[5] National Library of Greece, Athens (Papers of the London Greek Committee, file K5): [James Hamilton Browne,] "Substance of a conversation held with Colocotroni in his palace", enclosed with Browne to Byron, 13 September 1823; cf. idem, "Narrative of a visit, in 1823, to

in Cephalonia, the entire Legislature abandoned Tripolitsa to Kolokotronis and his supporters, and decamped to Salamis. Mavrokordatos himself was spirited out of the town and took refuge among the ship-owners of Hydra.

By the end of 1823 Greece had in effect two governments, one based at Kranidi in the northeast Peloponnese and made up of modernisers and their sympathisers, and a rival dominated by Kolokotronis and Petrobey Mavromichalis at Tripolitsa. Mavrokordatos by this time had been given a mandate by the Kranidi government to return to his former power-base of Missolonghi in west Greece and direct operations there.[6] Mavrokordatos arrived at Missolonghi on 12 December and almost immediately sent a boat to Cephalonia to fetch Byron to join him. In the event, Byron arrived at Missolonghi on 4 January after a hair-raising voyage involving near-capture by the Turks and shipwreck. During the same days, the Kranidi government formally stripped the members of its rival government of office, and was duly defied from Tripolitsa. The civil war had begun.

Also in January, the deputation sent by the government, before the split had become irrevocable, to raise a loan in London belatedly arrived there. A deal was concluded in February. On 22 March news reached Greece that the stupendous sum of 800,000 British pounds had been subscribed and would shortly be on its way. Byron was named as one of three commissioners responsible for its disbursement. In anticipation of this news, the Kranidi government had already gone on the offensive against its rivals in the Peloponnese. During April 1824, while Byron was dying of fever at Missolonghi, first Corinth and then Tripolitsa surrendered to government forces. By early June, the first civil war was at an

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the seat of war in Greece", *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, vol. 36, no. 226 (September 1834) 392-407 (p. 404).

[6] *Μνημεία της Ελληνικής Ιστορίας, τόμ. Ε΄: Ιστορικόν Αρχείον Αλεξάνδρου Μαυροκορδάτου*, fascicles I-IV, ed. E. Protopsaltis (Athens: Academy of Athens 1963-1974), III 552, no. 848: Legislative Body to Byron, 15 [OS /27] October 1823 (translation in Nicolson, *Last journey*, p. 172).

end. The government had come through this first, crucial round. Greece once again *had* a government. It would not all be plain sailing from there, far from it. But today it is becoming possible to see those months while Byron had been in Greece as a turning point – in the internal, political struggle for dominance that would determine the outcome of the Revolution.

How far did Byron himself contribute to this outcome? What were his considered objectives for Greece, once he had begun to understand the true situation there? How did these objectives fit with those of the Greeks among whom he was determined to serve? And how, finally, did some of the leading players among the Greeks react to this saviour in their midst – *at the time*?

Byron's policies for Greece

The first thing to be said about Byron's political ideas for Greece is that he was utterly serious. He was serious about Greece in a way that he never quite was about the Italian revolutionary movement that he had become involved in, a few years before. That had ended in fiasco. Now, his letters from the time that he left Genoa show a changed man. Most of them are *about* Greece – about Greece and about money. A great many of them are written to bankers (Byron was almost always good friends with his bankers). The money was needed for the cause. And the "Cause" (with a capital letter) begins to appear in Byron's letters as something almost sacred:

> I mean ... to serve the *Cause* if the patriots will permit me – but it must be *the Cause* – and not individuals or *parties* that I endeavour to benefit.
>
> As I have embarked in the Cause I won't quit it, – but "in for a penny in for a pound" – I will do what I can – and all I can – in any way that seems most serviceable...
>
> I cannot quit Greece while there is a Chance of my being of any (even *supposed*) utility – there is a Stake worth millions such as

> I am – – and while I can stand at all – I must stand by the Cause.[7]

When he decided to go to Greece, in June 1823, Byron effectively gave up writing poetry. His great comic epic masterpiece, *Don Juan*, was left untouched, sixteen stanzas into its seventeenth canto. After that he wrote only one short poem that he completed, and a smaller number of drafts and fragments. Byron in Greece was no longer a poet, but a man of action. Remarkably, for someone of so changeable and inconstant a nature (a shortcoming of which he was well aware), Byron suddenly throws all his energies together behind a single purpose, and sticks to it. Many of his friends, and some who were not really his friends, such as the shrewd Bishop Ignatios in Pisa, doubted whether he *would* stick to it, and feared what might happen then. Had he lived longer, all this might have turned out differently. But as it was, for the last ten months of his life Byron was more consistent and serious about the cause of Greece than he had ever been about anything – except poetry.

