

PERCEPTIONS OF THE ORIENTAL IN MODERN GREEK PAINTING

Greek painting may be divided into three distinct periods: the Ancient, the Byzantine and the Modern. The 19th century – a century important to the whole world and even more important to modern Greece – marks the Modern period of Greek painting, and finds the newly established Greek nation, after four centuries of Ottoman occupation, ready to receive every influence from the western world. Following the creation of the Modern Greek State (1828) and the establishment of the School of Arts in Athens, it was natural for the Greek painters to draw their inspiration from the immediate past, representing mostly scenes from the War of Independence (1821). They also immortalized the figures of its heroes whilst displaying at the same time scenes of everyday life always in conjunction with “the Greeks close attachment to their religious faith, their family and their glorious past”. The descriptive detail, a narrative tone, folkloric elements and local costumes became the basic characteristics of Greek genre painting, which later incorporated all new trends of art and concentrated not only in genre painting but also in landscape painting and portraiture. The involvement of genre painting with landscape painting became the main characteristic of the first decades of the 20th century, a period in which are obvious the influences from abroad to the arts and literature and at the same time a modernistic tendency towards

Greekness and the depiction of Greek nature and traditions.¹ Nevertheless, in this paper it is my intention to discuss the perceptions of the Oriental as they were developed by the Greek painters of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focusing on several of their own Oriental experiences and on their relations with the Westerners' Orientalism, that is an "Orient rêvé", that reflects their fantasies of a world of intrigue, mystery and exoticism, and in a lesser degree an "Orient connu" by traveling,² that was long given an extraordinary experience of the picturesque and exotic as well as of the otherness.³

In what follows I will focus on Greek Orientalism, considered it as part of the European Orientalism in terms of its resemblances and aesthetics, and one aspect of the evolution of the secular Greek painting of the 19th century showing the new paths of the Greek artists' inspiration and creativity. I will present some Greek painters who under the influences of Westerners artists were at a certain period of time delighted in the high-key intensity of the Oriental light and clapped a colorful palette to render the exotic atmosphere of the Orient in ethnographic paintings they created. They depicted faithfully in a realistic, naturalistic or impressionistic way the images of the Orient, mostly from Greece and Near and Middle East, that fascinated their eyes, with ethnographic exactitude, and represented Oriental picturesque scenes and various aspects of the oriental with sensitivity in the description of customs and characters that illuminates their own perceptions as well as their relationship with the westerners imaginary of the East.⁴

200

1 For the claims of originality in visual arts through Greekness and the autonomous selfhood, at this period, see Periklis Giannopoulos, *Greek line and Greek colour* (in Greek), 'Nea Synora'-A.A. Libanis, Athens, 1922.

2 Cf. A. Souriau, 'Orient/Orientalisme', in *Etienne Souriau, Vocabulaire d'Esthétique*, PUF, 1990, pp. 1098-1099.

3 Cf. Jean-Claude Berchet, *Le voyage en Orient*, in Robert Laffant (ed.), *Anthologie des voyageurs français dans la Levant au XIXe siècle*, Paris, 1985, Introduction.

4 Cf. Tony Spiteris, *Introduction à la peinture néo-hellénique*(in Greek), Athens, 1962, and Angelos Prokopiou, *History of Art 1750-1950*, vol. 2, Romanticism, Realism, Impressionism in Greece (in Greek), M. Pechlivanides, Athens, 1961, pp. 353-457. See also Stelios Lidakis, *Geschichte der griechischen Malerei des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Prestel Verlag, München, 1972.

Historical Background

Edward W. Said's *Orientalism*, published in 1978,⁵ being a defence of the Orient's integrity and a challenge to established Western attitudes towards the East, had in the last decades a major impact on the study of the Orient and led to fruitful analyses in the fields of cultural studies and aesthetics; although Said paid little attention to visual materials, his work served as a source of inspiration for art historians and cultural critics to reconsider Orientalist painting, early colonial photography, postcards and illustrated travelogues.⁶ The Orient, as an environment, aesthetically and intellectually distinct from the Occident, as a place of romance and of exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes as well as remarkable experiences, attracted the attention of travelers, writers and painters from the Romantic period of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century till the first decades of the twentieth century, and gave birth to Orientalism, a way of coming to terms with the Orient, based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience.⁷ "Orientalism – truly flowered in the nineteenth century, when steam navigation and the railroad made travel easier and facilitated contacts with other landscapes and other people" – and is connected mostly with a space that is located in the Eastern Mediterranean.⁸ Actually, it was travel literature and picturing that had been particularly interested in describing, evaluating and imagining the physical and cultural environment of Eastern countries such as Greece, Turkey, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, and cities such as Constantinople, Cairo, and Alexandria. The desire to describe and depict the Orient at that period of time is apparent in the textual and visual representations of the Orient, a space interwoven with Islamic and Christian elements, full of contradictions, that captured the romantic imagination and created Orientalism as a product of an aesthetic mobility and as a mode of discourse and a style of thought. It was actually

5 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.

