Lord Byron and Mesologgi in Art

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Lord Byron and Mesologgi in Art:
The Messiah and his Mission.

Introduction

Philhellenic artists depicted Byron as a beacon of heroism in Mesologgi.¹ This paper examines Byronic imagery with a view to understanding how it came to establish the poet as a messiah of the Greek War of Independence and influenced depictions of revolutionary Mesologgi. Art has contributed significantly to the infusion of the death of Byron in Mesologgi into the narrative of the struggle for Greek national independence. It also contributed to the construction of Mesologgi in Greek culture as a crucible of the ideological creation of the modern nation state. The arrival and death of Byron at Mesologgi were manipulated by artists using recurrent compositional structures influenced by Romantic and classical ideals. Through the analysis of a selection of such images produced from 1813 to 1999, this paper seeks to demonstrate that Byron’s pre-1820 artistic persona influenced the aesthetic and ideological conceptualisation of Mesologgi. These representations will be seen to have brought together historical and heroic subject matter that contributed to the stabilisation of narratives attached to both Byron and Mesologgi and elevated the political significance of each on the world stage.

Travellers to Mesologgi have regularly described the town as located on swampy flats with a damp, unhealthy climate.² The pall-like, melancholy atmosphere already associated with the town was heightened by Byron’s death there on 19 April 1824, which continues to influence perceptions of Mesologgi as a gloomy, yet heroic place.³ The geography and climate of Mesologgi have in turn contributed to the consolidation of the legend of Byron as a tragic heroic figure and of the town as a

¹ In the past this place name has been conventionally transliterated into English as ‘Missolonghi’, however I have found 27 other spellings as well. Amongst these I have a preference for ‘Mesologgi’ as it renders the local pronunciation more accurately and is in use today textually, therefore I have used it consistently except where quoting a text containing another spelling.
² Chandler (1776: 282) and Cockerell (1903: 230) both describe the locality as having a disease-bearing climate. Waddington (1825: 169-170) wrote that he didn’t visit Mesologgi partly because of its ‘repulsive nature’ in reference to the ‘pestilential climate’ of the place.
³ Henry Fox arrived in Mesologgi on 12 May 1824. His narrative of the event described the town as ‘pestilential’, that he visited the house where Byron died and how terrible the loss was for Greece and Europe (Earl of Ilchester 1923: 209-10).
place of ‘deathless fame’ in modern Greek history. On the basis of the response to Byron’s arrival in the town Marchand characterised Byron as ‘A “Messiah in Missolonghi”’. His observation that ‘Byron was not cast down by the dismal, marshy town or the house that had been provided for him’ illustrates the coalescence of heroism and adversity that implicated the physical environment of Mesologgi in Byronic legend.

**Byron as an artistic subject**

Philhellene art figuratively transformed Byron’s image from a literary into a heroic icon. Current scholarship maintains that Byron manipulated his image to reflect a literary persona with an associated heroic element and thus contributed directly to the formation of Byronic iconography. Peach discerns the ‘prefiguration of Byron as a Romantic hero’ in the 1808-9 portrait by Sanders where the windswept poet is about to board a dinghy with his page Robert Rushton; the image accompanied later editions of *Childe Harold*. Heinzelman refers to the phenomenon of an easily recognisable ‘Byronic branding’ heightened by the poet’s celebrity, and argues that it contributed to the success of his oeuvre. Mole also considers that Byron’s celebrity was fed by his poems, which channelled attention back to his persona and thus created a market for images of the poet. Byron commissioned self-portraits and complained about, or rejected those not to his liking. Byron’s publisher also commissioned portraits and was known to give engravings of the poet as gifts at social functions, which amounts to both promotion and commodification of his famous client.
Two portraits provided the main iconographies for representations of Byron in Greece: both were painted in 1813 and circulated widely in print form. One is Richard Westall’s *George Gordon Byron, 6th Baron Byron* and the other is Thomas Phillips’ *Portrait of a Nobleman* (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). As precepts for later representations of Byron, these youthful portraits contributed to the sense of unfulfilled potential and tragedy that became associated with Byron’s death at the age of 36 at Mesologgi. The components of these two portraits that pre-figure later portrayals of Byron concern his life as a poet and an aristocrat. In the Phillips’ painting these components are the large collar, the cloak, the distinctive hairline and dimpled chin. Byron is similarly clothed in Westall’s portrait, but here the subject’s identity as a poet is emphasised through the chin-in-hand cerebral pose, and his isolation in a cavern.