Byron never set out his political ideas for Greece in a systematic way. But a careful reading of his letters and of the extensive records of his conversations at Missolonghi that were published in English soon after his death, allows a remarkably coherent programme to emerge.[8] It can be summed up in three fundamental principles:

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[7] *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, vol. XI (London: John Murray 1981), pp. 42, 76, 131: Byron to John Cam Hobhouse, 6 October 1823; Byron to Charles Barry, 11 December 1823; Byron to Samuel Barff, 10 March 1824.

[8] For the letters, see previous note. Conversations reported in Pietro Gamba, *A narrative of Lord Byron's last journey to Greece*, [trans. from Italian by John Cam Hobhouse] (London: John Murray 1825), and William Parry, *The last days of Lord Byron* (London: Knight and Lacey 1825).

1. A free Greece must be a centralised state, united under a constitutional government, in effect what today we would call a nation-state;
2. The government must secure and responsibly disburse the economic support from outside that a successful revolution will require;
3. The government must reach an accommodation through diplomacy with the Great Powers of the day, without which true independence will never be possible. Great Britain must be persuaded that a free and strong Greece, with an economy based, like Britain's, on maritime trade, will be a far more reliable bulwark against Russian expansionism than the "putrefied" Ottoman empire.[9]

To these pragmatic ends, Byron is prepared to compromise, at least in the short term, principles held dear by fellow-liberals: freedom of the press, a republican constitution.

This is not the Byron that generations of admirers of his poetry have come to know and love – or hate. Even on the importance of unity, the least controversial topic, his position is not what might have been expected. When Byron talks of "uniting the factions", as he often does, it is always and only in the service of a strong, centralising government. Even before he left Cephalonia, he had decided to reject the claims of the warlords – against the advice of his own friends, Hamilton Browne and Trelawny, whom he had sent to Tripolitsa to reconnoitre on his behalf. Later, he would continue to hold this line at Missolonghi, even after some of his own closest associates had transferred their allegiance to Odysseus Androutsos in Athens.

This is the more surprising, in that characters such as Kolokotronis and Odysseus were more or less made in the mould

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[9] Conversation reported as taking place on 11 March: "The English government deceived itself at first in thinking it possible to maintain the Turkish empire in its integrity: but it cannot be done; that unwieldy mass is already putrefied, and must dissolve. If any thing like an equilibrium is to be upheld, Greece must be supported" (Gamba, *Narrative*, p. 214).

of the typical "Byronic hero". Could the creator of the Corsair, the Giaour, Lara and many more – archetypal warlords all – really be indifferent to these legends that were being created around him? Indeed, it is likely that the "Byronic" type of hero had been to some extent inspired by what Byron had learned, during his earlier travels in Greece, about men like these and the songs of the klefts that extol their values and way of life. For all his no doubt genuine belief in the need for unity, there is no question of Byron being even-handed in his dealings with the factions. Once he knew that Mavrokordatos was on his way from Hydra to Missolonghi with a squadron of ships that he, Byron, had paid for, he threw in his lot with Mavrokordatos and the government party.

At the beginning, there may have been personal, as well as political, reasons for this choice. Mavrokordatos, while he had lived in Pisa, had enjoyed the confidence of Byron's friends Percy and Mary Shelley. Shelley, and particularly the fact of the poet's accidental death a month short of his thirtieth birthday, had played a significant part in making up Byron's mind to commit himself to Greece. But essentially Byron's decision was a political one. Mavrokordatos, he had decided, was the nearest Greece had or was likely to have to a figure like George Washington or the Polish patriot Tadeusz Kościuszko. It no doubt helped that Mavrokordatos was still at this time known by the courtesy title of "Prince", the legacy of his service to his aristocratic uncle in the Ottoman service at the semi-feudal court of Bucharest from 1812 to 1818. Later, Byron would become impatient with Mavrokordatos, but he never abandoned him, or said anything against him in writing.

