NON-THEMATIC ARTICLES

Celebrating in King Otto’s Greece: The Economics of Dynastic, National, and Religious Public Ceremonies during the Ottonian Monarchy (1832–1862)

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ABSTRACT
The heavy-handed regime of King Otto of Bavaria introduced the ritual of national celebrations in Greece in 1833. The monarchy instituted annual celebrations for occasions such as the apovatíria—the anniversary of Otto’s landing in Nafplio—and also organized festivities for some of the king’s other public appearances (departures, arrivals, inauguration of various institutions). The festivities were primarily based on the traditions of European royal courts and secondarily on the protocol of the Orthodox Church. The monarchy and its concomitant institutions, the church (with its religious ceremonies) and the army (with its hierarchy), offered a familiar and safe spectacle with their firmly established rites such as parades, processions, hymns, and chants. Given the scanty financial resources of the Greek state during Otto’s reign, sponsoring such celebrations required a delicate balance. Focusing on the example of the anniversary of the Greek War of Independence on March 25, this article emphasizes the regime’s effort to stage said celebrations in a manner befitting both the significance of each event and the king’s grandeur without provoking public sentiment with the high cost of the celebrations or with events that were unfamiliar to the inhabitants of the Greek capital, Athens.
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Introduction: The Power of Celebratory Rituals in the Ottonian Period

A foreign traveler spending a year in Athens in, say, 1847 would have, willy-nilly, attended multiple public celebrations in the center of the Greek capital. Athens hosted the bulk of public celebrations. However, other cities and towns also had their share, and most prominent among them was the city of Nafplio, the first seat of the revolutionary government and the port that was to welcome modern Greece’s first head of state, Governor Kapodistrias, in 1828, as well as the minor King Otto along with his entourage and the Regency Council in 1833.

On days of celebrations, our traveler would be awakened at dawn by twenty-one or more gun shots, usually fired from the top of Lycabettus hill, while military bands would play marches in different parts of the city. Between nine and ten o’clock in the morning, he would be drawn by the noise of the crowd and, out of genuine interest or plain curiosity, end up at the church of Saint Irene, where he could see the entire political, religious, and military elite of the newborn state, gathered around King Otto and Queen Amalia. After the end of the service, he would drink his coffee and smoke a cigarette or a hookah at the famous café, The Beautiful Hellas, at the intersection of Aiolou and Ermou streets, where he could also learn the latest news from Greece and abroad. His entertainment might extend into the small hours of the night, when he could drink and dance to the sound of zurnas and davuls in the squares, streets, and taverns of the small Athenian center. Alternatively, if the traveler were a prominent European, one of the few hundred who visited Greece during the Ottonian period, he would spend the evening at one of the formal dinners held at the palace, dancing the “polonaise” with the vivacious queen and drinking fine Rhineland wines, while from the windows of the new palace building (today’s Parliament) he could gaze out at the ships docked at the port of Piraeus as the view to the sea was then unhindered.

Before the arrival of the Bavarian king on February 6, 1833 (January 25, according to the old calendar then in use in Greece), the atmosphere in the new Greek state was completely different. Athens was still a small city, mostly in ruins following the 1821 Revolution. The inhabitants of the Greek peninsula would not fail to honor their numerous saints, but they would usually do so at local festivals in the rural hinterland. In other words, celebration as a public event was not something new for the locals. In fact, during the years of the Revolution, both in Moldavia and in the Peloponnese, central Greece, and the Aegean islands, dozens of public ceremonies were held on the occasion of receiving prominent persons or the blessing of arms. New circumstances, however, were the successful ten-year war, the formation of the independent Greek state, and the establishment of absolute monarchy along with its court.

Who organized festivals in the Greek kingdom and for what purpose? In January 1833, the newly established Greek state did not just welcome one person to Nafplio, its new king. It also welcomed a dynastic regime, and an absolute monarchy to boot. The one who disembarked was the young Bavarian prince Otto Friedrich Ludwig von Wittelsbach (June 1, 1815–July 26, 1867), who had been brought up with the dynastic ideology and day-to-day exercise of power, both real and symbolic.
For this reason, when he arrived at the half-destroyed Nafplio, the harbor was crowded with the massive frigates of the three “Protecting Powers,” their thirty warships, and the thirty-four ships carrying military units, namely the 3,500 men of the Bavarian army who were to replace the French soldiers in the city’s fortress.

From that day on, the dynastic regime established its power and its symbols in every area of the country’s governance—military, economic, legal, educational, and cultural. Each royal appearance was a privileged field for the display of these symbols. The king conveyed them and targeted them—sometimes all together, sometimes singly—to different cultural, political, and economic recipients.

The stereotype of unanimity, joy, and jubilation uniting socially disparate subjects around the absolute monarch was the dominant motif of the ideal image that the newly appointed Bavarian government hoped to impose. It was, in other words, the true image of a model and a vision. The model of monarchy and the vision of the Greek nation, though they had an adequate past, would be forged anew during Otto’s thirty-year reign.

Celebrations in the public sphere of the Greek kingdom were among the most important fields in which the realization of these mutual but also divergent expectations was tested. But they also had to function as the mirror of history: the Greek past was to be reflected in it, but with the new monarch taking central place in the image. The image had to speak of everything: politics, economy, ideology, the rulers and the ruled. Although the mirror would often distort, even the distorted images would become aspects of reality.