6 Cf. I. Boer, "Orientalism" in M. Kelly (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, Oxford University Press, v. 3 (1998), pp. 406-408.

7 Cf. E. W. Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, London-New York, 1978, Introduction, p. 1.

8 Cf. Christine Peltre, *Orientalism*, Editions Terrail/Edigroup, Paris, 2004, p. 12.

the Mediterranean space that became an object of permanent fascination for the “orientaliste” – meaning someone who is knowledgeable about Oriental people, their languages, history, customs, religions, and literature, a term that also applies to Western painters inspired by “un Orient connu” – and the “Orientalisant”, the one inspired by “un Orient rêvé”.⁹ Since the late Renaissance and throughout the eighteenth century, European travelers had made their journey to the Orient drawn by an insatiable curiosity to know the languages, history, customs, religions, and literature of Oriental people. By the nineteenth century the Oriental journey had become, according to Jean-Claude Berchet, “much more than a mere tourism phenomenon. People aren’t content just to make it; they are forever dreaming about it, having fantasies about it, and depicting it down in words, in painting and in music. The mystery may well have become hackneyed, but it still retains its glamour among the Salon-going public and bookshop customer”.¹⁰

202

Orientalism – related to the arts, literature and the aesthetics of travel – is an art-historical term and a cultural category referring to the depiction of a loosely defined cultural region such as the “Orient”.¹¹ It is considered, related to the Orientalist painting, as a revelation of the colors, shadows, contrasts, mysteries and unfamiliar faces and landscapes of the Orient; it also demonstrates the European encounter with it that became the studied, the seen, the observed, the object and the source of inspiration linked with such qualities as the exotic,

9 Cf. A. Souriau, ‘Orient/Orientalisme’, in *Etienne Souriau Vocabulaire d’Esthétique*, PUF, Paris 1990, pp. 1098-1099.

10 J.-C. Berchet, *Le Voyage en Orient, Anthologie des voyageurs français dans le Levant au XXe siècle*, Robert Laffont (ed.), Paris, 1985, Introduction. Narratives of the Orient give usually depictions with many different qualities that are apparent in textual and visual representations of it. G. Flaubert, one among many of the French travelers, wrote on March 27, 1853: “We have understood the Orient as something glinting, blaring, passionate and contrasting. In it we saw no more than bayadères and curved sabers, fanaticism, voluptuousness, etc. In a word we were still in the days of Byron. For myself, I felt it differently. What, on the contrary, I like about the Orient is that grandeur that is so unaware of itself, and that harmony of disparate things. I remember a bather with a silver bracelet on his left arm, a blister on the other. There’s the true and yet poetic Orient, rascals in tatters trimmed with braid and all covered in vermin ... It reminds me of Jaffa. As I entered I sniffed both the smell of lemon trees and the smell of dead bodies” in Gustave Flaubert, *Lettres d’Orient*, L’Horizon chimérique, Bordeaux, 1990.

11 Cf. A. Souriau, “Orientalism”, *op. cit.*

the erotic, the sensual, the mysterious, the picturesque, and the unfamiliar. The Oriental obsession existing in the western painting of the nineteenth century, incorporates paintings “well drawn” and “well-painted” in the academic manner of the time, while in later 19th century received new directions corresponding to the diversification of the aesthetic concerns that followed the break down of the academic system and expanded into the impressionists, symbolists and avant-gardists painters’ conceptions of the Orient.¹² Related to painting from Delacroix to Klee, Orientalism incorporated pictures that were linked thematically rather than stylistically, demonstrating the excited responses to the mysteries and seductions of the exotic, that was spread by the storybook entitled *The Thousand and One Nights*, popularly known as *The Arabian Nights* as well as the attitudes caused by the unfamiliar.¹³

The Orient, as an entire system of thought and scholarship, seen as different and sensual, although usually limited in the Mediterranean, is a wide geographical space in which are included the life, history and topography of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Greece, the Crimea, Albania, and Sudan, a wide area that attracted the interest of the artists and travelers long before Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798.¹⁴ Nevertheless, it was expended in the whole of the 19th century, when Europe became more involved culturally and politically in the Near East, an interest noticed by Victor Hugo in his 1829 poems entitled *Orientales*, inspired by the Greek War of Independence (1821). In the preface to this poetry collection Victor Hugo noted that “In Louis XVI’s time one was a Hellenist, now one is an Orientalist. For empires as for literature perhaps it will not be long before the Orient is called upon to play a role in the Occident”,¹⁵ noticing the fact that the Orient has become in his age a “general concern” for the arts, the science and

12 Roger Benjamin (ed.), *Orientalism. Delacroix to Klee*, The Art Gallery of New South Wales (1997), 2001, Introduction.

