

[DOI: 10.20472/AHC.2020.006.003](https://doi.org/10.20472/AHC.2020.006.003)

**KONSTANTINA NTAKOLIA**

ATHENS SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS, Greece

## **THE REPRESENTATION OF THE DEFEAT. THE GREEK-TURKISH WAR OF 1897 THROUGH THE HAND OF ITS ARTISTS: DRAWINGS AND PAINTINGS OF THE FRONT**

### **Abstract:**

The defeat of Greeks in the short, in terms of duration, war that broke out in 1897 against the Turks, constituted the motive for researching the way that the Greek and foreign artists chose to illustrate this unpleasant outcome of war, since so far, a concertation of the images of that war has not been conducted. Through the study of c.150 drawings, oil paintings and folk images a first attempt is realized to approach and interpret the way that the 'infelicitous' war of 1897 was presented and illustrated, mainly in the national and international Press of that time, where the documentary painting meets Ernst Gombrich's principle of the "eyewitness".

Although the 1897 war lasted approximately only a month the artistic production was immense. Hundreds of correspondents managed to reach the front to execute drawings of the battles that took place in the Thessalian and Epirus front. These fast drawings were sent back home, and they were published in the newspapers of the time (Acropolis, Empros, Pinakothiki, Script, Gli Avvenimenti d' Oriente, L' Illustración, Le Monde Illustré, La Tribuna Illustrata della Domenica, Le Petit Journal Supplément Illustré, Le Petit Parisien, The Daily Graphic, The Illustrated London News etc.) creating a "point of view" of that war. To this end, a second wave of Philhellenism was arisen, motivating the Philhellenes around the world to join once again the Greeks in the battle, e.g., the Italians Garibaldi fought and died heroically in Thessaly.

Last, special reference is made to the works of Demetrios Galanis (1879-1966) and Georgios Roilos (1867-1928). The aforementioned painters were present at the front and had the opportunity to draw the incidents. Although both artists are well known (Galanis lived and work in Paris with the avant-garde while Roilos was a prestigious professor in School of Fine Arts-Athens), this facet of their work remains undiscovered. Therefore, in this study, Galanis' drawings of the front are presented for the first time, while a new approach to Roilos' paintings is attempted.

Based on the analysis and study of the images of the war, we present our conclusions on the depiction of the 1897 Greek-Turkish war: Realism and Naturalism are alternate, while the soldiers are portrayed mainly as ordinary people fighting, suffering and dying for their homeland. Perhaps the foreigners, influenced by these pictures, felt sympathy for the Greek troops and reached for help regardless the continuous recessions. It was a matter of representation of the defeat.

### **Keywords:**

1897 Greek-Turkish war, 19th century Press, correspondents, documentary painting, Philhellenes, Philhellenism, Garibaldi, Galanis, Roilos

## The Representation of the Defeat. The Greek-Turkish War of 1897 through the Hand of its Artists: Drawings and Paintings of the Front

In our study, we investigate the short war of 1897 between Greece and Turkey, focusing on the representation of the defeat of Greece through the drawings and the paintings. So far, there is no concentration of images of this war in order not only to visualize events but also to interpret the way the "unfortunate" war of 1897 was depicted. However, a study has been conducted for the representation of this war in cinema<sup>1</sup>. Also, several historical texts have been written since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century is considered as the "golden age"<sup>2</sup> of war correspondents, and many of them headed to Greece from all over the world.

On the other hand, in Art History, the void of literature in the subject is immediately noticeable<sup>3</sup>. The Greek-Turkish War of 1897 has remained in the shadow of the History of Greek Art, despite its significant artistic output, regarding its duration and outcome. Indeed, Georgios Roilos' (1867-1928) two versions of "The Battle of Farsala" constitutes the unique reference to this war in most cases<sup>4</sup>. Consecutively, we present the results of our study concerning the brief war of 1897<sup>5</sup> between the Greeks and the Turks.

