

A Homeric Hero for the Greek Resistance

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In present-day Greece, one searches with little success for evidence of the heroes of the Greek resistance during the German occupation (1941-1944), with one sole exception: Aris Velouhiotis. In the popular expression, Aris has achieved, and in some eyes exceeded, the pantheon of the heroes of 1821, reaching even into the preserves of classical mythology in the regard in which he is held. For all the threat he represented as a figure who resurrected the residual memory of a dark period, he has retained such a hold on the popular imagination that Aris' memory can neither be disallowed nor co-opted.

Much of the credit for Aris' popularity rests with Giorgos Kotzioulas, one of the most important figures in the literature of the Greek resistance. Kotzioulas was the writer-in-residence for Aris Velouhiotis' inner circle, accompanying him in the mountains of Free Greece, writing dramatic pieces to help recruit members for EAM (Ethnikon Apeleftherotikon Metopon [National Liberation Front]) against the Germans and at the same time attempting to immortalize Aris Velouhiotis as the hero of the Greek resistance.

By Kotzioulas' account, Aris Velouhiotis was the captain of a band of twenty-five robust and bearded *andartes* in the mountains of Roumeli. They were largely from Roumeli and Thessaly, in their mid-twenties, and all wore black Cossack hats that gave them their nickname. The Black Hats rode on large, half-tamed horses from the Thessalian plains that none, it was said, but Aris' team could ride. Entering a vil-

lage, the Black Hats are described by Kotzioulas as storming in on horseback, dark and fierce, austere and secretive. They lived off the land and were held together like a band of ascetic monks by their abbot. Self-governing, theirs was a disciplined and single-minded existence in which disobedience was not tolerated and self-criticism was routine. While each performed his daily responsibility automatically and dove into battle without being ordered, they ate and slept together as a family and largely made decisions as a group, including those that dealt with death. Kotzioulas depicts Aris' followers as one body molded by the fire of the struggle and modeled on an ancient ethic. Largely uneducated, they reveled in being physically superior fighters. They upheld high standards of behavior to serve their own vanity and pride, to feed their glory and honor, but to act, as well, as a model for those in the struggle. Highly selective of those who were to join them, the Black Hats were a forbidding force to those who would approach or follow.

Psychologically, Kotzioulas presents Aris as a man of harsh experience who survived not as much by his insights as by a peasant's cleverness. If his men would fall on their swords for him, if they matched him in every deed, it was because he appeared to have a depth they lacked. Kotzioulas refers to this quality as Aris' mystery, his invincibility, an inescapable quality evinced by his words, by the whole man. His eyes, Kotzioulas contends, played back and forth from the laughing to the serious, suggesting a range of emotion that might describe an erratic personality with little emotional control, but one capable, nevertheless, of brilliant moments and electric surprises.

Kotzioulas' vision of Aris attended night and day by fanatical devotion, devoted to leading by following the will of the people, is a convenient fiction reinforced through a variety of staged events often brutal and striking. As fearsome and inaccessible as he is made to appear, Aris thus strikes a

resonant chord among the peasants in the mountains, who are said to receive him as a man forged in the crucible of battle and not by politics. Loved and honored as one of the struggling people, he faces the dilemma that if he deviates from his chosen role, those who support him will find another model to act as their symbol.

A large part of the mythology built around Aris has to do with his relationship to his men. Not only did they eat and sleep like a family, but the *andartes* (Greek guerrillas) took refuge in his name, sharing his renown and his authority in the villages. More like an ancient than a modern hero, Kotzioulas tells us, Aris protected those in his band like a dragon. Otherwise, he would have found his men slaughtered beside him when he woke in the morning by enemies who seeded themselves everywhere among the people who loved him. The *andartes* are depicted as Aris' tortured children, not chickens to be killed without each of their lives being accounted for. A part of the violence that surrounds him, Aris is himself compared to Herod, who inhumanely slaughtered men like sheep, and to Odysseus, decisive, resourceful, rich in tricks, and disdainful like all brave men. Aris himself, however, preferred Achilles, the generous warrior, as his model, a singularly revealing choice since Achilles deserted his comrades to pursue a personal slight, recalling Aris' signing of the repentance declaration. Achilles fought his war in his own way, a fate to which Aris was himself later to succumb, a victim of his own myth. The choice of the Achilles metaphor opens up rich interpretive possibilities, particularly because it originates in the subject himself. Achilles, a purist and the best of all Greek warriors, lived conditioned by the recognition that he would die young and gloriously. He could not thereby be measured by the same yardstick as a common fighter, indeed hardly as a mortal at all. His apparent invulnerability led him to an arrogance that undermined him, contributing to an anger and an inconsis-