13 Lynne Thornton, *The Orientalists Painter-Travelers*, ACR Poche Couleur, Paris, 1994, Introduction.

14 *Encyclopaedia of Art*, *op. cit.*

15 V. Hugo, *Préface des Orientales*, (1829).

politics. On the other Delacroix's Orientalism introduced concepts and images that fuel certain inflammatory Orientalist images of the Islamic world. In these images, as for example *The Massacre of Chios* (1824) and *The death of Sardanapalus* (1827), inspired by a play by Byron, despotism and violence as well as the ruler's brutal control over the destiny of the people, linked to sex were given a certain perception and attitude towards the Orient that was going to be influential to other artists, such as Regnault, Dehodencq, Clairin and Benjamin Constant. At the same time the Orientalist images of the Islamic world were depicted in the celebrated series of odalisques and the images of harem and bath of J.-A.D. Ingres who relied on travelers accounts as the Turkish Embassy Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.¹⁶

204

Many western painters – in particular the early travelers such as the Orientalists, primarily French and British travelers and stay-at-home alike – often relied heavily on literary sources for their works. One of the painter-travellers was Delacroix who traveled to Morocco to have the Orientalistic experience, while later on Klee visited Tunisia for the same reason; nevertheless the usual destinations of European Orientalists in the 1830's and 1840's were Turkey and Egypt. For example, Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps (1803-1860) has given to the audiences the first Orientalist paintings and achieved an unequalled reputation with his travels to Asia Minor and Syria in 1828 as he explored the “everyday life” of Turkish citizens under Islam. Later on the English painters Frederic Lewis and Edward Lear or French painters such as Jean-Léon Gérôme and Léon Belly traveled in Egypt and have given their own conceptions and images of the Orient in their “photographic painting”. Eugène Fromentin, a novelist as well as a painter, has travelled extensively in Algeria in the late 1840's and has written his memories in two influential travel books, *A Year in the Sahel* and *A Summer in the Sahara*, while in his paintings tried to represent pictures of the Orient in an ethnographic and over-documented way. All these Orientalists were attracted by the romantic opportunity of “seeing” and “making” pictures of harems and baths, slave and street markets, Bedouins and soldiers, landscape and architecture,

16 Cf. Roger Benjamin, *Orientalism. From Delacroix to Klee, op.cit.*, pp. 8-9.

choosing themes and stereotypes that are common in all of them, in a realistic or impressionistic way. A new generation of painters including Manet, Renoir, Cézanne, and later on Kandinsky, Matisse, Chagall, Picasso, and Klee, have been attracted by the charm of the East and have given also to us new perceptions of the Orient depicting scenes, portraits and landscapes in a new style, although keeping close to the Orientalist tradition.¹⁷ With all these artists painting became a ‘prestigious vehicle for the expression of cultural values’ as well as a representation of the Islamic cultures and identities.

Greek perceptions of the Oriental

The lure of the Orient, as it was expressed by the European painters during the nineteenth century, is apparently found in many paintings of the Greek Orientalists of the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, among which are included Nikephoros Lytras, Nicolaos Gyzis, Theodoros Rallis, Symeon Savvides, Pavlos Prosalentis the younger, and Pericles Tsirigotis; later a new generation of painters, inspired by impressionism, such as Thalia Flora-Karavia, K. Parthenis and K. Maleas, represented a later Orientalism, choosing subjects such as gardens, palm trees and sand as well as seascapes, sites and panoramas. All these modern Greek painters have been trained in Athens and abroad, either in Germany, France or Italy; some of them were born in the East or stayed there for long or smaller periods, especially in Asia Minor and Egypt. They were artists influenced by the widespread climate of Orientalism with different starting points and a different direction, since their place of birth or study or the seat of their artistic or exhibition activity was Munich, Paris, London, Rome, Athens or Alexandria. Actually we can distinguish two periods of Greek Orientalism connected with the establishment of the Greek nation-state: the first starts in 1844 and ends by 1862 and the influences from the academic “Munich School” of painting are apparent in the works of the Greek painters N. Lytras and N. Gyzis. At that period influences coming from France and Italy can also be traced in the paintings of