In total, c.150 drawings, paintings and lithographies were collected from Greek and foreign press and from collections of museums. Considering the press and paintings of the time, an overall outcome of our study can be summarized in the followings: (i) Realism and naturalism alternate in most of the works; (ii) In many of them, the landscape plays a dominant role and covers most of the painting. Reference is also made to the names of the hills where the battles were fought, a fact which substantiates the credibility of the eyewitness; (iii) The majority of these artworks are in black and

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Bottomore, *Filming, faking and propaganda: The origins of the war film, 1897-1902*. Diss. Utrecht University, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Charalampos Vogias, *Ο Ελληνοτουρκικός Πόλεμος του 1897, Κινηματογραφικές, Υγειονομικές και άλλες Πρωτοτυπίες- Ευρεία Γενική Βιβλιογραφία, (=The Greek-Turkish War of 1897, Cinema, Healthcare and other originalities-General Bibliography)*, Athens, 2016, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> See Antonis Kotidis, *Ελληνική Τέχνη, Ζωγραφική 19ου αιώνα, (=Greek Art, Painting of 19th century)*, Athens, 1961, Stelios Lydakís, *Οι Έλληνες Ζωγράφοι, Ιστορία Νεοελληνικής Ζωγραφικής, 16ος – 20ός αιώνας, (=History of Greek Painting, 16th-20th century)*, v. 3, Athens, 1976, Nelli Misirli, *Ελληνική Ζωγραφική 18ος-19ος αιώνας (=Greek Painting 18th-19th century)*, Athens, 1993, Miltiadis Papanikolaou, *Η Ελληνική Τέχνη του 20ού αιώνα (=Greek Art of 20th century)*, Thessaloniki, 2006, Chrisanthos Christou, *Η Ελληνική Ζωγραφική 1832-1922 (=Greek Painting 1832-1922)*, Athens, 1981.

<sup>4</sup> See Kotidis, *Greek Art, Painting of 19th century*, Lydakís, *History of Greek Painting, 16th-20th century*, Misirli, *Greek Painting 18th-19th century*, Papanikolaou, *Greek Art of 20th century*, Christou, *Greek Painting 1832-1922*.

<sup>5</sup> The war took place at the central Greece: Thessaly and Epirus. The battles in the Thessalian front are presented in 5 main incidents: (i) The battle at the frontiers 4-11th April 1897; (ii) The retreat to Larissa and Farsala: 12-13th April 1897; (iii) The Battle of Velestino: 16th April 1897; (iv) The Battle of Farsala: 23th April 1897 and (v) The Battle of Domokos: 5th May 1897. Since the battles on the Epirus front were not so extensive and did not have significant impact on the outcome of the war, not many paintings nor drawings have been made in contrast with the battles on the Thessalian front.

white (except for the colored Italian newspaper *La Tribuna Illustrata della Domenica* and the French *Supplément Illustré du Petit Journal*); (iv) The documentary painting requires the recording of the daily routine of soldiers, who are not portrayed as heroes but as ordinary people fighting, suffering and dying for their homeland; (v) The art of photography also seems to have played a decisive role in the conception and execution of the drawings, since many of them are reported to have been made based on photographs taken from the battlefield.<sup>6</sup>

Regarding the Greek press, we noticed that the Greek-Turkish war was one of the main subjects covered in that period. A fact that is proven by the numerous pictures of the battlefields that were published almost daily during the war. These drawings came either from reprints of foreign publications or either by the correspondents themselves, such as the photographer Natsis (newspaper *Ακρόπολις* [=Acropolis]).

From our research, we have identified two painters who were present on the battlefield, survived and their works left indelible memory of the short war, but also many questions to later scholars. The first was the young Dimitrios Galanis (1879-1966), who was sent as a newspaper correspondent to the front. His signature drawings were published in the Press and were presented in this survey, extending our knowledge with respect to the artist's early work in Greece<sup>7</sup>. (After the end of the war, Galanis lived and worked in Paris side to side with the established Avant Guard.) Galanis's early drawings for the Greek-Turkish war constitute a new addition to the painter's work. The precision of the drawing and the sharp line of Galanis (*View of the Battle of Velestine*) that he will develop into his mature engravings are already evident in his early drawings. On the other hand, the realism in the execution of the forms (*The Reveni Battle, at the Front*) in combination with the slight turn to infirmity (*Our Guardians in the Mati*) do not reveal his future turn to cubism fifteen years later. An exception to the above is the drawing *Larissa Railway Station*, where plastic solutions that will be adopted by the painter in his mature phase, are identified.