Byron believed that the Greek Revolution had the potential to bring into the world an entirely new kind of politics. The revolutionary movements in western Europe troubled him because, as an aristocrat, Byron could never wholeheartedly throw in his lot with the oppressed multitude. In Italy he had had a glimpse of a new ideology (as we would say today), that of the nation, which was at once revolutionary because it would do away

with the old, decayed order, but did not necessarily involve replacing one ruling class with another. In the new, emerging, ideology of the *nation*, there would be a role for all classes, including his own. Byron, in short, saw a free Greece as the first of a new kind of state in Europe, free of the old monarchical, feudal order, and based on the idea of the nation. In Greece, he saw the means to put into practice the political vision that he had articulated in lines written for *Don Juan* in the summer of 1822, within days of the death of his more radical friend Shelley:

> And I will war, at least in words (and – should
> My chance so happen – deeds) with all who war
> With Thought...
>
> It is not that I adulate the people;
> Without *me*, there are Demagogues enough ...
>
> I wish men to be free
> As much from mobs as kings – from you as me.[10]

These, then, are the political ideas that Byron brought to Greece. How did they fit with the political world of Greece at the time?

The politics of Mavrokordatos and his circle

The short answer is that they fitted remarkably well. So well, indeed, that we have to ask, are they even Byron's? Unity under a centralising government was of course already the chief pre-occupation shared by Mavrokordatos, Bishop Ignatios in Pisa, the wealthy primates of Hydra who for the time being held the fig-leaf of a central government in place, and many, but not all, phil-hellenes. What is noteworthy is not that Byron insisted on unity, but what he meant by it in practice, which coincided very much with Mavrokordatos' ideas too.

On the economic issue, Byron was in a better position than most people in Greece to understand this dimension of the

[10] Byron, *Don Juan*, canto IX, lines 185-7, 193-4, 199-200.

Revolution, its demands and prospects. He knew that his own resources would only go so far, and at an early stage threw his weight behind the campaign to raise a loan in England. His fame undoubtedly helped to bring in subscribers, and by March 1824 the loan was oversubscribed. That must be due in some part to the "Byron effect". But the actual policy of seeking sources of income abroad, and persuading foreign investors that Greece had a future worth investing in, had already been adopted by the Provisional Government in the immediate aftermath of the assembly at Astros – at the very time when Byron was finally making up his mind to go to Greece. So Byron had no part in that decision by the Greek government.

On foreign relations, the situation is more complex. That Greece would need foreign support if it were ever to win its independence was an idea that went back at least to the Russian-Turkish war of the 1770s. In 1821, most Greeks had still looked for that support to Russia. An Orthodox power and a traditional enemy of Turkey, Russia must be persuaded to intervene and guarantee Greek independence. But Russia under Tsar Alexander did no such thing – even though for a time the direction of foreign policy lay in the hands of a Greek nobleman from Corfu, Ioannis Kapodistrias. Perhaps as early as 1820, Mavrokordatos and Ignatios in Pisa were beginning to contemplate a different scenario: the very one that Byron would later espouse. According to this scenario, the Ottoman empire was in terminal decline, and the western European states would need a new buffer to protect them against future expansion by Russia (even though officially they were all together in the Holy Alliance). That buffer would be a strong and independent Greece, which the western powers might therefore be persuaded to support.[11]

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[11] Alexandre Mavrocordato, "Coup d'oeil sur la Turquie" [1820], in: A. Prokesch von Osten, *Geschichte des Abfalls der Griechen* (Vienna: Gedold 1867), vol. III, pp. 1-54; cf. Georgios Theodoridis, *Ο Αλέξανδρος Μαυροκορδάτος και η δράση του (1791-1821)* (Athens: Neohellenic Research Foundation 2011).

One of the things that tipped the scenario from the old one of looking to Russia to the new one of looking to the West was the phenomenon of philhellenism. By the end of 1821 it was becoming clear that the most potent link to foreign sensibilities was not the expected one of Orthodox Christianity, but the heritage of the classical Greek past, that was mobilising popular support throughout western Europe and as far away as in the USA.