17 Cf. Christine Peltre, *Orientalism*, Editions Terrail/Edigroup, Paris, 2004, pp. 216-226.

Th. Rallis, S. Savvides, A. Giallinas, and P. Prosalentis the younger. There is also a later period (1863-1881) of Greek Orientalism, characterized by a plurality of themes and expressive means that bears the marks of impressionism. Among the painters of that period are P. Tsirigotis and S. Scavellis, while at the turn of the century and the first decades of the twentieth century, Thalia-Flora Karavia, a female painter, and K. Parthenis and K. Maleas, important twentieth century painters, also created Orientalist paintings under the influence of impressionism and of new artistic styles.¹⁸ Following their European Orientalistic experience the Greek painters, most of them born in cities of the Orient such as Constantinople, Smyrna, Alexandria, Cairo, or other cities in Asia Minor, kept alive the memories of their youth; after their studies abroad they traveled or stayed for long periods to the East and depicted themes and stereotyped figures similar to the ones presented by the formalistic or impressionistic aesthetics of European masters. The visual representations of the Oriental experiences depicted by the Greek painters convey realistic and unprejudiced views of the “Other” or imported stereotypes.¹⁹ The Greek painters’ memories and their encounter with Eastern cultures is clearly observed in their paintings that bear the mark of the influences exercised upon them and at the same time their own perceptions and fantasies of a world that was familiar to them. Although the so-called Greek Orientalists watched and absorbed the Westerners’ images of the Orient and represented in their pictures themes related to the landscape, natural and cultural, and to stereotyped figures similar to the ones depicted by the Westerns, nevertheless they had their own recollections of an Orient that was attractive and not unfamiliar to them.

In this paper, I shall take as study cases, first Nikephoros Lytras (1832-

18 See E. Georgitzogianni, “The Orient’s enchantment by the Greek painters” (in Gr.), newspaper *Kathimerini*, 2006, pp. 16-19, and Maria Katsanaki, “Images of the Orient in the Greek Painting of the 19th century”, in *National Gallery: 100 Years. Four Centuries of Greek Paintings*, (in Greek, 2000), Athens, 2nd ed., 2001, pp. 89-99.

19 See Yiorgos Kechagioglou, “The national, ethnic and religious ‘Other’ in Modern Greek original prose and prose translations (18th c.-1821): A preliminary sketch”, in Anna Tabaki & Stessi Athini (eds.), *Identity and Alterity in Literature 18th-20th c. Translation and Intercultural Relations*, Domos, Athens, 2001, pp. 35-48.

1904)²⁰ and Nicolaos Gyzis (1842-1901)²¹, compatriots coming from the Greek island of Tinos who studied in Athens and Munich, a place where artists such as Franz von Lenbarch (1836-1904) were interested in Orient. They are the most prominent representatives of what is known in the history of Greek painting as the “Munich School”.²² Besides their scenes of daily life, they made portraits and still-lives and were attracted by the peaceful ambience of the family and the idyllic beauty of country life. The representation of scenes of everyday life was very popular in Munich, in the so-called Biedermeier style or in the style of the School of Carl Theodor von Piloty. Following the Bavarian artists, who exalted the charms of family life, of nature and of rural merrymaking, these two Greek artists have chosen exclusively Greek themes, as Lytras painted exclusively genre scenes in a naturalistic manner, while Gyzis produced at the beginning of his career genre compositions and later symbolic and allegorical works. Their Orientalistic paintings are of “an Orient connu”, as in the summer of 1873 they travel together to Asia Minor and Smyrna, a trip that was unforgettable to them as Gyzis recalls six years later in a letter written in 1879 and addressed to Lytras: “I will never forget our trip to Smyrna. I still have before my eyes those trabs, the

²⁰ Lytras was taught at the Polytechnic School of Athens by Ludwig Thiersch and later entered the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich as a pupil of Piloty (1826-1886). In his return to Greece he was appointed professor of painting at the School of Arts, took part in many art exhibitions in Western Europe and is considered as the leading painter of the “Munich School” and the most important Greek painter of the 19th century. He was awarded several first prizes for his genre paintings depicted in a fine naturalistic style. His works can be found in the National Picture Gallery of Athens, the National Bank of Greece, the Coultides Collection, and many other private collections.

²¹ Nicolaos Gyzis studied first at the School of Arts in Athens and in 1865 at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich under Carl Theodor von Piloty (1826-1886). He was at that time influenced by another painter of the realistic school, Franz von Defregger, a student and friend of Piloty's. In 1872 he returned to Athens and established himself there permanently. He exhibited successfully in various exhibitions in Nürnberg, Munich and Paris, and in 1882 was appointed Full Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich and his work was widely recognized abroad. An extensive and representative collection of his paintings is in the National Picture Gallery of Athens, the Coultides Collection, and many other private collections, as well as in the Neue Pinakothek in Munich.