**Friedel: The force of destiny or the 'siege of Byron'***?

Politicised Philhellenism needed propaganda and this determined how the Greek War of Independence was constituted artistically. Byron served as a figurehead of Philhellenism that conveyed both the optimism and the difficulty of the struggle. One notable exponent of this art was Adam Friedel, an enterprising individual who spent three years in Greece during the early stages of the insurrection.\(^{13}\) In 1824 Friedel commenced a lithographic project of a pictorial album containing 24 leading figures of the Greek revolution. The resultant album, was titled *The Greeks: Twenty-four portraits of the principal leaders and personages who have made themselves most conspicuous in the Greek Revolution*, was well received and influenced the conceptualisation of contemporary Greece in the West.\(^{14}\) Byron was among the subjects selected for the second part of the album published in 1825, and a further five images of Byron were added successively as the project expanded into six installments by 1832. The series of images of Byron was titled *Lord Byron, The noble advocate and supporter of the Greek nation*, dated from 1825 to 1828 and cast him as a poet and active Philhellene.

Although Friedel had actually met Byron in Mesologgi, his images incorporated established Byronic iconography that was over ten years old. The three-

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\(^{13}\) See Koukiou-Mitropoulou (2007: 13-26) for an account of Friedel’s sojourn in Greece.

quarter profile, Byron’s distinctive hairline and dimpled chin in *Lord Byron*, *The noble advocate and supporter of the Greek nation* 1828 (Figure 2.1) clearly identifies the lithograph’s basis in Phillips’ *Portrait of a Nobleman* 1813 (Figure 1.2). Friedel’s representation upholds earlier Byronic iconography of lively curls and rosy complexion, features that suggest reserves of vitality. Byron is poised on the edge of a precipice with a pocket-sized notebook in his right hand. His left hand rests under his jacket, which is vaguely military in style. The gesture is reminiscent of the ‘hand in waistcoat’ posture of 18th century portraiture that was based on a classical model signifying orators and men of worth. The addition of a cloak can be deemed a Romanticist stroke, as a cloak had become a trademark of Byron the poet. However, the established iconography of Byron as a solitary literary genius is transformed through the helmet and sword in the foreground, as well as the Greek landscape in the background. Apart from denoting status, the huge crest on the helmet bears associations of ancient warrior heroes. The inclusion of the helmet further lends an element of authenticity as Byron took three such objects with him to Greece. The scene is suggestive of Byron’s sojourn in Cephalonia before embarking for the mainland: in the background is Mesologgi, presented as a low-lying citadel on a promontory extending into the lagoon (Figure 2.2). The lithograph creates a heightened political context because it locates the poet in revolutionary Greece and artistically established Byron in a military role. In terms of the historiography of Mesologgi, the inclusion of the town in a composition created 1828, several years after its fall and Byron’s death, acknowledged its importance in Philhellene and Greek national ideology, as a place where the ideals of the Greek revolution were put into practice.

To a viewer aware of this journey’s outcome, Friedel’s image of Byron waiting to cross the Ionian Sea to mainland revolutionary Greece becomes a depiction of the force of destiny and accords with the popular perception of Byron as a solitary genius and turbulent personality who completely committed himself to the liberal cause. Friedel’s representation of a reflective Byron across the gulf from Mesologgi can be connected with persisting speculation as to Byron’s motivation in becoming

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17 (Marchand 1957, vol 3: 1079). However, Byron was not known to have ever worn them (Eliot 1992: 197).
involved in the Greek War of Independence. Artistic representations of Byron and Mesollogi have not engaged with the difficult political realities that he faced in deciding when and where to land in revolutionary Greece, or the circumstances that awaited him upon arrival in Mesollogi. Langley Moore coined the term ‘the siege of Byron’ to describe the inundation he experienced in Cephalonia by Greek military, civil and religious emissaries soliciting support and resources.\textsuperscript{18} Minta has examined a series of letters by Philhellenes and insurgents to Byron during the summer of 1823 to demonstrate the careful consideration he gave to optimising his contribution to the war effort in Mesollogi.\textsuperscript{19}

Byron understood that the motivation behind the calls to hasten his landing on the mainland was financial. In effect, the insurgency did not have a naval fleet or regular army, and the initial funds for the war effort were raised by contributions or were plundered from Turkish inhabitants.\textsuperscript{20} The need to pay the irregular army was among the most pressing requirements of the time. Tsiamalos argues that the engagement of Souliote troops using Byron’s funds was part of Mavrokordatos’ strategy to secure his own political and military position in the region.\textsuperscript{21} Byron wrote to Bowring on 24 July 1823 that, ‘The Archbishop is at Pisa -- but has sent me several letters etc. for Greece.--What they most seem to want or desire is ‘Money--Money--Money.’\textsuperscript{22} Byron’s postscript to the letter to Hobhouse on 14 September 1823 reveals his desire to support the insurgents while maintaining a degree of pragmatism regarding his possible role in the War:

P.S.-- I have sent over to Missolonghi some medical stores for the wounded there. --- (the Commandant of the town) is very pressing that I should go over there---but I first must have an answer from the Tripolitza Gov[ernmen]t---and also keep a look out for the arrival of the Committee’s vessel.---When these things are settled I may as well be in one place as another I suppose---though I have as little cunning in fortifying a besieged town as “honour hath skill in Surgery”\textsuperscript{23}.

