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"Hymn to Liberty" by Dionysios Solomos
An English Translation of Stanzas 1-16

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Introduction

This commentary accompanies my translation to English of the epic Greek poem "Hymn to Liberty" by Dionysios Solomos. First published in 1825, it is a poem of critical importance to Greek identity and is ingrained in the historical, cultural and political aspects of Greece. Its opening stanzas became Greece's national anthem. Following the bicentennial of the poem's first publication, it is timely to have a new translation that focusses on accessibility to modern generations. That is, a translation that prioritizes contemporary English idioms to promote engagement, particularly by younger generations of the Greek diaspora who encounter these verses primarily as a ceremonial anthem rather than living poetry.

To aid my endeavour I consulted Kimon Friar's magnificent essay on translation (Friar, 649–678) as it is especially useful for Modern Greek poetry. It was with trepidation I considered his cautions, about "*whether poetry can be well translated by one who is not himself a poet*" (Friar, 667) or to not be "*a translator, impelled by ambition beyond his reach*" (Friar, 656). While I worked on my translation, I didn't want to be influenced by other translations. However, after I finished it, I decided I should investigate other translations, no matter how briefly. Most I found were of the first few stanzas only, and it is just the first two which are used as the Greek national anthem for official events or ceremonies. The complete poem is actually 158 stanzas. This translation is of the first sixteen stanzas, so nowhere near complete either. I hope however that in conjunction with prior works it gives the reader some insight into the thoughts of the poet and the Greek population of those times.

A secondary objective here is to discuss a few topics that I used to structure my thoughts while translating this poem. With the benefit of the post-translation research, I have been able to use some well-known translations as examples within these topics. Initially I did not consider these topics (A to D, described below) as a translation process for poetry because of a crucial step I needed in producing the translated poem. This being that I moulded each stanza "going in circles" by testing different possibilities until some rhythmic pattern emerged.

It has since been pointed out that this approach may still be considered a part of a process. Its circularity is a methodology arising from the creative act of translation, an endeavour that ponders every phrase. Such an intermediary step may not be required by bilingual poets who can conjure both meaning and poetic form simultaneously, however I found the step highly necessary. Friar posits that someone who is not a poet cannot translate poetry well. Yet this raises the question: might not the translator absorb some of the same skills - linguistic mastery, aesthetic judgment, rhythmic sensitivity – that characterize poetic creation itself?

Topic A: Adapt or adhere?

Charles Brinsley Sheridan was in 1825 the first to offer an English translation (Tiktopoulou, 86) of the complete poem. His work highlights the first question to consider in reproducing a poem in another language. That is, should it be an adaptation or as much as possible a literal rendering in the other language? Sheridan chose adaptation, which helps considerably for such a long poem because it can avoid direct translation of difficult stanzas. His translation harks back to the classicism of those times and contains numerous archaisms. I chose to adhere as

much as I could to literal accuracy. I wanted the reader to absorb it as a historical account, in poem form, of the Greek populace's experiences around the 1821 War of Independence.

Topic B: Translate in full or in part?

Rudyard Kipling, in his version of 1918 (Kipling), also chose the adaptation approach. However, on the question of whether to translate the whole poem or just selected parts of it, his translation is a translation in part. Obviously, this approach can make it easier to create translations. In this, Kipling had the simpler task by restricting himself to producing seven stanzas, and not the 158 in full. However, he created a translation held in very high esteem indeed. This may be judged by the fact his version is used by the Greek Government on its English web pages (HELLENIC REPUBLIC-Greece in the World).

Kipling's version highlights the second decision that must be made by the translator. That is, just how much of a poem needs to be translated? In this case, for some uses, an argument could be made for the first two stanzas as it is they that are used officially. Next, possibly the fifteenth because of its rousing nature; at least Kipling thought so as he includes it as stanza number six of his seven. Kipling's poem also highlights a sub-variant of translation in part, whereby the stanzas translated are not contiguous.

Due to the time required for a full translation, given the difficulty of English rhyme for the poem's language and in particular its idioms, I stopped at the sixteenth stanza. This is because that is where stanza 2 repeats. In fact, it reappears as stanzas seventy-four and eighty-seven also. I felt that by employing this device, Solomos returns to the emotional, central idea behind his poem, and it seems a fitting way to end this translation.

I also felt that readers can still get an understanding of Solomos's language and poetic style, as well as Liberty's travails with my translation. Also, as they are contiguous stanzas, the possibility of appending to the translation with the least impact is retained.

Topic C: Preserve rhyme and visual shape?