²² Cf. Andreas Ioannou, *Greek Painting, The 19th century*, English translation by D. Dellagrammatika, Melissa Publishing House, Athens, 1974, p. 60 ff.

camels chewing their cuds and I can still see you in Aidini when you were taking quince for your fever”²³. In the same year (1879) Lytras visited alone Egypt and was much attracted by the picturesque of the country which soon will become a source of inspiration to many Greek artists. Nevertheless, both Gyzis and Lytras were inspired by the world of the Orient before their visit there. As early as 1869, Gyzis was already exhibiting at the International Exhibition of Munich an *Oriental with Pipe* (Picture 1), while Lytras had been working on his *Abducted Maid*, a scene which is set on Greek soil; these paintings have given to both artists the opportunity to depict Oriental types before their trip to Asia Minor. Gyzis and Lytras produced later different paintings with Oriental themes, in different styles, naturalistic or impressionistic, and they have been photographed in Munich as Easterners, dressed the one as a Bushi-bourouk and the other as a Hodja.

208

Gyzis, after his trip in the Orient, revitalized his expressive powers depicting new themes in a strong natural light enriched by vivid colors in his Munich atelier. He painted many colorful pictures of the traditional professions and customs of the Ottoman world, as is well represented in his works *Oriental with Pipe*, *The Fruit Vendor* (Picture 2), *The Punishment of the Chicken-thief*, *the Slave-market*, *Courtship in Cairo*, *The Abduction of Greek Children* (Picture 3), or *Three Baskibouvouk playing at Cards in a Coffee House at Smyrna*. Gyzis following the practice of the European painters transferred the atmosphere of the Orient into his studio in Munich where he had a collection of objects and costumes from Greece and the Orient and painted “like a German artist, in somber colors, indoors, closed in his studio, even though his soul, full of bright memories”. Gyzis, whose studies of the internal spaces is compared with Ingres’ quality,²⁴ revitalized also his iconographic and stylistic style and changed his perception of light and color, a change that is apparent too in the paintings of his friend Lytras who, after traveling to the East, displayed his ability to compose multiple-figure groups of exceptional live

23 Maria Katsanaki, “Images of the Orient in the Greek Painting of the 19th century”, in *National Gallery: 100 Years. Four Centuries of Greek Paintings*, Athens, (2000), 2nd ed. 2001, pp. 89-99.

24 See *Greek Painters* (in Greek), Melissa Publications, Athens, v. 1, pp. 109-110.

lines. Lytras painting entitled *The Fortune Teller* (Picture 4) gives the impression of spontaneity of approach that is an interaction of his working outdoors and reminds us of the Moroccan story-teller of Alfred Dehodencq whose realism and careful observation of costume and ethnic type as well as his fluent brushwork is evident in his work that serves as “a durable document”.²⁵ The most interesting thing in both Gyzis and Lytras paintings is their tendency to depict in some of their Oriental works the “Oriental other” as Greek subjects. That is apparent in one of Gyzis paintings in which he is showing his friend Lytras on his creative fervor, that is drawing with the tools of his art, surrounded by men, women and children who are watching him, a scene painted in 1875 entitled *The Painter in the Orient* (Picture 5) that reminds nevertheless a home in the Greek countryside with Greeks depicted in it rather than an Oriental environment,²⁶

The same interest in depicting the ethnic types, gestures and customs is found in the paintings of Pavlos Prosalentis the younger (Venice, 1857-Alexandria,(?)1894) and of Symeon Savvides (Tokati in Asia Minor,1859, Athens1927), artists that have been also attracted by the Orientalist movement fashionable at that time in Europe. Pavlos Prosalentis, grew up to an artistic milieu of the island of Corfu, and studied painting in the School of Arts in Athens having N. Lytras as a teacher; later he studied in Naples and Paris, before returning to Corfu, his native place. He also lived and worked in Egypt for a long time. His paintings are primarily portraits and his work, more influenced by his Italian schooling, is characterized by a formal realism. A number of oriental subjects depicted by him are kept in Cairo and a small number in his birthplace, Corfu.²⁷ Savvides on the other hand, an artist of German apprenticeship with a work of a superior quality, was born in Asia Minor (Tocat) in 1869, and had his artistic studies in Athens, at the Polytechnic School, the School of Arts, where he studied architecture, and in Munich where he went on a private scholarship. In Munich he studied under the Greek master Nicolaos Gyzis and the Germans Ludwig von Löfftz and