\textsuperscript{18} Langley Moore (1974: 389).
\textsuperscript{19} Minta (February, 2007).
\textsuperscript{20} Stobaugh (1965: 13). Diamandouros (1972: 302) identified the effort to establish a regular army amongst the insurgents as the most difficult of tasks in the organization of revolutionary Greece. Veremis (1984: 165) described the revolutionary military force as having been made up not of one army, but several. Local leaders with strong regional allegiances commanded these irregular armed forces and Vakalopoulos (1991: 119) considers that this cultural factor and the accompanying issues of legitimacy of power formed the crux of the civil wars that took place during the revolution.
\textsuperscript{21} Tsiamalos (2009: 348-9).
\textsuperscript{22} Marchand (1973-82, vol. 10: 213).
\textsuperscript{23} Marchand (1973-82, vol. 11: 25).
On 15 October 1823, the legislative body of the Provisional Greek Government wrote to Mavrokordatos from Salamis asking him to proceed to Mesollogi in the capacity of President of western Greece. On that same day the Provisional Government wrote to Byron formally requesting that he join Mavrokordatos and provide financial support to the amount of 30,000 pounds sterling. A week earlier Mavrokordatos had written to Byron urging him once again to cross over to the mainland. This letter contains a suggestion of a leadership role for Byron in a military expedition to gain control of Lepanto. Byron’s presence, Mavrokordatos claimed, would ‘electrify the troops’.

Byron did not remain inactive when on Cephalonia waiting for directions from the London Greek Committee as the material support he provided to the insurgents in Mesollogi demonstrates. Another example of Byron’s tangible contribution to the Greek cause during this period is an advance of 4,000 pounds sterling to the Greek government on 1/13 November 1823, specifically for the needs of western Greece.

Minta points out that Byron did not receive the letter dated October from the Provisional Government requesting his presence and the large sum until mid-December, when Mavrokordatos had arrived in Mesollogi. This indicates that Byron was assessing matters independently of the London Greek Committee and according to his own judgement as to the needs of the insurgency. Byron’s decisive action in forwarding financial aid to the insurgents has been assessed by Andreades as an intervention at a critical time. Byron’s resources supported the insurrection in

25 Protopsaltes (1963-86, vol. 5 part 3: 552). The timing of the letter to Byron from the government appears to coincide with the call for military support for Mesollogi, particularly a naval fleet to defend the western coast, see letter from Andreas Zaimis in Kerpini dated 5 October 1823 to the President of the Executive body of government (Londos 1914, vol. 1: 144-146).
27 It appears the remark appealed to Byron as he referred to it in a letter to Hobhouse announcing his intention to depart for Mesollogi (Marchand (1973-82, vol.11: 85).
28 Andreades (1904: 14-50). See Dalleggio (1949: 66) for copy of the deed for this amount dated 12 November 1823 and Marchand (1973-82, vol. 11: 60-1) for the loan agreement with the Greek deputies dated 1/13 November 1823.
29 Minta (2007: 1094). A postscript to a letter from Anastasios Londos in Argos to his brother Andreas in Gastouni dated 30 October 1823 refers to Mavrokordatos carrying a letter for Byron asking for his presence there (Londos 1914, vol. 1: 163-4). In fact, the fleet was being assembled at this time and Mavrokordatos set sail for Mesollogi on 18 November 1823 (Protopsaltes 1963-86, vol. 5 part 3: 627).
30 Andreades (1904: 14).
western mainland Greece during a volatile period of civil war, when the Provisional Government had no firm source of income and the Greek agents in London had difficulty in both negotiating a loan and in selling Greek bonds. The value of Byron’s contribution to a war that was sustained under these adversities should not be undervalued.31