It is with this topic where, as translator, I had a plethora of compromises to consider.
Many difficulties may be side-stepped by using free verse or "plain prose" (Trypanis, 501). His translation consists of the first four stanzas, of which the first two lines are shown below:

> I recognize you by the fierce edge of your sword; I recognize you by the look
> that measures the earth.
> Liberty, who sprang out of the sacred bones of the Greeks brave as in the past, I
> greet you, I greet you.
>
> Constantine A. Trypanis

However, my objective was different. I desired a translation that used more traditional rhythmic elements.
Solomos's poem is visually represented in quatrains (stanzas of four lines). Sheridan and Kipling both employ the quatrain in their translations, preserving the quatrain structure of the original poem.
Choice of visual representation is often influenced by poetic rhyme so a quatrain can be more difficult to use in translations, as opposed to the simpler AA rhyme frequently found in couplets. Using a minimum of Greek, the following pattern is easy to see in every stanza of his poem:

- the final vowel of the 1st and 3rd lines is the same and is never accented.
- the final vowel of the 2nd and 4th lines is the same and is always accented (i.e. stressed).

Noting the above one may guess the rhyme, and indeed the Solomos quatrains do have an ABAB rhyme pattern, where the A lines rhyme together as do the B lines with each other. To test the effects of rhyme on visual shape, Sheridan's and Kipling's first stanza can be used as examples. See the table below:

Original	Couplet form
Yes! I know thee by the lightning *Of thy tyrant-slaying glaive,* *By thine awful glances bright'ning,* *As thou gazest on the brave.*	*Yes! I know thee by the lightning of thy tyrant-slaying glaive,* *By thine awful glances bright'ning as thou gazest on the brave.*
	Charles Brinsley Sheridan

Original	Couplet form
We knew thee of old, *O divinely restored,* *By the lights of thine eyes* *And the light of thy Sword.*	*We knew thee of old, o divinely restored,* *By the lights of thine eyes and the light of thy Sword.*
	Rudyard Kipling

While not suggesting the couplet forms above are improvements, one can see that Kipling's quatrain is quite amenable to couplet form as it has just two lines that rhyme with each other. Sheridan's is more accessible as a quatrain because of its ABAB rhyme. It should also be noted that quatrains do not mandate the ABAB form.

Another aspect affecting both rhyme and shape is the syllable count of the lines. Solomos quatrains can be viewed as two pairs of lines, the first line of each pair being 8 syllables, and the second 7 syllables, in length. This structure applies to a large proportion of the 158 stanzas. My translation uses quatrains and an ABCB form of rhyme.

Topic D: What of the audience?

This question is really a restatement of 'what type of language should I have used?' To answer the above, one should consider that a considerable portion of the population was illiterate due to hundreds of years of subjugation. Writing in the vernacular (i.e. demotic) and using idioms of the time made absolute sense but had to contend with the advancement by influential advocates of Katharevousa (i.e. cleansed/pure) Greek as the official language. Despite this obstacle, the poem's leading stanzas were in 1864 integrated into the national anthem of Greece. Solomos's passion for demotic was also fortunate given its adoption as the official language in more recent times.

In the current era many Greek children learn something of events around the 1821 War of Independence and this poem, from the time they are old enough to sit on their grandmother's knees and most certainly after starting school.

In this translation, I wished for a language style whose wording may be simply explained, line by line, to children of the Greek diaspora. At the same time, I wanted it to be accessible by adults with limited Greek language acquisition including those of non-Greek background with an interest in Greek culture.

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ΥΜΝΟΣ ΕΙΣ ΤΗΝ ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΑΝ
Διονύσιος Σολωμός

Σὲ γνωρίζω ἀπὸ τὴν κόψη
τοῦ σπαθιοῦ τὴν τρομερή,
σὲ γνωρίζω ἀπὸ τὴν ὄψη,
ποῦ μὲ βία μετράει τὴ γῆ.

Ἀπ᾽ τὰ κόκαλα βγαλμένη
τῶν Ἑλλήνων τὰ ἱερά,
καὶ σὰν πρῶτα ἀνδρειωμένη,
χαῖρε, ὦ χαῖρε, Ἐλευθεριά!

Ἐκεῖ μέσα ἐκατοικοῦσες
πικραμένη, ἐντροπαλή,
κι ἕνα στόμα ἀκαρτεροῦσες,
«ἔλα πάλι», νὰ σοῦ πῇ.

Ἄργειε νά ῾λθη ἐκείνη ἡ μέρα
κι ἦταν ὅλα σιωπηλά,
γιατὶ τά ῾σκιαζε ἡ φοβέρα
καὶ τὰ πλάκωνε ἡ σκλαβιά.

Δυστυχής! Παρηγορία
μόνη σου ἔμεινε νὰ λὲς
περασμένα μεγαλεῖα
καὶ διηγώντας τα νὰ κλαῖς.