In the European environment of the Restoration, the Bavarian ruler Ludwig I and his second son, King Otto of Greece, systematically tried to impose absolute monarchy. They wanted to surround it with a number of activities, primarily in the fields of arts and letters, architecture, and urban planning. In this effort they were helped by the “politically colorless neoclassicism/philhellenism” of the romantic notion of a Greek nation. For at least a while, this served the ideological and political aspirations of the proponents of neoclassicism and philhellenism. This was the time when the “neoclassical sensitivity of romanticism” began being limited to aesthetics while shedding the political significance of ancient Greece, namely democracy. The House of Wittelsbach tried, both in Greece and in Bavaria, to use aesthetics as a substitute for politics in the underpinning of absolutism. Every royal appearance—which included salutes, body posture, dress, dialogues, forms of address, proclamations—was a privileged field for the trappings of absolute monarchy that addressed different cultural, political, and economic recipients simultaneously: local notables, Roumeli chieftains, Morea band leaders, shipowners from the islands of Hydra, Spetses, and Psara, Europeanized politicians and scholars of Phanari and of centers of the Greek diaspora, political party leaders, ambassadors of the European powers, Greek and European military officials. Most royal appearances were made in public ceremonies. They were the privileged field for a condensation of the state’s symbolic power in modern Greece.

The country’s financial situation—already worsened by the so-called independence loans—had troubled the thoughts of the government since the first days of the establishment of the modern Greek state. The young king himself, in his address to the people upon coming of age on May 20/
Within this context, the purpose of this paper is twofold: first, to analyze the establishment of public holidays in the Greek kingdom and, second, to explore the economic dimension of public ceremonies during the Ottonian absolute monarchy and, after 1843, the constitutional monarchy. The main point of this work is that the monarchical system—much too costly for a relatively small, debt-ridden state—reflected a belief that the costs of its “symbolic/aesthetic” presence in the public sphere were inelastic. That is why all official ceremonies were funded by the state. However, the monarchy sometimes had to cut down on the number of dancing balls or the well-attended banquets of the royal court. At the same time, while the people appropriated public ceremonies, especially the national celebration of Independence Day, private gatherings became more frequent in the 1850s, with costs covered by donations and fundraising among citizens.

The Public Profile of “Ottonian Court Society”: Dynastic, National, and Religious Ceremonies of the Greek Kingdom from an Interdisciplinary Perspective

One question that arose early in our research—even before the questions of who organized celebrations and why—was why one should deal with celebrations as an object of history. Although celebrations have been a systematic field of study only since the 1970s, eminent ethnologists, historical anthropologists, sociologists, and historians, working in parallel or in collaboration, had by the early twentieth century turned to objects such as the human body, food, myth, climate, books, and public opinion. They thus broadened not only our perception of human activity but also our thinking on subjects that until then had been dealt with exclusively by the natural sciences, such as time and space. One such new subject was celebrations, which, like all scientific subjects, was constructed through multiple approaches, predominantly those that studied a wide range of important issues: from the rituals of the French and English monarchy in the Middle Ages and the rites of religious life, to the rites of initiation or passage of everyday people from one social position/status to another through, for example, marriage, baptism, or death.

After delving into the above approaches, historian Mona Ozouf further historicized the field of research with her pioneering work on the French Revolutionary feasts of 1789–99 and, on the basis of this particular example, reformulated theoretical questions concerning celebration as object and as reality.7 Inspired by Ozouf’s approach, we intend to show that public celebrations of the Ottonian reign created a new memory, distinguished by an excess of purpose on the part of the organizers, repeating themselves without anyone noticing or complaining: every year, the...
present absorbed and ignored the problems of everyday life, power appeared to be immortal and indestructible, and the desire for a glorious past and a better future prevailed. It is precisely here that the greatest difficulty of our project lies. The historian's good fortune to know "what happened next" has been a huge obstacle to the analysis of the "present time of the celebration." Each time, the particular "performance" of the celebration, with its performativity, contained all the vitality and ephemerality of a live impact on reality. For example, even the simple narrative of Otto's disembarking ceremony, let alone its interpretation, would be impossible or at least extremely biased, and ultimately distanced from the reality of that day, if the historian were influenced by knowledge of the king's subsequent unpopularity, the wave of opposition to "Bavarian rule," and the like. Holidays and celebrations are objects of history that significantly change the way we think about historical science and, in particular, the multiple layers of social time.

A second difficulty in the research was that historians usually have access to sources that reveal, if not exclusively, at least to a large extent, the plans of the organizers and, to a much lesser degree, the reception and experience of the celebration by the disparate crowd of participants. Even the major newspapers of the time, with their lengthy articles, provided mediated accounts that were more a reflection of the reporters/columnists' political views than of the contrast between the joy and the discontent caused by each celebration. This difficulty seems to have been overcome, particularly in cases where the facts themselves could not be ignored, as, for example, with the constant mischief, binge drinking, and excesses that took place during the March 25 celebrations, or in cases where different sources could be cross-referenced, such as scholarly reports, Queen Amalia's letters, and newspaper articles.

In the course of our research, concepts such as "rituals," "symbols," and "protocol" had to be clarified and studied, as they were an integral part of the daily life of the monarchy and of public celebrations during the Ottonian period. However, the "scientific paths" we wished to explore led us to "avenues" of research production of an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary character, concerning mainly rituals and symbols, and, less importantly, protocol: the perspective of religious anthropology, structural functionality, and the theory of cultural institutions, the ritual aspects of communication, and ritual practices in the field of education are but a few of the fields where ritual practices and symbols have been thoroughly studied. For the sake of simplicity, we will focus exclusively on the discussions that were of primary importance for the needs of our approach.

Inspired by Émile Durkheim, who studied the importance of ritual performance in the formation of social structure, we follow the work of anthropologists and sociologists who showed, among other things, that rituals reinforce levels of power and authority, inspire a sense of belonging and impose social order. Scholars of rituals all agree that traditional rituals are performed at a given time and in a specific place. As Arnold Van Gennep explained in his long-overlooked work, rituals have a clearly defined beginning, middle, and end, which are determined by a bell, a song and a dance, or even a shout, while time in rituals is defined on the basis of written or unwritten procedures. Furthermore, the presence of participants in the ritualistic setting (the "space") is a necessary element that strengthens the unity of the community. Only through their presence in the ritualistic "scene" are participants able to feel the venerability as well as the power of the ritual
and subsequently increase their sense of collectivity. Another characteristic element of rituals is schematization/standardization, according to which the ritual has to follow certain rules and criteria. This formalization is linked to a certain heritage and its repetition and, as Paul Connerton notes, “all rituals are repetitive, and repetition automatically implies continuity with the past.”