Given that Byron was solicitous for image, he can reasonably be assumed to have deliberated on when and where to land on mainland Greece with a view to optimising his chances of a successful contribution to the Greek War of Independence. His sense of the timeliness of his physical involvement is demonstrated in a letter to Mavrokordatos on 2 December 1823 introducing Stanhope, who preceded him to Mesologgi as an envoy of the London Greek Committee.32 Byron outlined the three possibilities for Greece as he saw them: to obtain liberty, to become dependant on the sovereigns of Europe, or to remain under Turkish rule. His reference to civil war amongst the insurgents demonstrates an understanding of the volatility of internal Greek politics and perhaps recognition that a better moment for crossing over was not likely to arise because of this continual flux. On 27 December, just twenty-four hours before sailing for Mesologgi, Byron wrote a letter measured in tone stating as much to Thomas Moore.33 Byron told of being able to proceed to Mesologgi with a ‘safe conscience’ because of Mavrokordatos’ official appointment there. Byron wrote that he held enough money to pay his guard and believed that he wielded sufficient influence over the Souliotes to keep them in ‘harmony’ with other groups. On the same day he wrote to Kinnaird, asking him ‘to stretch my credit and anticipate my means to their fullest extent’.34 There was no tardiness in his remark to Kinnaird regarding the possibilities of both Greece and himself that he should ‘believe neither the Good nor the evil you may hear of Greece as yet – none of them have yet hit on the right place of the cause…’.35

31 Beaton (2013: 199) considers that Byron’s loan was significant in that it launched the fleet from Hydra to Mesologgi that brought Mavrokordatos to western Greece.
Odevaere: Byron and glory

Byron died of illness, not in battle after only a few months in Mesologgi. This however did not prevent Odevaere representing Byron as a vanquished hero of the Greek War of Independence. When Odevaere painted Byron on his Death-bed c.1826 (Figure 3) he conferred on his subject’s face the same sensuality, striking brow and hair-line as those in Westall’s George Gordon Byron, 6th Baron Byron, 1813 (Figure 1.1). Greer argues that the Apollo Belvedere was an inspiration for Westall’s portrait.\(^{36}\) Kenyon-Jones recognises the association between Byron’s profile and Apollo, but also credits Johann Casper Lavater’s physiognomic system that circulated widely from the 1770s onwards as having influenced Neoclassical aesthetics relating to ideal beauty.\(^{37}\) Odevaere’s training under David is apparent in the Neoclassical structure of the composition and the arrangement of the contemporary subject matter. The shallow space, classical drapery and reclining form of the painting clearly reference David’s Andromache Mourning Hector, 1783.\(^{38}\) Odevaere’s academic, theoretically informed manner is also present in the covering of Byron’s right foot, which eliminated his congenital condition and regenerated Byron’s body in death.\(^{39}\) David communicated the nobility of Hector’s death for his country through a laurel crown, and Odevaere laid Byron out in a similar dead warrior mode.

The veneration of Byron as a vanquished hero of the Greek insurrection exemplifies the rhetorical idealisation of the classical past in the construction of modern Greek history and utilises the trope of light to produce Byron’s apotheosis. Odevaere presents a body in superb physical shape that displays both mortality and unspent vitality, thus suggesting an untimely death. A lyre with broken strings on the floor beside the bed along with a sheet of paper, seemingly just fallen from Byron’s extended hand, provides a symbolic reference to his identity as a poet. Wreaths encircle the titles of Byron’s poems commencing with Ode to Napoleon, Tales and Childe Harold, and decorate the side of the bed. The sword in its scabbard over the

\(^{36}\) Greer in Kenyon-Jones (2008: 33).
\(^{38}\) Jacques-Louis David, Andromache Mourning Hector, 1783. 2.75 x 2.03 m, oil on canvas. Paris, Musée du Louvre, D. L. 1969-1.
\(^{39}\) See De Baecque (1997: 184) for a discussion of the refined treatment of the dead hero by David.
bed-head forms a reference to Byron as a soldier. The juxtaposition of the lyre and sword defines a heroic path; and the painting is firmly grounded in the rhetoric of French Republican politics, particularly that of the national martyr. Apart from David’s Andromache Mourning Hector, Odevaere also referenced in equal measure the etching Honneurs rendus à la mémoire de le Pelletier: Jeudy [sic] 24 Janvier 1793, le corps du martyr de la liberté 1793. This image depicts the elaborate funeral of Louis-Michel le Pelletier, who was murdered by a bodyguard of Louis XVI because he voted for the execution of the King at the National Convention. After his death Pelletier was elevated to the status of Republican martyr and model patriotic citizen. Byron is presented in an almost identical fashion to Le Pelletier, with his body partially enveloped in a sheet, his arm dramatically dropping to his side and his sword hanging off the bed-head.