By 1823 the geopolitical situation had radically changed. In Russia, Kapodistrias was out of office. A Russian proposal made the next year for Greece to be partitioned provoked horror in Greece when it became known. By contrast, in Britain, the new Foreign Secretary, George Canning, in March 1823 went so far as to recognise the rights of the Greeks as belligerents. The British government still maintained an official policy of strict neutrality. But Canning's step was the first sign of recognition by a foreign power that the Greek revolutionaries had some legitimacy. It was now that Mavrokordatos set himself by all possible means to woo the British interest – through lobbying Canning and the British government, through seeking a loan in London, and, as soon as Byron's involvement became known, through enlisting the most famous Englishman of his day to the side of the beleaguered Greek government.

So it is impossible to tell how far Byron's ideas for a strategic alliance between Greece and Britain, based on common interests, were really his own or merely reflected what Mavrokordatos already thought. It does seem likely, though, that Mavrokordatos' fortuitous acquaintance first with the Shelleys in Pisa and then with Byron at Missolonghi had some impact on his own political thinking.[12] It was only later, at least a year after Byron's death, that Greek politics began to develop along the lines of parties

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[12] Vasilis Panagiotopoulos, "Κάτι έγινε στην Πίζα το 1821", *Τα Ιστορικά* 3/5 (1986) 177-82 (pp. 180-1); Christos Loukos, "Οι «τύχες» του Αλέξανδρου Μαυροκορδάτου στη νεοελληνική συνείδηση", in *Η Επανάσταση του 1821* (Athens: Society for the Study of Modern Hellenism 1994), pp. 93-106 (p. 106, n. 37).

aligned to the rival Great Powers. Mavrokordatos, from then and for the rest of his long life, would become the leading figure in the English party.

The Greeks' view of Byron

How did the Greeks view Byron, while he was alive among them? For Mavrokordatos and his immediate circle, of course, Byron was an ace in their hands, to be held on to at all costs. For almost everybody else, access to his money and his person was a goal to intrigue for. The exception was Kolokotronis. Kolokotronis never so much as mentions Byron in his later memoirs. At the time, he greatly surprised Byron's emissary Hamilton Browne by stating that he objected to the principle of a foreign loan, which he complained would only be used to prop up Mavrokordatos and his associates. Even if it succeeded, according to Kolokotronis, the loan would bring with it dependence on a foreign government.[13]

More typical, and revealing of the way in which Byron's presence was beginning to break down traditional, localist politics in Greece, was the reaction of Georgios Sisinis, the primate of Gastouni in the northwest Peloponnese. Sisinis during those months was trying to keep in with both sides, with the deeply traditional aim of trying to protect the people of his own region from plunder, extortion, and violence. Sisinis wrote several times to Byron, and at one point thought he had succeeded in persuading him to disembark first in his own power-base of Eleia. Once Byron was at Missolonghi, Sisinis kept up the pressure, sending messengers to Byron but also to Mavrokordatos' enemies within the town. Byron, no doubt schooled by Mavrokordatos, responded with consummate diplomacy – with perfect manners promising nothing.

Shortly before Byron's death, Sisinis' frustration broke out in a remarkable display of self-awareness. This letter to a political

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[13] Browne, "Narrative", p. 404. This part of the conversation with Kolokotronis does not appear in the report that he sent to Byron at the time (see note 5).

friend and supporter is touching in its candid recognition that, thanks to Byron and Mavrokordatos, the old structures of power in the Morea can never be the same again:

> Our own policy is crumbling from the foundations... If it was only a matter of making up to the Milord, that I could take. But then I see Mavrokordatos too, whose intentions are evil and you should know it. And all the time I keep thinking that the only thing I can do is to abandon my own policy and adopt a new one, and of such a sort, with such fine manners, that maybe that way we can further our old policy [after all]. And this disaster has come upon us because of the loans, because the Milord is going to give it all to the people at Kranidi and that is the basis of their power.[14]

Of all the warlords who plotted to attract Byron and his wealth to their side, the one who came nearest to success was Odysseus Androutsos in Athens. Odysseus successfully won over Byron's associates Stanhope and Trelawny (who would later marry Odysseus' under-age sister). By the second half of March 1824, Odysseus had succeeded in persuading both Mavrkordatos and Byron to join him in a summit meeting of the leaderships of Eastern and Western Greece at Salona (modern Amphissa).