Georgios Roilos, the second painter, has been widely regarded as a painter of war scenes<sup>8</sup>. Roilos, during the war of 1897 he was enlisted and, therefore, acquainted

---

<sup>6</sup> However, our study has not found any photograph that captures scenes similar to the published drawings. Instead, photographs were found presenting group portraits of soldiers, or military exercises. Perhaps that reference was made with the aim of enhancing the credibility of the event presented in the drawing. The present research was realized in the National Historical Museum and the Greek Literature and Historical Archive (E.L.I.A.).

<sup>7</sup> From our research we identified Galani's signature in 4 drawings from the Greek-Turkish war in the newspapers *Σκριπ* [=Scrip] and *Εμπρός* [=Empros]. If Galani's drawings were published in the *Ακρόπολις* [=Acropolis] newspaper - as is often said - then they would not be named or signed.

<sup>8</sup> A systematic research in his artwork during the war has not been conducted therefore a prior knowledge was missing, such as the artist's monograph.

with the atmosphere of war. He made drawings from various war episodes, which he used for his related projects<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, his painting style in general was imposed by these compositions for which he had implemented many preliminary studies, some in-situ during the events of the war<sup>10</sup>. Thus, “he developed a form of painting, the figurative documentary, which was intended to record events based on historical truth.”<sup>11</sup>

We would like to make some observations concerning the work *The Battle of Farsala* (Averof Gallery), which even if it has been established in the literature as "the battle of Farsala", our research showed that this painting does not represent this event. The work has its original wooden frame, which bears the inscription "Farsala, April 23, 1897". Starting with this, and in conjunction with the study of the work itself, we came to the conclusion that it is not the battle of Farsala that Roilos depicts, but an episode that took place before it, on April 23, 1897, and which is also mentioned in the Report of the Successor Prince Konstantinos: Following the successive defeats of the Greek army, the Successor found it useful to mobilize the troops by declaring an order on the day of the battle (23 April 1897).<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, the painting depicts the arrival of the Successor and his staff, while the troops with the wounded soldiers in the foreground cheers and greets them by shaking hands and raising their rifles. All the soldiers pictured are Greeks with their face turned to the Successor, apparently waiting to hear what he had to say.

For all the above reasons, we consider Roilos to have painted this scene a few years after the war, perhaps due to an order from the Greek royal family, judging from the large size of the work and the composition (167 x 290 cm). However, the fact that the painting was not purchased by the King leaves open the door for further investigation<sup>13</sup> into Roilos enigmatic work, as well as whether the painter was present at the event or whether the work resulted from a patchwork of drawings that had already captured in other battles (see some details, such as the wheel, etc.).

Finally, the fact that Roilos portrayed the Successor's arrival at Farsala rather than the battle, could probably explain the difference in style between this work and the

<sup>9</sup> The following conclusions were drawn from our research: First, Roilos' studies are ignored from the front. Then, the painting *Deleria*, purchased by the Greek royal family is missing. Likewise, the *Memory of 1897* and the *Gentzelia* are missing. On the other hand, Roilos drew the cover of *Νεολόγος* [=Neologos] (Christmas 1897), where a wounded young Evzonas (Greek soldier) is depicted. He is held by a woman – an allegory of Greece- who is pointing to the Acropolis hill.

<sup>10</sup> Christou, *Greek Painting 1832-1922*, p. 142.

<sup>11</sup> Misirli, *Greek Painting 18th-19th century*, p. 213.

<sup>12</sup> *Report of His Majesty's Crown Prince on the Activities of the Army of Thessaly during the 1897 Campaign*, Submitted to the Ministry of Military Affairs, Athens, 1901, p. 236.

<sup>13</sup> For further information on the topic see Ioannis Karadimas, *Ο ζωγραφικός πίνακας Η μάχη των Φαρσάλων του Γ.Ν. Ροϊλού ως τεκμήριο ιστορίας*, (=The painting *The Battle of Farsala* of Roilos as historical evidence), master thesis, Athens School of Fine Arts, 2019.

impressionistic approach of *Battle of Farsala* in the National Gallery. A difference that noted by Art Historians. Roilos handled the two issues in a completely different approaches because they were, actually, two different incidents: (i) the arrival of the Successor, that was depicted in a more figurative and formal way, perhaps due to the royal order; and (ii) a violent battle which gives to the painter the freedom for impressionistic openings.