While Byron on his Death-bed was created in or around 1826, it is uncertain whether Odevaere painted this work before, or after, the fall of Mesologgi that took place on 11 April 1826. Although the town was well known by 1824, the association with Byron became indelible after his death there on 19 April of that year. In a letter to Hobhouse on 31 March 1824 Byron himself refers to Mesologgi as ‘this now celebrated city’. It is quite likely that the fall of the town prompted Odevaere to use Byron as a subject to deliberate on the loss of both.

Odevaere’s idealised representation of Byron’s dead body is the embodiment of the notions of hope and tragedy that also came to define the town of Mesologgi. The painting contains several conspicuous components of the ideological construction of modern Greece. A statue above the head of the bed, cropped above the waist by the frame of the painting, is inscribed with the Greek word for ‘liberty’ and this forms the

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40 Mavrokordatos had appointed Byron Commander General of the armed forces in Aetolia (Protopsaltes 1963-86, vol. 4: 117-8 and 190). The position was not purely ceremonial and Byron acted in this military role. Examples include the placing of a Prussian officer under arrest after an outbreak of unruliness in the barracks; and requesting Andreas Londos in Vostitsa to send twelve of his men to Mesologgi for training under the English artisans (Moore 1830, vol. 2: 759 and Londos 1914, vol. 2: 434).

41 The artistic depiction of Byron as a martyr of Greek liberty was the most popular over the 1826-7 period (Athanassoglou-Kallmyer 1989: 87).

42 Imprimerie des Révolutions, Honneurs rendus à la mémoire de le Pelletier: Jeudy 24 Janvier 1793, le corps du martyr de la liberté 1793. 9.5 x 16.5 cm, etching. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Estampes et Photographie, RESERVE FOL-QB-201 (130).


key concept of the composition. The word connects the classical Arcadian landscape with Byron’s laurel-crowned head thereby emphasising his sacrifice for the cause. Beaton connects these same elements in his political analysis of the significance of Byron’s death for revolutionary Greece. Byron, Beaton concludes, died for the idea of a liberated Greece, and his figure became the epitome of the revival of ancient civilization in the modern world.\(^{45}\) The Arcadian landscape in the painting on the wall behind the dead Byron is in fact Mesologgi idealised and presented as regenerated ancient Greece.\(^{46}\) The water in the foreground and the mountains in the background are stylised visions of the topographical features for which the town is known best. In short, the landscape painting is an artifice that establishes Mesologgi as an Arcadian stage for Byron’s death. Odevaere brought together Byron and the town of Mesologgi to articulate the ideological creation of modern Greece around the notion of liberty.\(^{47}\)

**Vryzakis: Byron as the Messiah.**

Byron’s death did not limit the variety of his posthumous artistic representations. Theodoros Vryzakis’ painting *The reception of Lord Byron at Mesologgi*, 1861 represents Byron’s arrival in the town on 5 January 1824 and depicts him as a religious figure amongst the insurgents (Figure 4). Vryzakis’ own biography was strongly linked to the insurrection: he was 12 years old when his father was killed in the war. Vryzakis’ paintings of the insurrection are civic-minded in their portrayal of 19\(^{th}\) century Greek nationalism and have come to be considered as authentic representations of the Greek War of Independence.\(^{48}\) The artist executed the painting of Byron at a time of great political turmoil in Greece. In 1861 hostility between the Bavarian-born King Otto and his Greek subjects over the limitations of constitutional rule had erupted and culminated in the dismissal of the King in 1862.\(^{49}\) King Otto had also become embroiled in conflict with some of the Great Power patrons of Greece, notably England. Considered in this political context, Vryzakis’ pictorial narrative creates an exemplary moment of Greek nationalism and pristine Philhellenism in its

\(^{45}\) Beaton (24-27 November 2010: 16).

\(^{46}\) On the hundredth anniversary of Byron’s death Drinkwater (1924) wrote a poem that evokes a vision of Attic Greece rising out of Mesologgi.