tency that was both human and demonic. Achilles refused the gifts of Agamemnon, leader of the expedition to Troy, lest he diminish his honor, and had to be dissuaded from killing Agamemnon. In much the same way, Aris rejected British coordination of the overall war effort and himself conspired to kill those captains who rivaled him. Achilles' very association with the immortals both honored and diminished the greatness of his achievements, as did Aris' presumption of prowess beyond that of mere mortals. The honor Achilles paid to his slain comrade Patrocles was itself no less intense than Aris' bonding with his followers; his inconstancy in his conduct of the war was no less than Aris' erraticism as the leader of one of the many bands of the resistance movement. But it was the choice of a short glorious life over a long undistinguished one that most resonates with the Aris story. It is a model that accounts for Aris' uniqueness, his intensity, and his conviction and that suggests the possibility that Aris' headlong dash into immortality consciously mimicked the path of his classical mentor.

Kotzioulas' mythologizing of Aris represents the Black Hats and their leader as figures whose lives come to have greater value than that of the villagers they presume to serve. Like the myth woven around Aris by the mountain people with whom he dealt, this telling reconstitutes the exploits that had formed the basis of his support from the people, risking the very resource he would need to survive his own fame. Any mistakes he would make would be written so large that he could not escape the weight of a judgment that would in the end crush him. The myth would become a personality cult, so that Aris himself as a singular figure displaced the "people" in importance and his "elite" group came to have greater importance than the "democracy" he fought for.

The model crafted for Aris was nevertheless strategic. It told the tale of a serious figure about whom the people knew little. This anonymity gave him weight and mystery. The

anecdotes related about him suggest someone able to cut through complex moral dilemmas and reduce them to a certainty rooted in the harsh reality of peasant existence. Aris' story expressed clear choices and a persistent appeal to the trust of the people. In times of moral uncertainty and social turbulence, he cut a figure of one who provided direction in terms familiar to those he would lead. He was a figure whose common logic was rooted in everyday concerns of hunger, fatigue, fairness, and community. The effect he created was that of linking a known cause to a specific end, linking purposive action to some hoped-for future. His model, built as it was on anecdotal narratives reducible to exemplary moral tales and on dramatic exploits that strikingly sponsored a personal cult, fed directly into the popular consciousness with a high sense of its own relatedness to popular forms and attitudes. Just as Aris took pains to carry his own stores with him, so as not to have to confiscate scarce supplies from the peasants to whom he had to appeal for political support, his myth took care to feed popular perceptions, not to starve them. His reiterated promise to the people was that the *andartes* would untie their chains, not forge new ones.

One critical aspect of the Aris story is his presentation as one not beholden to outside interests. Seen as one who knew the Greek people, having traveled half the mountains of the country, his experience was their experience. Aris' resistance is constructed as one built out of his own efforts and not bought by British *lira*. Aris is shown to rely on the perception of his own trustworthiness and his personal reputation for honesty. His claim, as Kotzioulas depicts it, was that all he had was his own strength, the truth, and his roots in the people. Thus, he moves on the ground through the mountains, using information from the people to build a truly indigenous movement. His image was even more clearly defined by the opposition to his command raised by the English, and their efforts to arouse other factions to opposition.

Based on a highly personal style and rooted in the popular consciousness, Aris' leadership was amenable to cultural construction through narrativizing. As a captain whose fame was rooted in local forms of recognition, the Aris that Kotzioulas constructs claims Parnassós (Apollo's birthplace) and Karpenisi (the death-site of Markos Botsaris, hero of the War of 1821) as his place of origin. His choice capitalizes on their mythic and historical associations as well as their proximity and their familiarity. He is equally preoccupied with what it means to be a captain on the level of everyday considerations. He chases down the arrival of company stores, assigns billets, makes certain that communications equipment is loaded, transported, and guarded. He runs meetings and takes complaints from villagers, campaigns among the people, draws up military strategy, and resolves daily disputes between factions and within the political organization. In his command, Aris embraces the difficult decisions that assign the fates of individuals, including harsh sentences for rape, theft, or betrayal, whether they are villagers or *andartes*, EAM sympathizers, or admirers of warring factions. Aris' rootedness in everyday reality is critically important to the mythologizing and the narrativizing of his performative resistance. That he is popularly remembered in certain ways rather than in others suggests a principle of selection, either by selective retrieval or selective survival of events. Sources choose, for example, to cite the brutal sentences he passes on *andartes* to balance his willingness to avenge his comrades. They insist on recalling the asceticism of his hard life high in the snowy mountains over the three years he fought. And they marvel at the high drama of his appearances.