The meeting was postponed several times, as rains made the Fidari (Evinos) river impassable and effectively cut off Missolonghi from the rest of Greece by land. In the end, neither Mavrokordatos nor Byron went to Salona, because Byron became ill on 11 April and died just over a week later, on the nineteenth.

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[14] "... το εδικόν μας σύστημα πέφτει από τα θεμέλια... Αν ήτον να αγκαλιάσω τον Μιλόρδον μοναχά, υπομονή· πλην βλέπω και τον Μαυροκορδάτον, όστις θρέφει κακούς σκοπούς και να το ηξεύρης· μ' όλον τούτο πάντα στοχάζομαι, ότι δεν ημπορώ να κάμω αλλέως αλλά να αφήσω το σύστημά μου και να ενδυθώ το νέον και τοιαύτης λογής, με τρόπους εύμορφους, ημπορούμεν να βοηθήσωμεν και το παλαιόν μας σύστημα· και αυτή η συμφορά έχει να έλθη πλην εξ αιτίας των δανείων, επειδή και ο Μιλόρδος έχει να δώση όλα των Κρανιδιωτών και αυτή είναι η βάσις της δυνάμεώς των" (*Μνημεία* [see note 6], IV 283-4 no. 1156: Georgios Sisinis to Konstantinos Dragonas, 26 March [OS /7 April] 1824).

Mavrokordatos, through an extraordinary combination of bad luck and an excess of political ingenuity, had lost his ace after all.

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In the short term, Byron's death was a disaster for Greece. It was the principal reason for the delivery of the first instalment of the English loan to be delayed by almost six months. The promise that the money was on its way was sufficient for the government to rout the rebels in the Peloponnese and restore its authority throughout Greece by early June 1824. But the delays occasioned by Byron's death held up the actual payment until the end of July. As a result, the Greek cause suffered catastrophic losses, that might otherwise have been averted: the crushing of the revolt in Crete and the destruction of the island towns of Kasos and Psara. As one of the negotiators for the loan bitterly put it, writing from London to the President of the Executive in Greece, when the first instalment was finally paid over: "How I curse fate for not having left Byron in the land of the living for fifteen days more, until you could have got the money."[15]

But that was in the short term. In the long-term *political* history of the war, Byron's presence, his alignment with Mavrokordatos, and his role in promoting the British loan, were all significant factors in the closely fought struggle for dominance between the modernisers and the warlords. If that struggle had gone to Kolokotronis and the warlords, then Greece, or more probably several separate regions, might have achieved the same kind of *de facto* independence as did Serbia from 1815 until 1878, or Samos until 1912, while still remaining nominally under Ottoman rule. As it was, Greece instead became the first new state

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[15] "... πόσον αναθεματώ την μοίραν, οπού δεν άφησεν ακόμη δέκα και πέντε ημέρας με τους ζώντας τον Μπάυρον, έως να λάβετε τα αργύρια..." (*Αρχεία Λαζάρου και Γεωργίου Κουντουριώτου*, vol III, ed. Antonios Lignos (Athens: Sakellarios 1920), p. 63: Ioannis Orlandos to Georgios Koundouriotis, 28 July [OS /7 August] 1824).

in modern Europe to win full legal sovereignty – the first of the modern type of nation-state that has since become the norm throughout the continent and much of the rest of the world. The Greece that Byron fought for – the Greece that came into existence by international treaty in February 1830 – in that sense is a cornerstone of what today we call modernity.

For Greece itself, that achievement came at a price. Because Kolokotronis also had it right: acceptance of a foreign loan really did mean that foreigners ever afterwards would have a say in running the country. The landmark achievement of sovereign independence in 1830, *de jure*, was never quite that *de facto*. The fault-line in Greek society that Byron tried to bridge in 1824 is still there today – manifested in the continuing consequences of the economic and political crisis that broke over the country in 2010.