From his own perspective, Richard Quantz points out that ritual is a “formalized, symbolic performance,” while John David and Frederique Van de Poel-Knottnerus, who have studied symbolic ritual practices, suggest that they may display varying degrees of “similarity” depending on how they are perceived in terms of form and meaning. The greater degree of similarity brings about the mutual reinforcement of these practices as well as the effect they have on those involved within the context of an embedded group; such comparable (“homologous”) ritualized symbolic practices facilitate the reproduction of the social structure.

The specific festivals of the Ottonian period were not rituals; they contained rituals (or ceremonial), which produced what in the political terminology of the state was called “protocol.” It is indicative that Armansperg, the chairman of the Regency Council, was given, among other things, the title of master of ceremonies, a position created in 1585 by Henry III of France (grand maître des ceremonies).

In their edited volume Le Protocole ou la mise en forme de l'ordre politique, Yves Déloye, Claudine Haroche, and Olivier Ihl note that in its origins, “protocol seems fundamentally driven by this quest for harmony as well as by this desire for pacification. At the same time, its hierarchy was the source of many conflicts. The history of etiquette and protocol is punctuated by incidents that reveal the outlines of major political issues.” Queen Amalia in her letters to her father as well as the newspapers of the time repeatedly noted issues of protocol that led to confrontations between the royal couple and ministers, senators, and members of Parliament. Protocol was—and still is—a “manual,” a “catalog” of memory. In this sense, “the term protocol implies something that is important, guarantees continuity, preserves the memory of political institutions. For it defines the list of classes and hierarchies, the hierarchy of political functions, reminds everyone of their place and of the gestures to be performed, justifies the distribution of bodies in the political space, regulates the movement and rhythm of ceremonies: protocol guarantees the expression of political order.”

After the Revolution of September 3, 1843, the protocol for official public celebrations and palace balls was not abolished but was changed and even became the subject of controversy. The society of the Ottonian court during its absolute and constitutional government contributed to the development of the institution of political protocol. This is why the study of the protocol of public royal appearances and all kinds of ceremonies allows us to better understand the morphology of power.

Celebrations contain rituals that crystallize into protocol, and, in turn, rituals and protocol are expressed in symbols. According to Victor Turner, “the symbol is the smallest unit of ritual,” and ritual is but a bundle of symbols with a “dominant” one. He appreciates that symbols can, for example, be objects, activities, words, relationships, events, gestures. Recognizing the interconnection of ritual and symbols (as well as religion and symbols), in a later work he concludes that a ritual is “a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and
objects, performed in a sequestered place, [and is] designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors’ goals and interests.” Thus he conceives of rituals as “storehouses of meaningful symbols” by which information is revealed and regarded as “authoritative” since they deal with the “crucial values of the community.” The concept of “symbol” refers to “something” that is perceived in a person’s mind in a different way from what is visible and explicit (without, however, it being confused with the concept of metaphor). A symbol, in fact, is determined by what it refers to (e.g., values, memories, emotions) for the perceiver, without necessarily being inferred from the object or event itself. Therefore, the meaning of the symbol often varies to a large extent, depending on who perceives it, in conjunction with the general context. Indeed, according to Ike Verschoor, “the same object can be a symbol for one person, while it does not have any meaning for his neighbor or can be perceived in a totally different way, according to the situation.” For his part, Maykel Verkuyten proposes that symbols are a “means to experience an abstract content, and not only representing one in a brief and vivid way for the purpose of intellectual understanding as with metaphors” while pointing out that they have the power to affect people’s thinking and behavior.

The concept of “national symbols” has been of particular interest to a number of researchers. K. A. Cerulo points out that the creation and adoption of national symbols “stems from a long tradition in which groups or ruling houses used banners, crests, fanfares, etc. as a form of announcement and identification,” while Ike Verschoor, based on Cerulo’s analysis, points out that in the nineteenth century, more and more nation-states adopted a single set of symbols, so that, by the twentieth century, it had become a globally shared rule.

During the Ottonian reign, national symbols, while already possessing a history of their own, were at the same time in the process of formation within the new context of the state. The Greek flag remained the most important and most enduring symbol. As research has already revealed, in prerevolutionary times various groups of chieftains as well as island shipowners used banners (flambouras) or flags (bayraks) which despite their diversity usually contained the cross, being modeled after the banners of the Orthodox Church. The diversity of flags was maintained throughout the first year of the Revolution, as the administration was not uniform. As Mazarakis-Ainian notes,

some flags bore the symbols of the Society of Friends, others the phoenix of [Alexander] Ypsilantis or the figure of goddess Athena, and other improvised ones followed the old tradition of the brigands (the armatoloi) with the banner of war, using the cross and the saints, or the eagle and the cross, in all possible combinations. But all flags without exception had the cross, and the words “Freedom or Death” in a dominant position. A flag with a cross had to be raised in order to formalize the desire for freedom, the overthrow of despotic tyranny and the resurrection of the Nation. In addition to “Freedom or Death,” mottos that were used included “Jesus Christ Is Victorious,” “God Be with Us,” the “With It or On It” of ancient Sparta, “I Am Reborn from My Ashes,” and “Fight for Faith and Country.”