Narrativizing the story of Aris meant the *andartis* (Greek guerrilla) chief would be constituted in a certain way. His love of demotic song, for example, becomes a means of both modeling from the past and structuring the future. Demotic song summons up an image to be mimicked in real-time

agentive action; captured symbolically, it can then be reproduced to control the flow of historical meaning. Turning song to weapon, the Black Hats characteristically broke out into song on various occasions and together with their chief were themselves the subject of song.

Kotzioulas pledges to tell Aris' truth and to express his debt to history. He promises to place for once the "English radio" (access to propaganda) at Aris' disposal, to contextualize and localize him in a human way. Resisting fanatical and anecdotal war stories, abstracted and generalized patriotic pieces, and outright propaganda, Kotzioulas' texts resist as well the influence of the distant political organization and its alienating ideology. They take up, by contrast, the popular consciousness as their political white paper and strive to create a sense of local community, modeling it by acknowledging the historical conditions and materials out of which it would be fashioned.

It is this kind of narrative statement Aris is represented as delivering in campaign speeches among the people in the mountains. A charismatic populist, Aris typically speaks for several hours with villagers in mixed audiences of all ages and types, poor farmers, children and old women, those of a high station, and those neglected. He is shown addressing his audience freely, naturally, and from the heart, assuming a plurality of positions rather than consensus. Without being an artful speaker, Aris is said to appeal to the villagers as authentically one of them. His strength, according to Kotzioulas, lay in bringing his message to the people himself so that they heard the opinions of this "fearsome lion" from his own mouth, as a lion at ease. Aris' appeal to the people is that of a self-created man, an educator, and a person of faith who touched their hearts. As Kotzioulas presents him, he lets his audience in on his secret, his power, his mystery; he makes the unapproachable approachable, bringing the villagers in little by little. As he ends, he moves out into

their midst, offering his hand and some private words. In such speeches, he stages resistance as a performance, mixing spectacle and reality, the symbolic with the actual.

Aris, in Kotzioulas' texts, is shown to draw a psychological autopsy of the popular condition, engaging to bury the corpse of a passive people and to deliver a living, if infant, liberating force. Through such a construction, Aris becomes actively agentive, reaching out to add his strength to that of his audience. Building on the natural legitimacy with which his popular constituency had endowed him, Aris' speeches create the conditions of possibility for limited subject autonomy. His appeal to popular sovereignty assumes greater validity when his priest anoints resistance as a God-blessed struggle to counter an indigenous theology that allows the obscenities of war as a punishment for imagined sins.

Beyond attaching Giorgos Kotzioulas to his band and staging speeches, Aris contributed to his own mythologizing through the content of events associated with him, often staging or manipulating them to create a public effect, with the knowledge that stories would be circulated about his exploits. The stories Kotzioulas repeats are, interestingly, not those that place Aris in the context of the historical struggle or those that display his instinct for military strategy. Rather, Kotzioulas chooses those that he believes give a personal picture of the man he was close to. Kotzioulas' choices thus embrace a popular or indigenous construction of the Aris story. He finds the materials for his stories in Aris' work in the villages, in his relations with his own men, in his care for the opinion of those for whom the struggle was being fought, and, most particularly, in the kind of instincts Aris displays in his application of local justice.

As Kotzioulas represents his dilemma, Aris wanted to protect villagers from his mistakes and those of the movement. He felt that every failed plan, every logistical slip implicated the villagers, and it was they who would suffer. If, for

example, army food stores were lost or delayed in transit, and villagers had to feed his band, or if Aris had to authorize confiscating food from the village, he did so with the proviso that immediately the loss was located, the villagers' food was to be returned or replaced. Demonstrating that Aris recognized both necessity and its price in popular support, Kotzioulas represents him as aware of those who watched his every movement from inside their huts. Aris, he claims, understood the popular need for clarity and decisiveness, and, above all, for evenhandedness. Thus, where villagers might afford themselves the luxury of pity in rendering decisions on miscreant *andartes*, Aris had to execute justice. Only then would the people be able to make commensurate sacrifices for the struggle.