\(^{47}\) Hess (2005: 106-7) considers Mesologgi came to function as a synecdoche of tragedy that collected classical, Romantic, political, religious, antiquarian and utopian visions of Greece through the figure of Byron.


depiction of the town of Mesologgi united behind the figure of Byron during the Greek War of Independence.50

Vryzakis’ artistic narrative is consistent with historical accounts of the 1824 event and the symbolic value of Byron’s physical presence in Greece during the revolution.51 In Mesologgi the newspaper Ellinica Chronica reported that Byron was received ceremoniously by all sectors of the community because he was going to make a large contribution to the regeneration of Greece.52 Assessing these prospects from exile in Pisa, Ignatios, the ex-Metropolitan of Arta and Nafpactos and confidant of Mavrokordatos also placed a high value on Byron’s potential contribution to the War through the exercise of his political influence abroad and was anxious that the insurgents make a good impression on him.53 In a letter to Mavrokordatos dated 16 February 1824 Ignatios sent friendly regards to Byron and also conveyed hopes that Byron, through toil and patience, would become the ‘saviour of Greece’.54 This reference to Byron as ‘the saviour’ was consistent with the rhetoric of the insurrection as a sacred cause, but might seem incongruous coming from a man of the cloth.55 Ignatios’ intentions are clarified in a letter dated 1/13 March 1824 to Louriottis who was in London, negotiating finance for the insurrection.56 In this letter Ignatios expressed the hope that the example of Mavrokordatos’ work with Byron in organising western Greece would be adopted throughout the country and that order would thus be established amongst the insurgents.

51 Gamba (1825: 84). A sober letter to the London Greek Committee from Byron dated 28 January 1824 simply stated that ‘we were very well received’ [(Greek Committee (London). (1823-4: K7 E3 page 2)].
55 Mavromichalis and the Messenian Senate in Kalamata sent a declaration made on 25 March 1821 to the governments of Europe stating ‘Never was a cause more just, more holy than ours; we fight for our sacred religion, for our lives, for our honour, for our property, which our oppressors have never respected’ (Niles, Niles, Hughes & Beatty 28 July 1821: 352).
56 Protopsaltes (1959-61, vol. 4, part 2: 189). In a letter to Byron on the same day he praised Byron for being an enemy of the Porte, as the Sultan had proclaimed him. He also invoked the ancient Gods, rather than Christ, claiming that Apollo and the muses were protecting Byron in his sacrifices in order to restore the temples of Greece. Ignatios did not omit to mention his own prayers for Byron’s success (Ignatios, letter to Byron 1/13 March 1824. British Library. Add. Ms. 31037 folio 43 Correspondence of the family of Byron. Unpublished manuscript, London).
The camaraderie among the insurgents is a prominent political theme of Vryzakis’ *The reception of Lord Byron at Mesolongi*. Byron is the focus of this unification of a population not previously noted for its unanimity. If we assume that it is Stanhope standing behind Byron, this would reinforce the position of Byron as first amongst Philhellenes in Mesolongi. Mavrokordatos, also in western dress, stands on the left between two armed leaders. This grouping represents unity between the administration and military branches of the insurgency. Another symbol of their unity is the Cross of their faith, which is raised as a weapon against the Islamic Ottoman forces and is flaunted as their proud insignia on a mass of flagpoles, in marked contrast with the dejection of the broken minaret in this idealised scene.

Vryzakis both adapted existing Byronic iconography and brought religious imagery to bear on his representation of Byron in Mesolongi. The Bishop looks to the sky as he blesses the moment, while the crowd of civilians and soldiers animatedly cheer, some holding revolutionary flags and others, laurel branches. The scene promotes harmonious patriotism and religion as a hallmark of the Greek nation. This is expressed symbolically in the highly decorated figures of the Bishop and the Chieftain on the left. The silver thread that features in their garments creates a visual connection between the men, and promotes an association between Orthodoxy and Patriotism. Pious reverence is paid to Byron through the woman holding votive candles on the left, and a man, further left, bowing deeply towards him with clasped hands.

The facial features of Byron in Vryzakis’ painting appear closely connected to those of Phillips’ *Portrait of a Nobleman*. This is particularly evident through the distinctive plumpness in the left corner crease of Byron’s lips and dimpled chin. However, Vryzakis transformed the loosely flowing upturned collar of Byronic iconography and the Phillips portrait with physiognomic effect. The more compact and neatly downturned collar speaks of diligence, rather than of nonchalance. A further variation of established Byronic iconography is the transformation of the cloak into a red-trimmed and crimson-lined white mantle. The air of leadership and authority denoted by this mantle in Vryzakis’ painting is reinforced through Byron’s strong, proffering stance with out-turned, open arms and firmly planted feet. Vryzakis did not originate this pose; it was created by Tony Johannot as an illustration for the
fourth line from stanza 30 of De Lamartine’s poem *Le dernier chant du Pèlerinage d’Harold* (Figure 5).\textsuperscript{57} De Lamartine’s poem has been interpreted as a conflating of Byron and Childe Harold into a single persona in its fictional account of Byron’s final months.\textsuperscript{58} Kenyon-Jones argues Byron’s literary success gave rise to a confusion in the Western imagination of Byron himself with his protagonists.\textsuperscript{59} Johannot used Phillips’ 1813 *Portrait of a Nobleman* as a model for the physiognomy of Childe Harold and chose to depict him in an open-armed stance as an illustration to the line *De chefs et de soldats Harold environné* of De Lamartine’s poem.\textsuperscript{60} Johannot’s illustration is exceptional for its depiction of Byron in a military scene. In this image Childe Harold holds a yatagan in his left hand and is surrounded by a tightly gathered group of Greek chieftains and soldiers, who are listening intently to him. Childe Harold’s right hand is motioning towards the cache of military equipment before him. A cavalry troop is charging in the background and a raised flag draws the viewer’s attention to the horsemen and unifies the scene.