Regarding the foreign publications in well-known press, such as *Gli Avvenimenti d' Oriente*, *La Tribuna Illustrata della Domenica*, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, *L' Illustration*, *Le Monde Illustré*, *Le Petit Parisien*, *Le Petit Journal Supplément Illustré*, *The Graphic*<sup>14</sup>, *The Illustrated London News*, they reflect a worldwide keen interest in the war in the eastern part of Europe.

Our study shows that foreign painters, like the Greek ones, preferred to depict battles indirectly by avoiding depicting a body-to-body battle or battles among armies, since almost all the battles<sup>15</sup> led to successive defeats and recessions<sup>16</sup>. Although they may have been eyewitnesses<sup>17</sup>, they have turned their attention to capturing the daily routine of the soldier in order to elude a representation of the defeat and evoke feelings of sympathy for the soldiers to the public. This tendency is aligned with the trend of the time for documentary painting, but also for a new philhellenism that awakened in Europe by witnessing the Greek fight with the old conqueror Turk, for the second time. It seems that the new wave of philhellenism that spread to Europe and America at the end of the 19th century played a catalytic role in depicting and rendering the scenes of war. This sympathy for the Greek people had already awakened earlier, in the context of an international trend for the convergence of nations: the appearance of cinema in 1895 and the revival of the Olympic Games in Athens in 1896 would favor the contact

---

<sup>14</sup> The English illustrated newspaper was founded in 1869 by the engraver William Luson Thomas and published several images from the battles of the Greek-Turkish war. The founder of the publication believed that the image had a political impact on the public and for this reason he "recruited" important artists in his potential. One of them was John Gullich (1864-1898), who painted the *Battle of Meluna* (May 8) based on a drawing by Graphic's "special artist" William T. Maud (1865-1903).

<sup>15</sup> The battle of Velestino was the only exception, where the army was led by the officer Konstantinos Smolenskis.

<sup>16</sup> Of the total of 150 images, except for popular images, only three drawings present a body-to-body battle. The popular folk lithographies, of course, had their own role and therefore a distinctive style. This is probably the main reason why body-to-body fighting or clashes between the two armies can be found in them. These paintings were created by well-known Greek and foreign lithographers and painters of the time, such as Christidis, Geralis, Tsalikis, Haupt, Dadd, among others.

<sup>17</sup> That is the case of the *Le Monde Illustré* envoy journalist and amateur photographer M. Henri Turot (1865-1920), who remained in the belligerent Greece for three and a half months. Most of the drawings for the Greek-Turkish war were made by M. L. Tinayre (1861-1942) and M. Bombled, following photographs by Henri Turot. In fact, Turot wrote a book about his experiences in Greece during the war. The book, entitled *L'Insurrection Crétoise et la Guerre Gréco-Turque*, Paris 1898, is illustrated with photographs of the correspondent himself and drawings based on them, depicting scenes and battlefields from the Cretan revolution and the mainland.

between cultures while events were taking place worldwide<sup>18</sup>. A similar case was the Greek-Turkish war, where the war correspondent Frederic Villiers<sup>19</sup> recorded the events of 1897 with his camera and Georges Méliès, who created short films replicating the war events<sup>20</sup>.

It is therefore no coincidence that many foreigners not only came to the country to observe the events closely and present them through texts<sup>21</sup> or pictures but also they participated actively in battles, especially in Domokos, and gave their lives to this brief and "unfortunate" war (see the Garibaldi and the Legion of Foreigners). The same theory can be proposed to the drawings that the Greek press decided to reproduce from foreign publications<sup>22</sup>. Our research results indicate that the Greek press worked toward the establishment of a general perception that the foreign correspondents were in favor of the Greek army and supporting the Greek soldiers by even fighting by their side.<sup>23</sup>

This is the reason why the depiction of war scenes in Art History has raised various debates on theoretical level about the degree of objectivity of the heroic images. Indeed, the artist expresses an opinion through these pictures, triggered by his point of view or probably imposed by the patrons. Similar issues are observed in the press, as well. The selection of war images that would illustrate an article may be subject to the "politics" of each newspaper. We should not overlook the fact that many of these pictures may have been created for the sake of a propaganda exploitation, which usually characterizes the depiction of war events, with the aim of stimulating the national public opinion.