Aris and his men were representatives of the struggle as a whole. One impropriety dishonored the whole and became a slippery slope from which the movement would find it difficult to recover. In Kotzioulas' construction, the movement represented by Aris sought to strengthen the sense of law, to act as a standard of absolute justice absolutely applied. At the center of chaos, the still spot of order had to stand as a beacon. Aris could not prove credible punishing the enemy for its misdeeds if he hesitated to punish his own. He could not create faith in the larger movement if its representatives in the immediate moment were allowed to go undisciplined. His judgments would not stand as a model if they were only as good as that of the villagers themselves. Whereas Aris' justice, as Kotzioulas represented it, took its impetus from local custom, it had to be better, stronger, more admirable, more unforgiving. If his excess was on the side of certainty, and if he himself suffered personally from his own judgments against his men, his authority and that of the movement would be elevated in the eyes of the people. Moreover, not only those acts but other of his exploits would then be narrated among the people.

The narratives treating Aris' administration of justice focus heavily on both the exacting standards and the centrality of issues related to discipline and order in the villages of the Greek mountains under the Nazi occupation. In circumstances in which disorder is addressed in a judicial setting, the possibilities of agentive behavior and the potential connection between actions and their results is clarified. Here, the EAM program could be made concrete and recognizable, a small stage on which the values of the resistance could be played out. Several narratives selected for telling by Kotzioulas focus on complaints against the *andartes* by village neighbors, a recognition of the priority given to the movement's relationship with villagers.

The most developed of the Aris anecdotes Kotzioulas relates is that of the young *andartis* Octovrianos. This anecdote ties together in an elaborated plot a number of themes: the administration of justice, discipline and order, relations with the people, bilateral responsibility, the interactivity of the resistance and the people, and the priority of the collective over the individual. Kotzioulas tells us here of a lively and well-regarded youth well aware of proscriptions within the movement against fraternization with the peasant women. Offenses against these women were assigned a swift and certain fate: death. Thus, in spite of the hardships of their lives, the homesickness and the austerity, *andartes* were on notice to maintain distant relations with women in the mountains, both in the villages and within the struggle.

Thus, while the formal expectation was that *andartes* did not lift their eyes to view the village girls, Octovrianos was said to have forced himself on a woman he met at a monastery. The secret affair became widely known, a second *andartis* was killed in a dispute over it, and ugly rumors surfaced in the village.

At first, Octovrianos denied knowledge of the offense; subsequently, he offered to sacrifice himself as a suicide. Aris

refused and, according to *andartis* custom, determined to execute him as an example to others. Many in the village and among the *andartes* objected that the youth did not deserve such a fate, that he should be discharged and allowed to take his own life or redeem himself. Anxious not to appear to favor one of his own band, Aris determined to exact the most severe penalty. He refused to pardon Octovrianos where he might have pardoned another. The execution completed, and having fulfilled his role as chief of the band, Aris embraced his dead comrade's corpse and bathed it in his tears.

The effect of this anecdote appears to be relatively independent of whether the event actually happened. Kotzioulas' presentation of it nevertheless strongly suggests he was either an eyewitness or someone to whom the events were subsequently related by an eyewitness. What is important is the currency that such tales were likely to have in a largely non-literate setting in which word-of-mouth was given significant value and weight. Under such conditions, rumors, anecdotes, or tales were likely to take on a life of their own as a means of reinforcing popular moral imperatives.

The folklore into which Aris has been fit is essentially that of a lone, mysterious stranger who thunders into a civilized place out of a darkness populated by a band of attendant black figures on wild horses. The tale tells us of one who, when dead, lives on in the minds of both those who love and those who curse him. His death itself is contested, for those who have not seen it with their own eyes continue to believe that Aris lives forever. He is a hero in the tradition of bandit-warriors (*listes*) of the mountains and forests, irregulars unconstrained by organized forces, righters of wrongs working at the popular level of the peasants.

As a construction, Aris fits the frame provided by common themes of demotic songs of the *listes*, central to which is the mixture of awe and terror he inspires. Equally important is the focus on his empathy for popular suffering and

on his provocation against the authorities confounded by the power of his own criminal acts. Aris is wrapped, like the *listes* (who, like him, were native to the territories of Epirus, Thessaly, and Central Greece commanded by Free Greece) in the mantle of the proto-rebel, sharing the same irreverent traditions and the same inhospitable environs. As important as the connections that linked him in life to the *listes*, those that defined his death sealed his fate in common lore. Freedom under the conditions that described Aris' exploits could not have been completely identified with the hero short of the defining moments of betrayal and execution. Freedom had to be absolute to lift such a hero above a mundane rural society in which none were truly free. It had to be absolute to resolve his value as beyond the reach of such mortal considerations as his own criminal acts. The cleansing power of betrayal and execution was needed to raise Aris to the heights of heroes of the magnitude of 1821. In this instance the cleansing was made more potent by factional disputes leading to his probable suicide surrounded by his enemies. In a sense, Aris' death can itself be attributed to self-betrayal, not only through his suicide but because the snake that would destroy him was already within, not only within the homeland or the movement but within the hero's own conflicted self. In death, a powerful escort is required in *listes* songs to take the brigand-warrior to his execution. This escort is modeled in Aris' story in two ways. First, in the host of enemies who cut off Aris' escape and second, in the power of his own tortured sense of himself as one of Metaxas' repentants and therefore one who was not to be trusted even within himself.