Vryzakis’ use of the posture from Johannot’s illustration, which was derived from a work of literary fiction based on the Byron-Childe Harold nexus, is a measure of the extent to which Romanticist depictions of Byron infiltrated Greek nationalist representations of his participation in the Greek War of Independence. Vryzakis replaced the yatagan that Childe Harold holds in Johannot’s image with a stylised military cap, and this conveys the idea of Byron’s being in service to the Greek cause (Figures 6.1 and 6.2). Vryzakis gave added strength to Byron’s stance by widely planting his feet. This stance, combined with Byron’s extended, white-gloved hands, appears to be extending the aura around him. The open-armed gesture also recalls iconographies of Christ in icons depicting Gospel scenes such as the Presentation. The predominance of white in his attire and the centrality of his figure in the painting

\textsuperscript{57} De Lamartine first published the poem in 1825, but Johannot’s image did not accompany the text at this time. I believe that the image first appeared in the 1850 edition of De Lamartine’s *Oeuvres complètes* (1850, vol. 1: 436-7) and the image seen here in Figure 5 came from the page between pages 416 and 417 of De Lamartine’s 1855 edition of *Premières et nouvelles méditations poétiques*.

\textsuperscript{58} Kouzoupis (1967: 56 and 60) and Wilkes (2004: 25).


\textsuperscript{60} The engraving is titled *Childe Harold* and is subtitled *De chefs et de soldats Harold environné*. 
marks Byron as a significant figure of the gathering and has religious overtones due to the association with light.\footnote{61 In reality Byron’s journey to Mesologgi had been an arduous one. In a letter to Mr. Muir from Dragometstori dated 2 January 1824 while waiting for the Greek fleet to escort him to Mesologgi, Byron wrote that the he had slept on deck without changing his clothes for five days, so even with a change it is unlikely that he landed looking as pristine as Vryzakis depicted (Moore 1830, vol. 2: 707).}

The downturned collar in both painting and book illustration suggests that Vryzakis modelled his figure of Byron directly on Johannot’s image of Childe Harold, without referencing Phillips’ Portrait of a Nobleman. Another possibility is that Vryzakis’ image is a composite of Johannot’s and Phillips’ representations. The thicker jowl of Johannot’s work differentiates it from both of the other images, which suggests that Vryzakis may have used Phillips’ representation as a reference for Byron’s physiognomy and Johannot’s for the stance. Regardless of this detail, what is evident is the influence of Byronism on the visualisation of 19th century Greek nationalism and the influence of Childe Harold on Vryzakis’ depiction of revolutionary Mesologgi.

The idea of Byron playing a role in the regeneration of Greece in Vryzakis’ painting is subtle, yet extremely potent. The Deacon standing on the left of the Bishop, amid a cloud of incense, is holding an Icon of the Resurrection, which is an archetypal image of victory in the Orthodox faith because it represents triumph over death. The golden-haired girl standing before the icon reinforces the idea of Byron as the Saviour of the Greek insurrection: as she draws the attention of the person beside her to Byron, her raised pointing finger is raised directly in front of the icon and below the figure of the resurrected and hovering Christ. The idea of Byron as the Saviour of Greece is ultimately delivered to the viewer through the crimson-coloured lining of Byron’s mantle. It is the same colour as the shroud unravelling around Christ as he soars up to heaven and into divinity (Figures 7.1 and 7.2).