This tendency was counterbalanced by the "front-line artists" who sought for documentary art. Therefore, they followed the troops on the battlefields to act as eyewitnesses to the events - the "eyewitness principle" according to Ernst Gombrich<sup>24</sup>. The painters were keen on pointing out their presence at the events. Consequently,

<sup>18</sup> Serge Berstein - Pierre Milza, *Η Ευρωπαϊκή Συμφωνία και η Ευρώπη των Εθνών, 1815-1919 [Ιστορία της Ευρώπης]* (=Histoire de l'Europe), transl. A.K. Anastasopoulos, edit. K. Livieratos, v.2, Athens, 1997, pp.243-245

<sup>19</sup> Frederic Villiers, *His Five Decades of Adventure*, London 1920.

<sup>20</sup> Some have survived to this day with the following titles: *Turks attack a house defended by Greeks (Tyrnavos)*, *The Greek warship George bombs the castle of Preveza*, *Execution of a Greek spy in Farsala*, *Occupation of Tyrnavos by troops of the Sultan*, *Naval battle in Greece*.

<sup>21</sup> Special mention is made of Stephen Crane, an American novelist who arrived in Greece during the Greek-Turkish war in order to record it. Indeed, in the *New York Journal*, May 11, 1897, he published, among many other relevant articles, a text from the Battle of Velestino entitled "Stephen Crane at Velestino" and wrote four books on the war. (Active Service, 1899 □ The Roll of Musketry, 1897 □ A Battle in Greece, Decorated by Valenti Angelo, Mount Vernon, 1936 □ Impressions of the Concert, 1897).

<sup>22</sup> *Gli Avvenimenti d' Oriente*, *La Tribuna Illustrata della Domenica*, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, *L' Illustration*, *Le Monde Illustré*, *Le Petit Parisien*, *Le Petit Journal Supplément illustré*, *The Graphic*, *The Illustrated London News*.

<sup>23</sup> We rarely see a drawing of the camp of the Turks.

<sup>24</sup> Ernst Gombrich, *The Image and the Eye*, London, 1982, p. 253.

inscriptions are often found beneath a painting in order to enhance the credibility of the drawing itself and the illustrated events. That is to say, the in situ quick sketches tend to be considered more credible testimonies than correspondingly grandiose works subsequently created in the atelier.

However, art historians should always bear in mind that even these war images are subject to prejudice and visual conventions, which deprive them of the advantage of an objective look. In any case, they do not fail to capture a 'point of view'. This is their main weakness in history narration, which has equally been criticized for its objectivity, as well<sup>25</sup>. Nevertheless, we should not surpass the impact of the image on historical imagination. Paintings, statues, engravings allow us to understand the non-verbal experiences or knowledge of past cultures<sup>26</sup>. Contact with a picture helps us imagine the past more visually and brings us face to face with History. Although the texts provide valuable clues, the images themselves "are the best guide to the power of visual representation in the religious and political life of past cultures," as Peter Burke points out<sup>27</sup>.

To conclude, the present study was conducted under challenging conditions since no previous investigations had been implemented regarding the Greek-Turkish war of 1897. As a result, a huge gap in knowledge had to be covered in order to outline this event in an artistic perspective through drawings, paintings and Press of that time. Therefore, we would like to sincerely thank prof. Konstantinos Ioannidis for his valuable feedback and support through the implementation of the presented research. We hope that this study will trigger the community of History of Art to investigate similar wars or events, such as the 1897 Greek-Turkish war, which seems to have not yet fallen into collective oblivion judged by the most recent erections of 1897 memorial sculptures in Greece (see Ilias Kotsiras's monument at Koutsoufliani, 2013).