Soon, however, from the very first “Provisional Constitution” of Epidaurus in January 1822, the “blue and white flag” was defined as the official Greek flag, both at sea and on land, while its shape was fixed, a few months later, by a proclamation of the president of the Executive Body, Alexandros Mavrokordatos. The cross was a plausible symbol, but the choice of the specific colors and the nine parallel lines remains unclear. It was imperative, however, that all symbols
reminiscent of the Society of Friends be replaced with a flag acceptable to the Great Powers. Although officially the flag remained the same until the advent of Otto and the Regency, in times of unrest—such as after Kapodistrias’s assassination—various revolutionary flags reappeared. Otto’s monarchy retained the blue and white flag, adapting only a few details, while the royal flag bore the dynastic coat of arms of the House of Wittelsbach.

During the various public celebrations, and especially on the anniversaries of March 25, the pantheon of heroes of the Greek Revolution was gradually assembled, decorating makeshift arches and trophies under the watchful eyes of Otto and Amalia (represented in portrait). There was no national anthem, since, as is well known, although Otto may have decorated the composer Nikolaos Mantzaros (1845) and the poet Dionysios Solomos (1849) for their “Hymn to Liberty,” he continued to use Bavarian military chants at every celebration, to the great disappointment of the populace.

The new state apparatus introduced and eventually established a number of public celebrations. The only festive days that existed before the Greek Revolution and continued to be observed and celebrated by the entire Greek population were religious holidays. But soon came growing criticism of the excessive number of public holidays, during which—according to an emerging economic and moral rationalism—public order was disrupted while idleness and wastefulness were encouraged among the poor. On January 23, 1843, the newspaper Athena editorialized:

> There are many reasons, we think, that compel the government not only to make the celebrations of public holidays a simpler affair, but also to reduce the number of such holidays as much as possible so that people regard them with greater respect, and to prevent the movement of masses of idle people to the capital city, who, having nothing else to do, wait for these official holidays so they can come to the capital and renew demands, or at least ask for the King’s special assistance, only to squander it in local coffee shops only to return to their homes poorer and more unhappy than they were when they had set out.

However, as John Petropulos writes, when the French traveler J. A. Buchon expressed to a villager the view that celebrations should be reduced, the latter replied that if the government thought there were too many holidays, it should stop creating new civil holidays, such as the anniversary of the king’s landing or of his entrance to Athens. He loved the king and the queen, he continued, but he also respected Saint Athanasius very much, and he would “never cease showing him the respect that [his] family always had for him.”

Taking into account the undisputed religious feelings of the Greek people, the Regency and, even more so, King Otto, introduced a series of public celebrations in which he and Queen Amalia were the focus. For these celebrations, official programs were issued. During the Regency, as well as during the first years of Otto’s reign, the programs were written in Greek, German, and French—in three columns. Later, however, most were printed either in Greek or in Greek and French. The ceremonies can be divided into three categories:

**Ceremonies on the occasion of one-off events:**

- Otto’s first landing at Nafplio
- Otto’s first proclamation

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23. Mona Ozouf estimates that as early as the eighteenth century an economic rationality developed in France in connection with celebrations; it incorporated the moral and religious rationality, which, aphoristically, stipulated that “continuous activity is the mother of innocence.” On the part of the church, there were many who believed that holy days consecrated to piety resulted in drunkenness, debauchery, even murder. As a result, encyclopedists, in order to denounce the abuses of feast days, did not take long to discover the arguments of the bishops (who wished to reduce the number of feast days) and those of civil authorities (who targeted public gatherings during celebrations as an opportunity for illegal acts). Ultimately, Ozouf concludes that, within this moral and religious context, celebrations always provoked criticism from one quarter or another for offending religion, the state, or morals. Ozouf, La fête révolutionnaire, 1789–1799 (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 8–9.


• Otto’s coming-of-age ceremony
• Otto and Amalia’s wedding
• Amalia’s first landing at Nafplio
• A feast at the Parthenon
• Otto’s twenty-fifth birthday ceremony

Annual feasts and ceremonies:
• March 25, Independence Day
• September 3, Anniversary of the 1843 Revolution
• Otto’s landing anniversary
• Amalia’s landing anniversary
• Otto’s birthday celebration
• Amalia’s birthday celebration
• Otto’s name day celebration
• Amalia’s name day celebration
• Otto and Amalia’s wedding anniversary

Repeated ceremonies:
• Welcoming ceremonies for Otto or Amalia on their return from tours and trips.26

The above typology includes all public celebrations throughout the Ottonian reign. However, in order to bring out the historical dynamics behind their establishment, two important social spaces must be considered where such ceremonies were planned and carried out: the royal court and the wider society, mainly the capital city of Athens. Also, this categorization does not include the Eastern Orthodox liturgical calendar. Among the latter’s feasts, the initiators of public celebrations were called upon to insert dynastic and national ceremonies. In particular, the dates of civil ceremonies should not coincide with important religious feasts such as Easter and Christmas. Whenever this happened, since Easter is a moveable feast, the official dynastic or national celebration was shifted to a different date.

The year began with the celebration of the new year, which was established as an official ceremony in the Greek state by the Bavarian rule. Of course, the problem was that, as the Julian (old) calendar was still in force in the Greek kingdom and the Gregorian (new) calendar had been established in almost all of the rest of Europe, the royal couple, as Amalia informs us, celebrated New Year’s Day twice: with public ceremonies and in the palace on January 1, according to the old calendar, and then again in the palace along with the courtiers twelve days later, on January 13, according to the new calendar—which made Amalia feel that “there was something fragmentary about this celebration.”27

Immediately after, on January 25/February 6, came the celebrations of Otto’s landing at Nafplio (his arrival in Greece), followed by the anniversary of Amalia’s landing on February 3/15.28 The first two months of the spring were dominated by the national holiday of March 25 and by
Orthodoxy’s great religious feast of Easter. The end of spring and beginning of summer was marked by the king’s birthday on May 20/June 1. The three months of summer, which did not include any of the royal couple’s birthdays or name days, were devoid of official celebrations. Besides, the season was stifling, especially in the capital, which the queen made a point of commenting on in letters to her father. In the fall, public celebrations started again with Otto’s name day on September 18/30 and Amalia’s on September 25/October 7. The year wrapped up with the winter celebration for the royal couple’s wedding ceremony on November 10/22, the queen’s birthday on December 9/21, and, of course, the great Christmas holiday.