25 Cf. R. Benjamin (ed.), *Orientalism...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 118-119.

26 *Ibid.*

27 Cf. *Greek artists in Egypt, 1860-1920* (in Greek), EPMAS, Athens, 1983.

Wilhelm von Diez. He lived in Munich for 24 years while at an advanced age he returned to Athens and died there in 1929. In his artistic life he was fuelled by his travels round his birth place in Near East, from which he borrowed most of the themes for his compositions. He was particularly interested in the study of light and color and many of his oriental subjects offer just such a field of application of his research. Savvides was fascinated by the rich color and the luxury of the Orient. Inspired by a world that was familiar to him he produced a rich artistic work which is distinguished by its tenderness and expressionism. In his *Oriental Bazar* (1905), a work in which he applies his observations regarding light, he transformed the paintings' surface into a game of light and shadow, bright and dark tones, vivid and muted colours. The same style of expression and technique is also found in his *Lighting of the Pipe* (Picture 6). Savvides was a painter of academic genre scenes who painted mainly landscapes,²⁸ and in all his paintings shows the influence of the western 'plein-airists' and his interest in ethnic types and ethnographic scenes.²⁹

210

The influence of the French School is apparent in the works of many noteworthy Greek painters who having completed their training in the French studios returned to Greece, mostly during the years after 1850, and contributed to the development of Modern Greek art. Theodoros Rallis (Constantinople 1852-?1909)³⁰, is an interesting case of Greek Orientalism, influenced by the French academic style as he was a student in 1876 of Jean-Leon Gérôme (1824-1904), the major representative of late Orientalism in 19th century France. Rallis had absorbed his teachers' powerfully sensuous realism and masterly technique and by 1875 he had begun exhibiting in the various Parisian "Salons" and a few

28 Savvides presented his works at important exhibitions in Berlin, Leipzig, Hamburg, Vienna, Paris and London and wrote an essay on painting in German. His works are in the National Picture Gallery of Athens, the Coultides Collection, in art museums in Europe and in many private collections in Greece and abroad.

29 See *Greek Painters*, Melissa Publications, *op .cit.*, pp. 277-278. See also *National gallery*, *op. cit.*

30 His paintings may be found in the Museums of the Louvre, the Picture Gallery of Sydney, Australia, the National Picture Gallery of Athens, the Coultides Collection, and other private collections in England, Egypt and Greece.

years later in the annual exhibiting of the Royal Academy of Art, in London. Born in Constantinople, of a wealthy merchant family, he was initially educated in England, in preparation for a commercial career. Nevertheless, soon he went to Paris and settled permanently in the French capital, where he entered the École des Beaux Arts and became one of the leading figures in the world of art. In 1900 he was appointed a member of the Jury at the Paris International Exhibition, and soon he was made a member of the French Legion of Honour. He painted portraits, but mainly genre scenes and themes inspired from Greek daily life and religion. He proved to be – because of his scenes from life in the Moslem, Jewish and Orthodox Orient – perhaps the Greek orientalist painter *par excellence*.³¹ Rallis traveled to Middle East and his great love for this area is reflected in his works that are characterized by an “idealistic mysticism”. In his painting entitled *The Booty* (Picture 7), exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1906, Rallis is inspired by violent acts of the Turkish conquerors and depicts a Greek woman bound and immobilized inside an Orthodox Christian church, a place bathed in an atmosphere of mysticism. It is a painting based perhaps on his recollections of Delacroix’s *Scenes from the massacre at Chios* (1824) and shows his technical precision and visual perfection as well as his master’s documentary realism and at the same time the Greek recollections to the cruelties of the Ottoman conqueror.

Rallis was interested in depicting stereotyped themes in his oriental paintings such as the harem and the hammam, places which present the East as the place where Western erotic imagination found its home. Romantic visions of the hammam are expressed by J. L. D. Ingres in his *Turkish Baths* (Musée de Louvre, 1852) and by J.J. Gérôme in his *The bath* (le Brain, c. 1880-85). Rallis’ paintings such as a *Circasian Woman at the Bath* (1909), show his skill of depicting the nude body, “un élément nécessaire de success” according to Cézanne, as his master Jean-Leon Gérôme. The same influences are also found in his *Oriental Bath* (1880-1890), a painting expressing his memories or fantasies from public baths in the Orient, or Ingres’ fancies of the harem and bath. In the above mentioned picture Rallis represents the myth of the “alabaster” women that reminds us Jean-Leon

