

Abstract

Lysandros Kaftantzoglou: Building a Utopia. Constructing the Greek Identity in Post-Revolutionary Athens

At the anniversary of the bicentennial since the events that led to the formation of the Modern Greek State, it is crucial that we revisit the past using the tools of the present. By the in depth examination of historic documents, available archives, or by unearthing archival material that has been overlooked we aim at reexamining the past through our newfound research perspective. We aim at shedding a new light, at a story that has already been told many times; that of the formation of greek identity, especially through the French-greek relationship and its many aspects; being symbolic, aesthetic, ideological, political, architectural. In said research our main focus is the notion of Utopia in the process of rebuilding the Greek Nation; in direct correlation to the arrival of the Venus of Milo at the Louvre Museum in March of 1821 just as the revolution was declared. Venus, from the faraway Milos, is transformed into a greek personification in Paris, a vehicle that can bridge the gap between an ideal past, in a circumstance where what is at stake is the desirable future.

French enlightenment philosophers described the ideals of Greece at a time when Greece did not exist, while the revolutionaries engulfed those ideals to their republicanism and its allegories creating a whole new symbolic system. Greece was but a set of ideals, a series of images of the ruins of grandeur that filled the pages of books such as the one by David Le Roy¹ or those of picturesque value such as those in the book of Comte de Choiseul- Gouffier². Not long before the definitive contribution of the work of Abel Bluet³ that came as a result of the scientific mission in Morias (Peloponnese); after the French troops helped greeks liberate it in 1828. Now we have detailed, measured and most importantly reconstructed drawings; the greek utopian images filling page after page, timely reminder of what has been. But all the while uncovering, and reconstructing the past, the image for the future was being formed alongside the new identity of the Nation State; the first in Europe. If the nation was a building what would it be? To further illuminate that creative process we focus on the work of Lysandros Kaftantzoglou. Kaftantzoglou's commitment to the question of 'greekness', was lifelong and evident in, but not limited at, his architectural work both built and unbuilt. His contribution to the matter was further developed through the position he attained as the first greek director of the Royal School for the Arts from 1844 until 1863. The case study we focus on, is his drawings for the Panellinion Iroon (National Pantheon). Greece is formed primarily on paper, from the first studies on Venus to Bluet's redesigned ancient temples; the anatomy of 'greekness' can be found. While through Kaftantazoglou's speeches and designs the debate unravels; how do we bridge the path from Utopia to re-construction. If the nation was a building maybe it could be the Panellinion Iroon.

¹ Le Roy, David. *Les Ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce*, 1770

² Comte de Choiseul- Gouffier, *Voyage pittoresque de la Grèce*, 1782-1822

³ Blouet, Abel. *Expédition scientifique de Morée, ordonnée par le gouvernement français. Architecture, sculptures, inscriptions et vues du Péloponèse, des Cyclades et de l'Attique*. Volume 1, Firmin-Didot frères, Paris, 1831

Bio

Niki Kogkelli is an architect and PhD candidate at NTUA (National Technical University of Athens) and PhD Fellowship grant recipient of the Hellenic Foundation for Research and Innovation (HFRI); her dissertation title being "Venus: from a Utopia's fragment to rebuilding a Nation". She studied Architecture at TUC (Technical University of Crete) and completed her Masters at NTUA School of Architecture's postgraduate program "Design-Space-Culture". Her research focuses on highlighting theoretical notions, symbolisms and allegories that emerge from historiography, history of art and architecture and political propaganda after the age of Enlightenment in Europe and their impact in the act of design in general and architecture in particular.