Dynastic Protocol and the National or Religious Spectacles of the Monarchy: Their Economic Dimension

A few days before the celebration of public feasts, Otto’s privy council and, in later times, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, brought out programs printed on luxury single sheets. These programs were an ever-evolving variation of the form and content of the first official program issued, that of the King’s Landing Festival. They were “manuals of Greek hierarchy” that the Royal Bavarian court presented to its main guests: the political, military, and ecclesiastical officials of Greece.29 The elaborate but exact seating arrangement of the participants was based on a royal protocol that was strict and not at all arbitrary. It attempted to rank, categorize, and compress the Greek and Bavarian presence. One must distinguish between “codified protocol” and “protocol practice,” however. In the same way that there were multiple versions of protocol in the European royal courts from the sixteenth century on, the master of ceremonies or the minister of Internal Affairs, who had overall command of the celebrations, made adjustments to the codified Bavarian protocol and ended up with a “revised” protocol practice, depending on the specifics of each ceremony. In any case, the spectacle that these ceremonies projected before a crowd was the visible order which determined “the invisible hierarchy of Order” that the country’s Bavarian government seemed resolved to impose.30 The collection of programs stored at the Benaki Museum and the General State Archives is almost complete for the entire Ottonian period and gives us an accurate representation of the way official festivals like the March 25 celebrations unfolded.

On the eve of the feast, at sunset, a twenty-one-gun salute was fired (twenty-one, in this case, in remembrance of the Greek Revolution of 1821) to announce the festive day. This was followed, on the same day, by military bands playing military music in the city and in the army camps. At sunrise on the feast day, twenty-one gunshots were fired and military music was repeated. At eight o’clock the troops took up their planned positions. At nine, a special mass was celebrated in a central church of Athens. After mass, the twenty-one gunshots were fired again. At noon, the kingdom’s warships, docked at the port of Piraeus and decorated with national flags, returned the salute with another twenty-one gunshots. Military music continued throughout the afternoon, and at sunset the final round of gunshots was fired. The festivities usually wrapped up with a ball hosted by the royal couple at the palace. Competition among prominent officials for an invitation to the ball was fierce. The king also used invitations as a symbolic opportunity to send out messages of what he had in mind about hierarchy, those in favor and disfavor at each time.

As demonstrated by the program and other sources of the time, such as newspapers and the queen’s letters to her father, the expenditure for a public festival was fixed and inelastic and
included the printing of programs (in multiple copies), gunpowder for the gunshots, transport of the royals themselves, arches and trophies erected in the city, firework displays, and innumerable lanterns usually illuminating the Acropolis and Mount Lycabettus as well as public buildings and important town houses. In some cases—such as the first celebration of March 25th—games were organized in imitation of the ancient Olympic Games.

Although no economic data is available that would allow us to come up with even a rough estimate of the costs of a public festival, indicative qualitative documentation paints a picture of hardship and poverty. When, for example, on May 23, 1833, Otto, along with all of the Regency members and his brother Maximilian, made a ceremonial entry into the city of Athens, the glory of the ancient city—which had not yet been selected as the capital of the newly established state—determined the great symbolic value of such an official entry. However, according to the Bavarian Colonel Predl, who was the chief official responsible for the organization of the public ceremony, “as neither the city of Athens nor we had enough gunpowder, we asked for the assistance of Osman Pasha, who was willing to offer it, and thus the greeting of the king of Greece was done with Turkish gunpowder and Turkish gunfire.”

Two years later, on January 22/February 2, 1835, secretary (i.e., the minister) of Internal Affairs Ioannis Kolettis would submit to the Regency a written proposal for the establishment of public celebrations on the occasion of the Greek Revolution, only a few months before the ceremony of Otto’s ascension to the throne. In addition to the official programs of celebrations, this proposal is the only complete Greek scholarly text of the Ottonian period in which opinions on public national spectacles are expressed. It is handwritten and consists of twenty consecutive folded sheets, written originally in French with the above date, as well as a German summary (entitled “Nationalfeste und Öffentlichfeste”) with a later date (March 30/April 11, 1835).

The text is divided into seven chapters with titles describing their content. In the first chapter, titled “The usefulness of these official ceremonies (celebrations),” the author asserts that, since the early nineteenth century, what has guided the Greeks on their way to revolution was their wish to come closer to antiquity and reproduce the glorious classical past. Therefore, as a reward for the Revolution, institutions need to be set up to respond to the wishes of the kingdom’s “thinking class.” Besides, how else can one expect the modern state of Greece to be respected, poor and deprived as it is, next to the huge beacon of civilized Europe? However, this land is still important because it was important once, and its past with its majestic shadow can cover the humbleness of its present. In order to bestow magnificence on the newborn monarchy, it must be invested with the ideal of antiquity, and the eyes of the world will undoubtedly turn to the king of Greece if he reproduces in the Mediterranean Sea ancient images that stir up the admiration of centuries. These official festivals will also have tremendous moral benefits. They will provide momentum to virtue, genius, and the fine arts, through the establishment of national awards, and thus the dynasty will be a source of moral virtue.