31 See *National Galley, op.cit.* See also A. Ioannou, *Greek painting..., op. cit.*, p. 243-244.

Gérôme's *Pygmalion and Galatea* (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Arts). In the *Circasian Woman at the Bath* mentioned above, Rallis shows his art to depict the female grace in nudity with the feeling for beauty in a stone interior lighted by light penetrating artfully through the openings in the domed ceiling.³² In the same way he depicts the nude in his *Oriental Bath* (1880-1890, Metsovo, Picture 8) where the unified colorful space incorporates the architectural elements of the interior with the fair skinned nude feminine bodies is an aesthetically pleasing surrounding. The Ottoman hammam, a place for the cleanliness of the body and for socializing and entertainment of women, attracted the fantasies not only of painters but also of writers as the Greek author Demetrius Kambouroglou (1852-1932) whose description in his *Memoirs of a long life* of a bath in Athens, located in Monastiraki, depicts baths as a place of mystery: "The atmosphere in this bath is surrounded by remarkable mystery. One thinks that a fairytale is being woven in which one could take part in"³³ The same mystery and excitement surrounds the harem and every experience that is connected with the Oriental dream or the mirage that evokes the Orient as depicted by westerners and Greek painters..

212

Depicting landscapes and everyday scenes from the Orient coincides with understanding distant cultures. In the aesthetic reflections of the late nineteenth century the art and civilization of the Near, Middle and Far East, mainly China and Japan, and to some extent India, are linked to a desire to understand early or exotic "high civilizations". In this way the encounter of nineteenth-century European art and scholarship with the exotic art and high civilizations shaped the perceptions or insights of creative artists who depicted the picturesqueness of figures and genre scenes as well as landscapes in a photographic manner as well as in an impressionistic style. The Greek artists make in particular in their paintings apparent their European influences and on the other hand express the sentiments of the persons depicted or the atmosphere imposed by the formal and plastic qualities of the landscape; at the same time tried to reconcile the naturalistic rendering of reality, the faithful depiction of the regional costumes

³² *Ibid.*

³³ See D. Kambouroglou, *Memoirs of a long life* (in Greek), Athens, 1930.

and of the simple decoration of peasant homes with the idyllic nature of the scenes. If the first Greek Orientalists would prefer the picturing of reality in a naturalistic or realistic manner, the painters of the second generation are characterized by indefinitiveness in the outlines of the figures and by the application of impressionistic techniques due to the influences imposed on them. Their paintings are characterized by ethnographic realism and their landscapes by views of the desert and its vegetation. Landscapes of Egypt as represented by the Greek Orientalists of the late period of Modern Greek painting, are of a special importance, since they make exotic elements of the surrounding space coincide with the sentiments of tranquillity and peacefulness reflected by the oriental scenery. Many of these landscape depictions incorporate the variety in color entailed by the strong daylight of the sun or the weak nightlight of the moon and show the influence of European art and Orientalist aesthetics. The traits of the landscape paintings described above become especially apparent in the paintings of such painters as Spyridon Scarvellis (Corfu,1868-Athens,1942), Pericles Tsirigotis (Corfu,1860-Cairo,1924), Konstantinos Parthenis (Alexandria, 1878-Athens, 1967), Thalia Flora-Karavia (Siatista,1870-Athens,1960), and Konstantinos Maleas (Constantinople, 1879-Athens, 1928); this new generation of painters introduced into Greece a revived Orientalism; as impressionism increasingly became the *lingua franca* of international modernist painting from the 1890s onwards impressionism and post-impressionism were incorporated in modern Greek paintings as well as Symbolism, Art Nouveau and Jugendstil. They Greek painters feature the modernist avant-garde Orientalism as expressed by Klee's highly abstracted landscapes or Matisse's Moroccan paintings of 1912-13; the latter restated selected iconographies prevalent in nineteenth century Orientalism, from Delacroix and Ingres to the Gérôme school.³⁴ The artists mentioned above belonged to a new generation and were westernized through their studies, mostly in Paris; they also had strong links with the East and inspirations from Constantinople, Egypt, especially Cairo and Alexandria, as we can see in Parthenis' *Landscape in Egypt* (Picture 9), Tsirigotis' *Sphinx in Cairo*

34 *Orientalism, Delacroix to Klee, op. cit.*, pp. 25ff.