**Koustas: Byron as the Greek National Hero**

The adaptation of Byronic iconography by contemporary representations of Byron in revolutionary Greece demonstrates that his presence in Mesologgi continues to define Philhellenism. Koustas’ lithograph chose to combine elements of the
classical Greek tradition of veneration of dead heroes (Figure 8). The lithograph is closely modelled on Westall’s 1813 portrait (Figure 1.1) that referred to Byron’s identity as a poet, and classical Greek grave stele. The solemn and introspective qualities of Westall’s portrait are magnified by their placement on the funeral stele by Koustas. While the artist utilised Byronic iconography relating to literary genius, he released this iconography from its original 1813 context by removing Byron from the cavern in which he sat isolated in Westall’s portrait into the domain of a public funerary monument. The name ‘Lord Byron’ is inscribed in English below the entablature of the grave stele, and ‘Mesolongi 19-4-1824’ appears in Greek at the base. The response in Greek to the written English is a neat reference to both the Philhellene’s support for the Greek Revolution and the connection between Byron and Mesolongi. Koustas transformed Byron from the poet and aristocrat into the embodiment of politicised Philhellenism, that is, the desire to see the descendants of the ancient Greeks free. In doing so, Koustas has illustrated how Byron at Mesolongi defines 19th century Philhellenism and has contributed to the definition of modern Greece.

**Conclusion**

Artistic Philhellenism utilised images of Mesolongi and Byron as motifs of hope and tragedy to elicit empathy for the insurrection. Romanticist representations of Byron as a poet, such as those by Westall and Phillips, provided key leitmotifs for the development of an iconography relating to his role in the Greek War of Independence. Representations of Byron by Friedel modelled on Phillips’ rendition of Byron presented Mesolongi as the location of his efforts in revolutionary Greece. Byron’s commitment to the Greek insurrection created enormous anticipation in Greece regarding Western aid and intervention into a war that did not officially have the sanction of Western governments, or the resources for decisive military engagements. Vryzakis’ painting of Byron’s arrival in Mesolongi embodies this anticipation and the notion of legitimacy, which his presence conferred on the Greek War of Independence. Vryzakis’ visual reference to Johannot’s illustration of Byron as the fictional character Childe Harold created a thematic connection to heroism, while the composition as a whole elevated him to a saviour of the Greek nation. Odevaere’s

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62 Grafton, Most, & Settis (2010: 432).
painting is an example of the significant contribution made by art to the romanticisation of Mesologgi because of Byron’s presence and death there. Odevaere metaphorically recreated Mesologgi along the lines of a regenerated classical Arcadian landscape, and connected Byron’s death to French Republican political values. Like Odevaere before him Koustas referenced Westall’s portrait of Byron in his representation of Byron. The Romantic artistic representation of Byron as a Philhellene, as Koustas’ lithograph demonstrates, reinforces the view that he made a valuable contribution to the Greek War of Independence and therefore, to the definition of modern Hellenism. The relationship between Byron and revolutionary Mesologgi in visual culture transformed Byronic iconography to herald him as a compatriot of the Greeks. Earlier iconography signalling a solitary intellect was thus modified to express the political value of action. In Greek, and wider Western culture, this is what has established the political image of Byron after his death.
Figure 1.1  Richard Westall, *George Gordon Byron, 6th Baron Byron*, 1813. 91.4 x 71.1 cm, oil on canvas. London, National Portrait Gallery, inv. no. NPG 4243.
Figure 1.2  Thomas Phillips, *Portrait of a Nobleman*, 1813. 88 x 70.5 cm, oil on canvas. Nottinghamshire, Newstead Abbey Collection, inv. no. NA 532  BLDIDNA000454-1.
Figure 2.1  Adam de Friedel publisher, Bouvier del'. *Lord Byron. The noble advocate and supporter of the Greek nation, 1828.*
Figure 2.2  Adam de Friedel, *Lord Byron. The noble advocate and supporter of the Greek nation.* Detail of Mesologgi as a citadel.
Figure 3  Joseph-Denis Odevaere, *Byron on his Death-bed*. c1826. 166 x 234.5 cm, oil on canvas. Brugge, Groeninge Museum, inv. no. 0000.GRO0350.1.
Figure 4  Theodoros Vryzakis, *The reception of Lord Byron at Mesologgi*, 1861. 155 x 213, oil on canvas. Athens, The National Art Gallery and Alexander Soutzos Museum, inv. no. II. 1298.
Figure 5  Tony Johannot pinxit, Gouttière sculpsit, Childe Harold, c1855. 24 x 16 cm, black and white steel engraving. Melbourne, private collection.
Figure 6.1  Tony Johannot *Childe Harold*. Detail.

Figure 6.2  Theodoros Vryzakis, *The reception of Lord Byron at Mesolongi*. Detail.
Figure 7.1  Theodoros Vryzakis, *The reception of Lord Byron at Mesologgi.* Detail.

Figure 7.2  Theodoros Vryzakis, *The reception of Lord Byron at Mesologgi.* Detail.
Figure 8  Apostolis Koutras, *Byron*, 1999. 112 x 76 cm, coloured lithograph. Mesologgi, private collection.
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