The sixth chapter is the most extensive one. It is titled “How we could add glamour to the official ceremonies of new Greece.” After a brief description of Greece’s contemporary situation (i.e., the situation prevailing in 1835), the author expresses the hope that the means will be found to add glamour to the national athletic events of the festivals. There are recommendations to reduce by one-third the import and export custom duties in the cities of the celebrations during the eight


32. The text was made known by Konstantinos Athanasios Diamantis, who presented it with a small introduction as: Konstantinos Athanasios Diamantis, Proposal for the establishment of national anniversaries and public games after the model of ancient festivals in the year 1835, reprinted from the Leimonarion. Issue in honor of Professor N. V. Tomadakis [in Greek] (Athens: Athenian Scientific Society, 1973), 73–74.

In modern historiography, the text was used for the first time in Christina Koulouri, “Celebrating the Nation,” 181–210. Koulouri provided the valuable information that the real author of the text was Kolettis’s adviser, Panagiotis Soutsos, as intimated by Soutsos himself many years later, on October 28, 1843 (newspaper Aion, appendix no. 481). We wish to take this opportunity to thank doctoral candidate Spyros Mihaeles for his help in locating a rare reprint of the document in the Gennadius Library collections.

33. Diamantis, Proposal, 311.
days recommended by the proposal. Continuing with its suggestions (for example, painting and sculpture exhibitions, choirs with twenty-four boys and twenty-four girls crowned with flowers), the proposal recommends the construction of four theaters (in the four proposed cities), which should be built soon, starting with the one in Athens in 1835. The theaters will be similar to those of antiquity, that is, huge, stepped amphitheaters, which should accommodate as many as six thousand spectators. The current difficulties in creating a National Theater in Greece should not deter the government. The Greek nation had theaters even under the Ottoman occupation; the best works of Racine, Corneille, Voltaire, Alfieri, and Schiller have already been translated into Greek. Greece can boast of its actors and dramatists. The government must promote the new talents of Greece.

As detailed as it was, the proposal as a whole was not adopted—not because of its ideological use of ancient classical heritage but because of its inapplicable maximalist spirit, which envisioned the construction of amphitheaters in the poverty-stricken Greek kingdom. However, it remains a rare example of the ideological horizon of the small but energetic group of intellectual courtiers who, since the arrival of the young king, had assumed various governmental positions because of their European studies and Phanariot cultural status, and shared an attachment to a glorious past as well as the megalomania of the royal environment. The “visions of a Byzantine Empire,” which Otto and Amalia never abandoned, always clashed with the actual state of the public finances. As a result, what prevailed was the wish of the rulers to achieve the most positive impressions at the lowest possible cost, since the Greek populace had begun to adore the pompous style of the public celebrations but also commended the administration when such celebrations were state-funded.

The success of the celebrations was almost always guaranteed because of the enthusiastic participation of ordinary people, who enjoyed dancing and singing in public places, an old custom rooted in Orthodox folk festivals. Already during the first celebrations of March 25, Athenian citizens decorated the streets with improvised portraits of Revolution fighters, while villagers arrived in the capital with their families bearing flags, tabors, and zournades (i.e., shawms, folk oboes).

On the other hand, purely private gatherings organized by specific groups with direct access to the press of the era seem to have been increasing in the 1850s. We can assume that the need for private celebration was transmitted to Athenian society by similar gatherings of Greeks abroad (in places such as Paris) or in the Ionian Islands. It found a suitable breeding ground in the capital as the country’s society changed and formed into groups in distinct industries and other areas.

Three such examples were widely covered in newspapers: the 1855 university students’ festival at the “Hotel of England,” the banquet of the Bar Association in 1857, and the three banquets—of the opposition MPs, the Bar Association, and the university students—in 1861, one year before the eviction of King Otto and Queen Amalia. The costs of the banquets were covered by fundraising among participants, a practice which was apparently already sanctified by similar events, which is why these events were usually characterized by journalists as frugal but lively affairs.

State-funded public ceremonies were also accompanied by private rejoicing. Greek citizens,
especially the residents of urban centers, appropriated the feasts and participated at their own expense, expecting, of course, the monarchy to continue financing the splendor in favor of the nation rather than its own glory.

However, as early as the 1840s, Queen Amalia expressed concern in letters to her father about the country’s economic situation, which was reflected in the reduction in number of banquets and balls and even of travel to other cities, for example, in 1842 to Nafplio, where the celebration of Otto’s landing was traditionally performed but which had to be canceled as a result of dissatisfaction with the monarchy’s expenses.

The Rulers and the Ruled: The Anniversary of the Greek Revolution as a Window on the National Festive Spirit

For most of the Ottonian period, the celebration of the March 25 anniversary as a celebration of all the people, in which national unity and unanimity could be expressed, largely remained wishful thinking. The rhetoric of the imagined national community did not accurately reflect reality. Aside from the fault-finding of the opposition press and the rhetoric of the friendly press about every minor or major event, the truth is that during the day-long celebration—when feelings of pride, sorrow, joy, and anxiety as well as of widespread “anti-Bavarian feeling” were amplified by the consumption of drink and the excitement of dances and songs—there were many occasions for mischief, binge drinking, and all kinds of excesses, as the writers of the time noted.

Of the mischief that occurred in 1841 we have but scant evidence, although the newspaper Athena devoted three articles to the March 25 anniversary. In those, the writer implied that petty misconduct had been provoked by the excesses of the authorities and were not to be blamed on the people, who, when they were happy, rejoiced in a most quiet and orderly manner.

Things were different in 1842, however. The capital of Greece may have celebrated the national anniversary with remarkable decorum, but such was not the case in Nafplio. According to newspaper writers, some “evil demon” took the baton of mischief from one city to another and thus, year after year, scandals broke out in a different region of the Greek kingdom during “the only one of our national celebrations.” The queen, in the aforementioned letter of April 11, 1842, wrote that there were many incidents targeting Germans but that she herself did not yet know the details. The details, however, had already been published in Athena as early as April 1, 1842, with wide coverage of the events based on the accounts of subscribers residing in Nafplio.