(Picture 10) and Thalia Flora-Karavia's *Women carrying water in Nile*. Konstantinos Maleas, born and educated in Constantinople and in Paris, almost inclusively a landscapist (Picture 11), through his travels in the Orient, especially in Egypt, and under foreign modernist influences, formed his own style as he had adopted the new revolutionary experimentations and teachings of modern art, which can be found in the adoption of his formalistic composition or in the simplification of colour and his technique incorporated in his Egyptian landscapes.³⁵ For the above mentioned artists Turkey and Egypt were irresistible as images of the Islamic splendour of caliphate architecture or for depicting landscapes and 'everyday life' of Turkish or Egyptian citizens.

214

Generally speaking the painters of the Orient took care to transfer its atmosphere and its perfume to their European studios where they amassed of various objects from the countries they had visited which did not simply decorate the work space but were used, along with the drawings they had executed during their trips, in the composition of their paintings. Of course one might agree with Edward Said that oriental depictions constitute manifestations of European and Christian prejudice against the Arab-Islamic world and its culture or taste conception of the cultural other.³⁶ But one has to admit that in the works of the Greek Orientalists the Orient is not represented only as a picturesque or beautified image of a dream or of the imagination or even according to prejudices and misconceptions. In this sense, in some of the paintings of the Greek Orientalists, one can conceive the perceptions of the Orient of these painters and their attitude to express the very spirit of an Orient experienced which was, because of their roots and idiosyncrasy, familiar and valuable for pictorial representation. Looking at their pictures we realize that they can be enjoyable, exciting, moving or communicative. Some pictures are easily

35 For the relation of the Greek poet K. P. Kavafis (born in Alexandria 1863- 1933) with Greek painters such as Thalia Flora- Kavadia, who stayed and worked for many years in Alexandria, or Konstantinos Maleas, his reception of the visual figures of his age and environment, as well as his knowledge of the texts of Theophile Gautier or of the French Symbolism, see E. Andreadi (ed.), *K. P. Kavafis. His world and the visual figures of his age*, Ministry of Culture-Megaron, Athens, 2004 and *Greek artists in Egypt 1860-1920* (in Greek), Athens, 1983.

36 E. Said, *Orientalism*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1978.

appreciated at first glance, but others require some explanation before they can be fully understood. In particular, some of the landscapes of Egypt represented by the Greek painters of the twentieth century are discerned by their sentimentality.

Usually Orientalist Aesthetics approaches the visual culture of exoticism by ranging wide from decorative arts to colonial museums. Orientalist art was created by ‘armchairs Orientalists’, naturalists who spent years of living in the oases of the Sahara, Fauve and Cubist travelers who created decors of indigenous figures and tropical plants; in the period of high modernism it has given, besides Renoir’s Algerian oeuvre, the abstract vision of Matisse’s Morocco or Klee’s picturesque landscapes.³⁷

It is well known that a good painter knows how to compose his picture, has a subtle sense of color harmonies or a bold sense of tonal dissonance; his work can give satisfaction, please and enlarge our understanding of a theme, enrich our perceptions of form, or can open up to us a whole new world of feeling and seeing. That applies to all Orientalists. In the case of the Greek Orientalists one can say that their depictions and what they represent were naturally contoured to the things they depict and showed their mastery, as in their works, although inspired by the European trends of art, they have given a rich body of work connected with their perceptions of an “Orient connu” that was familiar and significant to them. In their paintings we can see ways of perceiving the Orient as well as their reflections on art, and their willingness to adopt the Goncourts’ definition of art: “To see, to feel, to express, this is the whole of art”.³⁸ Their pictures incorporate this dictum as well as aestheticism and beauty, connect art with history and culture, and indicate their ability to adopt the taste of their age and at the same time their own creativity.

37 For a history of Orientalist art, see in Roger Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics. Art, Colonialism and French North Africa 1880-1930*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, 2003. See also Roger Benjamin, *The Decorative Landscape. Fauvism and the Arabesque of Observation* (1993).

38 Cf. Edmond and Jules Goncourt, *Journal des Goncourt. Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, II, Monaco, 1956, p. 251.

With the oriental perceptions of the modern Greek painters I mentioned above we have a cultural paradigm reflecting memories connected with their past and present. Besides, we experience an accepted cultural orientation connected with the European Orientalism, classical, modernistic and avant-gardistic. In the last few years the profound impact of the crisis in all levels of contemporary Greek life had generated a new interest for the Eastern world and cultures. A paradigm of the representation of the East through non-European eyes is the Turkish TV series of Suleiman the Magnificent that make possible to wide audiences to experience the life, the arts, the customs and the culture of a distanced age in an representational way that depicts in an authentic way the life and art of the 16th century Turkish life. As in the Orientalistic paintings so in contemporary movies, presented and directed not by westerners but by easterners, there is a tendency to depict actual, historical and imaginary facts in an naturalistic way and create characters who pass through borders of time, history, geography and politics.