Aris' identification with the *listes* clarified the element of darkness and ferocity associated with narratives that constructed his role and reinforced the conflicts that fed into popular ambivalence toward him. In some ways, Aris was trapped inside the myth constructed around him, like an insect in amber. If life imitates art, his death became a nec-

essary way of fulfilling the myth. It resolved the ambivalent feelings of fear and wonder he inspired in villagers and brought myth and reality into convergence in the same way that folklore works back and forth between the two to create an indigenous ideology.

Aris achieved a uniquely individual and solitary stature as an *andartis* hero. It could be argued that he had been elevated to a mythic status integrally tied to popular lore. This status meant that efforts would be made to erase him publicly as deviant, as a distortion of history whose divergence from the historical construction favored by the organized resistance made him dispensable. His erasure would represent a triumph for establishment forces, for the bourgeois urban element in the political arm of the movement, for the educated elite, for anticommunists of the Right, for the western allies represented by the English, and for the monarchists in Cairo. The latter's construction of Aris' story would sacrifice him to interests tied to traditional resources and powerful allies capable of restoring predictable social patterns to the social disequilibrium of a war-torn nation. This canonical and stable story was preferred to Aris' uncanonical and unpredictable story which lacked a clear central spine and whose hero was a protean and negative figure in a state of continually recreating himself. Where official organized resistance ideology bumped up against Aris' unofficial position, Aris was pushed to the periphery of the circle of accepted values along with the excluded voices of local expression that he hoped to represent. Aris' story had served its purpose in raising a threat to the old order. In a triumph of the anti-pluralistic perspective, it was subsumed by a dominating narrative that chose the hegemony of a forced commonality in the popular front over the difference of the many small stories that made up the many excluded voices the movement had initially presumed to represent.

Undermined by official establishment accounts and over-

whelmed by the hegemonic narrative of the organized resistance, Aris' story was not likely to prevail as a social text. One reason has to do with the oppositionally conflicted nature of his story. Aris in the brigand role was both loved and hated. He might slay a local village tyrant, but he also confiscated food from villagers. He might travel throughout the mountains to right the wrongs visited on the peasants, but he is himself the source of many of those wrongs.

The story of Aris cannot end with his exclusion or death, if only because the construction of this hero continued to have utility value. As Woodhouse claimed early in 1948, Aris' canonization was pursued with a religious fervor by the KKE (*Kommounistikón Komma Ellados* [Communist Party of Greece]), to whom he proved more useful dead than alive.

That posthumous eulogizing of this type should have gone on is not unexpected. One clearly, however, could not have predicted that it could have turned into popular adulation this side of divinity and lasted to the end of the century, given the parade of horrors incurred in the Greek Civil War and the quarter-century repression of the resistance movement experienced in the post-civil war period. The kind of testimony to the memory of Aris that I have examined here is the result of an interweaving of several strands of popular culture which took on a life of its own as a construction fully as ambiguous, complex, and powerful as the resistance itself.

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A Special Vase for George

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When we were fellow graduate students at Rutgers University, George and I both took a year-long course on Greek vase-painting with Christoph Clairmont. It was this course that kindled my love of the subject and led to my dissertation topic. George also developed affection for the subject, and although his research took him in another direction, an interest in Greek vase-painting was one of the things that we continued to share during our many years of friendship. It seems only appropriate, therefore, that I present him here with the first full publication of a very special, so far unique, Greek vase – one that will also be included in the volume of the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* that I am preparing on the Athenian black-figure vases at The Walters Art Museum in Baltimore (Figs. 1-4).

The vase is an Attic black-figure amphora of a special spheroid shape that has been attributed to the Euphiletos Painter and dates to ca. 530-520 BC.¹ Although in nearly pristine condition, it has been poorly fired in places, most notably in the areas beneath the figured panels, under the left handle and inside the neck. Just less than 30 cm. in height,² the amphora has an echinus mouth, short curved neck atop a narrow band between two red fillets at the join to the unusual, spherical body, and a torus foot joined to the body by a flat red molding marked off at the bottom by an incised line. The handle to either side is oval in section with two parallel incised grooves on the outside giving the impression that the