The story began with the best intentions of Greeks and Philhellenes who wanted to organize, jointly and with contributions from the celebrants, a banquet which would take place in the Governor’s Garden, at the foot of the Palamidi Fortress. A committee of three Greek officers was immediately formed, after a citizens’ vote, in order to hold a collection of money and organize the feast. Trouble ensued when the Bavarians in Nafplio made it known that they wanted to participate but the Greeks refused. Although the people of Nafplio claimed that they had not been suddenly possessed by feelings of “xenophobia,” since they would accept “anyone, including a Frenchman or an Englishman, a Russian or a Turk or even a Jew, if the Turk and the Jew wanted to join us with an open heart in blessing the memorial of our resurrection,” the arguments for the refusal reveal a pervasive aversion to the mentality of the Bavarians, which, according to the
inhabitants of Nafplio, would have turned cheerfulness into gloom, frozen the momentum in the hearts of the co-celebrants, and imposed “a troublesome ruler’s calculations in the place and time where alone his power must stop.”37 Besides, it was argued, the Bavarians were not to take exception to this decision, for the Greeks too had not complained when they were not invited to the ceremony of the dedication of the Nafplio Heroes’ Monument. However, the Bavarians did not stand idly by. They lodged a complaint with the fortress governor, Almeida, who urged them to set up a five-member committee, consisting of Bavarians of Greek birth, which the author of the report strongly objected to. The two committees—the Bavarian and the Greek—met, but in vain as it was impossible to find a solution satisfactory to both sides. Thus, the Bavarians decided not only to abstain but also to ban junior officers and soldiers, whether Greek or Bavarian, from taking part in the banquet.

It was considered important that the usual ceremonial gunfire salute was not carried out either at sunrise or at sunset, and military musicians were also forbidden to play songs or dances. Eventually a new civilian committee was organized which invited both Greek and Grecophile military officers to take part in the banquet, so that all those who preferred to listen to the “friendly voice of their fellow citizens rather than to the unfriendly dissuasions of their alien leaders” could attend.

The account of the banquet began with the appearance of Admiral Konstantinos Kanaris at one o’clock in the afternoon, with many palm-bearing citizens and military men cheering him. He was followed by commanders Nikitas and Rodios, and the three took the position of honor at the banquet table. The table was immense; it stretched from the center of the garden to its eastern end, the trunks of the trees serving as its support and the foliage as shade for the guests. Four guild flags flew at the edges of the table. There was no military music, but the festival was not “without song or dance”; musicians (probably gypsies) from the outskirts of the city arrived with bagpipes and drums. There were numerous toasts, the most important of which were to the victims of the war, to the king and the constitution, to living athletes, to the allied forces, but also to the press, which was, for the writers, one of the successors of the old fighters in this new struggle of the civilized world.

The men, dressed in uniforms of various designs and colors, adorned the open-air space. At sunset, they began to march toward the city to the sound of music from a single instrument, the flags leading the way, while in Platanos Square they shouted “Long live Greece” three times, and the sky was darkened by the colorful headgear they threw in the air. And although rain and hail began in the afternoon, the people of Nafplio kept walking around the city singing songs and dancing.

However, the celebration ended on an unhappy note. The next day three revelers, Botzaris, Diamantopoulos, and Koroneos, were sent to jail, the last one with a more severe sentence than the other two, because some people passing outside the house of a Mr. Hitz—who had ordered the detention—shouted “Good passing,” a wish usually reserved for the deceased!

In the following year, 1843, at the celebration in the capital, some minor trouble was caused by a group of youths, which the newspaper Athena had intimated on March 13, denouncing it as a fraudulent rumor intended to damage the university; the columnist took the opportunity to
preach a brief though pithy sermon on the sanctity and grandeur of the national holiday.

Two days after the celebration, the same newspaper congratulated the populace on their exemplary behavior and merely condemned the disorderly behavior of a small group of youths, without further reference:

No matter how much worry some flatterers and parasites wanted to cause to the Court regarding the March 25 national holiday, the celebration was conducted with the utmost order and decorum—even though Mr. Koutsoyannopoulos found reason to be afraid even of the word MAP on a wreath of flowers. So it may be with eagerness that we hasten to congratulate our fellow citizens on their inclination to orderly behavior, but it is with indignation that we are compelled to deplore some senseless and impetuous slogan found in the hands of youths, among whom some have tried to include a number of university students, but of whom we publicly declare that none took part in such frenzy.38

Although in 1845 the queen noted in a letter to her father that “the people celebrated March 25 joyfully and quietly,” she wrote this in contrast to the opposition newspapers which, according to Amalia, had tried to stir up riots by gathering people in Piraeus equipped with gunpowder and weapons.39 As far as the queen was concerned, there should have been an outcry caused by the fact that the English consul Edmund Lyons had not even attended the National Day church service:

Since the envoys here, by the way they have behaved, have brought about, for example, the September 3 revolution with their startled governments being totally in the dark, they will cause more of the same, since they are allowed to act in this way and reduce state affairs to private ones. What should the Greeks think, for example, when Lyons, on the day of the national holiday, which has always been celebrated with splendor, illuminations, etc., did not even come to church this time, something he had consistently done for seven years. They will say that England no longer wants the independence of Greece, because the ministry is not English. We were right, they will say, Mavrokordatos wanted to sell Greece to England, and other such nonsense. But that is exactly what a diplomatic attitude is: to avoid foolish prattle with a prudent attitude. By not coming, who did Lyons harm other than himself?40

On March 28, 1846, immediately after the description of the anniversary ceremony, which once again took place at the grave of Karaiskakis, there were general reports of an influx of thugs in Athens who stabbed and robbed peace-loving citizens, while at the forecourt of the parliament building, MP Kriezotis struck the Syros MP, Daras. In other words, there was a general breakdown of law and order that was encouraged by the authorities and inspired people to commit criminal acts.41 In contrast, in 1851 and in 1852, while the March 25 celebration took place peacefully, rumors and fear of disturbances led the government to station military detachments with loaded arms on every street.42