## Reference

- BERSTEIN SERGE and MILZA PIERRE (1997). *Η Ευρωπαϊκή Συμφωνία και η Ευρώπη των Εθνών, 1815-1919 [Ιστορία της Ευρώπης] (=Histoire de l'Europe)*, transl. Anastasopoulos A. K., edit, Livieratos K., v.2, Athens, 1997.
- BLOCH, MARC (1994). *Απολογία για την Ιστορία (=Apology for History)*, edited by Kostas Gaganakis, Athens, 1994.

<sup>25</sup> For the credibility and objectivity of the "testimony" in the narrative of History see: Marc Bloch, *Απολογία για την Ιστορία (=Apology for History)*, edited by Kostas Gaganakis, Athens, 1994, pp. 118-126.

<sup>26</sup> Francis Haskell, *Η Ιστορία και οι Εικόνες της, Η Τέχνη ως Ερμηνεία του Δυτικού Πολιτισμού, (=History and its Images, Art and the Interpretation of the Past)*, trans. Al. Tsotsorou – D. Kosmidis, edit. D. Kosmidis, Athens, 2012, pp. 193-233.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Burke, *Αυτοψία, Οι Χρήσεις των Εικόνων ως Ιστορικών Μαρτυριών (=Eyewitness, The uses of Images as historical evidence)*, trans. An. Andreou, Athens, 2003, p. 16,

- BOTTOMORE, STEPHEN, (2007). *Filming, faking and propaganda: The origins of the war film, 1897-1902*. Diss. Utrecht University, 2007.
- BURKE, PETER, (2003). *Αυτοψία, Οι Χρήσεις των Εικόνων ως Ιστορικών Μαρτυριών (=Eyewitness, The uses of Images as historical evidence)*, trans. An. Andreou, Athens, 2003.
- CHRISTOU, CHRISANTHOS, (1981). *Η Ελληνική Ζωγραφική 1832-1922 (=Greek Painting 1832-1922)*, Athens, 1981.
- GOMBRICH, ERNST, (1982). *The Image and the Eye*, London, 1982.
- HASKELL, FRANCIS, (2012). *Η Ιστορία και οι Εικόνες της, Η Τέχνη ως Ερμηνεία του Δυτικού Πολιτισμού, (=History and its Images, Art and the Interpretation of the Past)*, trans. Al. Tsotsorou – D. Kosmidis, edit. D. Kosmidis, Athens, 2012,
- KARADIMAS, IOANNIS (2019). *Ο ζωγραφικός πίνακας Η μάχη των Φαρσάλων του Γ.Ν. Ροΐλου ως τεκμήριο ιστορίας, (=The painting The Battle of Farsala of Roilos as historical evidence)*, master thesis, Athens School of Fine Arts, 2019.
- KOTIDIS, ANTONIS, (1961). *Ελληνική Τέχνη, Ζωγραφική 19ου αιώνα, (=Greek Art, Painting of 19<sup>th</sup> century)*, Athens, 1961.
- LYDAKIS, STELIOS, (1976). *Οι Έλληνες Ζωγράφοι, Ιστορία Νεοελληνικής Ζωγραφικής, 16ος – 20ός αιώνας, (=History of Greek Painting, 16th-20th century)*, v. 3, Athens, 1976.
- MISIRLI, NELLI, (1993). *Ελληνική Ζωγραφική 18ος-19ος αιώνας (=Greek Painting 18th-19th century)*, Athens, 1993.
- PAPANIKOLAOU, MILTIADIS, (2006). *Η Ελληνική Τέχνη του 20ού αιώνα (=Greek Art of 20th century)*, Thessaloniki, 2006.
- REPORT of His Majesty's Crown Prince on the Activities of the Army of Thessaly during the 1897 Campaign*, Submitted to the Ministry of Military Affairs, Athens, 1901.
- VILLIERS, FREDERIC (1920), *Five Decades of Adventure*, London 1920.
- VOGIAS, CHARALAMPOS, (2016). *Ο Ελληνοτουρκικός Πόλεμος του 1897, Κινηματογραφικές, Υγειονομικές και άλλες Πρωτοτυπίες- Ευρεία Γενική Βιβλιογραφία, (=The Greek-Turkish War of 1897, Cinema, Healthcare and other originalities-General Bibliography)*, Athens, 2016.