Καὶ ἀκαρτέρει, καὶ ἀκαρτέρει
φιλελεύθερη λαλιά,
ἕνα ἐκτύπαε τ᾽ ἄλλο χέρι
ἀπὸ τὴν ἀπελπισιά,

κι ἔλεες «πότε, ἄ! πότε βγάνω
τὸ κεφάλι ἀπὸ τς ἐρμιές;»
Καὶ ἀποκρίνοντο ἀπὸ πάνω
κλάψες, ἅλυσες, φωνές.

Τότε ἐσήκωνες τὸ βλέμμα
μὲς στὰ κλάιματα θολό,
καὶ εἰς τὸ ροῦχο σου ἔσταζ᾽ αἷμα
πλῆθος αἷμα ἑλληνικό.

HYMN TO LIBERTY
Dionysios Solomos

Translated by Panayotis Tsambos

I can see you in the sharpness,
in the peril of the steel,
I can see you in the gaze,
surveying land and sea with zeal.

Born of bones of countless fallen,
Hellenes' bones of sanctity,
and resurgent once again,
Greetings, hail o Liberty!

There within them, you resided
very bitter, very small,
and for just one voice you waited,
that would be your clarion call.

That day did arrive belated,
pall of silence over all,
as fear's shadow dark and heavy,
kept the populace in thrall.

You were saddened and alone,
solitude for consolation,
left to speak of glories gone
and to weep during narration.

In abeyance without end,
the voice for freedom waited,
striking one hand in the other,
despairing what was fated,

and you called out, "When, oh when,
will my mind be rid these pains?"
and replying from above then,
tearful cries, and sounds of chains.

Then gazing upwards tearily
your eyes a clouded flood,
scarlet drops fell on your clothes,
a Hellene sea of blood.

Μὲ τὰ ροῦχα αἱματωμένα
ξέρω ὅτι ἔβγαινες κρυφὰ
νὰ γυρεύῃς εἰς τὰ ξένα
ἄλλα χέρια δυνατά.

Μοναχὴ τὸ δρόμο ἐπῆρες,
ἐξανάλθες μοναχή,
δὲν εἶν᾽ εὔκολες οἱ θύρες,
ἐὰν ἡ χρεία τὲς κουρταλῇ.

‘Ἄλλος σου ἔκλαψε εἰς τὰ στήθια
ἀλλ᾽ ἀνάσασιν καμιὰ
ἄλλος σοῦ ἔταξε βοήθεια
καὶ σὲ γέλασε φρικτά.

Ἄλλοι, ὀϊμέ! στὴ συμφορά σου,
ὅπου ἐχαίροντο πολύ,
«σύρε νά ᾽βρῃς τὰ παιδιά σου,
σύρε», ἐλέγαν οἱ σκληροί.

Φεύγει ὀπίσω τὸ ποδάρι
καὶ ὁλογλήγορο πατεῖ
ἢ τὴν πέτρα ἢ τὸ χορτάρι
ποὺ τὴ δόξα σου ἐνθυμεῖ.

Ταπεινότατή σου γέρνει
ἡ τρισάθλια κεφαλή,
σὰν πτωχοῦ ποὺ θυροδέρνει
κι εἶναι βάρος του ἡ ζωή.

Ναί· ἀλλὰ τώρα ἀντιπαλεύει
κάθε τέκνο σου μὲ ὁρμή,
ποὺ ἀκατάπαυστα γυρεύει
ἢ τὴ νίκη ἢ τὴ θανή!

Ἀπ᾽ τὰ κόκαλα βγαλμένη
τῶν Ἑλλήνων τὰ ἱερά,
καὶ σὰν πρῶτα ἀνδρειωμένη
χαῖρε, ὦ χαῖρε, Ἐλευθεριά!

You set off in bloodied vestures,
I know, in the dark of night,
seeking out in countries foreign,
other strong hands for the fight.

On your own you took the road,
returning failed in deed,
doors don’t open willingly
if someone knocks in need.

Some shed tears upon your breast,
relief alas none came,
others promising you help
betrayed you just the same.

In your misery and distress
some were so glad by your woe,
the cruellest said “Begone!”,
“Back to your children go!”

On foot you stride back fast,
your heels lift up behind,
on herbage and on rock
your glory they remind.

Humbly bowing so dejected,
head in misery downcast,
like the pauper begging alms,
his life burdened to the last.

But yes! Now they fight back,
with drive your children rise,
unceasingly they seek
their victory or demise!

Born of bones of countless fallen,
Hellenes’ bones of sanctity,
and resurgent once again,
Greetings, hail o Liberty!