The well-known hostility of the Great Powers toward Greece regarding its attitude during the Crimean War took on symbolic—in addition to political—dimensions in 1854, with the conspicuous absence of the English, French, and Austrian commanders from the anniversary of the Revolution, while the English and French ships docked at Piraeus did not fire their guns or pay tribute to the Greek flag.43 Two years later, while the Anglo-French occupation of Piraeus continued, things returned to “normal” and the warships paid tribute to the Greek national holiday.
Nothing untoward occurred during the celebration of 1859, but voices seem to have been raised against the decision of the Athens diocese to stop mentioning the names of commissioners, fiduciaries, and parishioners of the country’s churches during the March 25 service. The decision was described as “bizarre” and, it seems, many commissioners were quick to declare that they would not obey the order.


New Year’s Day (January 1/January 13), Otto’s disembarking (January 25/February 6), Amalia’s disembarking (February 3/February 15), Otto’s birthday (May 20/June 1), Otto’s name day (September 18/30), Amalia’s name day (September 25/October 7), the royal couple’s wedding anniversary (November 10/22), and the queen’s birthday (December 9/December 21) were, year in year out, the officially established public ceremonies of the Ottonian reign. Although not all festivals were dynastic, the royal power established its public presence by imposing a standard ritual and protocol on all celebrations, including those that were not centered on the royals, such as the two national anniversaries—March 25 and September 3—and the major religious festivals, such as Easter and Christmas. Consequently, we have approached the festivals as an attempt by the monarchy not only to control its subjects but also to mobilize their loyalty to a foreign king in a celebratory manner through an inviolable protocol that established the hierarchy, with its main feature being the rallying of the nation and the church around the throne.

Of course, this desire did not emerge in fully developed form from the minds of the Regency and Otto himself, but evolved in response to the spectacle. That is why every celebration took on special connotations. Still, they all derived their meaning from the pressing need to unite the Greeks for the first time in history around the authority of the king of Greece that the Powers had elected; and most of them, regardless of the different reason for their constitution, embraced, at the same time, the dynastic spectacle, the ecclesiastical tradition of the litany, and the popular elements of “dances and festivals.” All the same, each celebration retained its particular characteristics, which, in turn, were altered with the passage of time; hence the object of our study is not the “ideotype” of celebration, but the annual routine of many different celebrations.

The symbolic power established by the monarchy, with its specific rituals, strict protocol, and the concession to the people of public space and festive time, was interiorized by the Greeks not as an invented tradition and practice but as the normal life of a festival-loving kingdom. In this context, both March 25 and September 3—the former a concession by Otto, the latter imposed by the revolutionaries—retained all the characteristics of dynastic celebrations but also acquired a new popular dimension, with strong feelings of excitement, participation, assimilation, and worry. Although the bureaucratic policies of the Bavarian government prepared the celebratory events in great detail, no one could predict whether these would meet with success or failure (occasionally, the two even coincided, depending on the city or the social groups involved). In a sense, the festive days froze the time of everyday political, economic, and social problems, depicted the immortality and incorruptibility of people and rulers, and expressed the aspirations of a newborn nation. That is why, as Mona Ozouf observes, the time announced by the celebrations was not the linear time of history.

Aside from the programs of the ceremonies and Amalia’s letters to her father, our main sources
have been newspaper articles, most of which are taken up by the written record of official public speeches. For many years, historians passed over sources of this kind as unworthy of consideration, as the “boring tributes” that came with formal procedures, such as, for example, proclamations, the addresses of a bishop to the king, and so on. Formal public speeches have been analyzed in recent years not, of course, for their originality or for the well-known representations they contain, but for their symbolic imposition as the sole and legitimate reflection of the social world—of the world that exists or that the state power in question wishes into existence.

The organization and realization of public festivals was, naturally, not undertaken by the king himself but by the master of ceremonies, the secretariat of the interior, and the versatile group of “court” politicians and intellectuals. The latter proposed various plans to the king and the government of the day. The texts that they composed did not only reflect the desires of a literate public, but they also formed and expressed the views of an emerging elite that hoped to dominate the political and cultural events of the kingdom. From various institutional viewpoints, the official programs of the ceremonies reflected the hierarchy imposed by the monarchical regime on those groups active around the king and queen.

With the anniversary of the Greek Revolution of 1821 being the most prominent, public celebrations were often marked by mischief, binge drinking, and excesses by both well-known and anonymous participants. And this was no accident. The considerable symbolic power that the monarchy established in the public sphere through celebrations trained elites and ordinary people toward the use of that power against those who had introduced it. The most striking example was the celebration of the anniversary of September 3, imposed on the monarchs almost as a punishment by the leaders of the revolutionary movement.

The public appearances of the king and, shortly after, the queen had every political reason to be festive, but they were also completely performative; that is, they incorporated law and order within their own performance as well as “benevolent” ideals such as the union of people and king, the continuity of the Greek nation from antiquity to the present, the primacy of Orthodoxy, and the “Europeanness” of the small state at the southeastern tip of Europe. Public ceremonies were the safest vehicle for the daily practice of the dynastic protocol, as, without much apparent expenditure of energy, they had an effect on reality through the image they projected.

Despite the Greek state’s perceived poverty, the Bavarian government of the country preferred to diminish the splendor of the court because of economic hardship rather than abandon its symbolic power in public space. Besides, the people’s alleged need for “dances and festivals” obliged the king to continue the funding of ceremonies by the state, while famous and less-than-famous Greeks organized parallel banquets with fundraising, thus revealing the importance they attached to private initiative.
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