the following annotations: “The patriarch fallen on his knees, dying [an allusion to the execution of the patriarch of the Eastern Church, Gregory V, on Easter Day 1821, which had revolted Western opinion]—A workman soldier covered with sheepskin—Vultures and scavenging dogs—Flaming debris pushed to the shore.” A veritable sorting of ideas seems to have taken place. In the end Delacroix arrived at his definitive composition, vibrating with contained intensity, in which Greece—a young woman in national costume—presents herself, palms out, chest half bared. In the middle distance, at the right, is a Turkish soldier posing triumphantly. The arm of a corpse buried under the rubble in the foreground evokes the struggle that has just ended, as does the blood still running on the stone at bottom center. There is nothing overdone or declamatory; one finds only the calm grandeur appropriate to allegory, the expressiveness coming as much from the treatment of color and the management of the brush as from the subject. The tones are somber, the range voluntarily muted, as in the costume of the Turk. The rare bright tints make the central figure of Greece stand out with her white cap heightened with rose, her white robe, the white lining of her cloak, and the blue-gray of her trousers. Delacroix avoided the tendency of a palette composed of somber colors by heightening it with more lively, still restrained tones: the orange of the Turkish soldier’s turban and belt, the red in the foreground on the dead man’s sleeve and on Greece’s slippers, and the gold embroidery of her cloak. The variations in handling reinforce the sublety of the color, as they did in the Massacres of Chios. One need only study the astonishing spot of blood on the stone to grasp Delacroix’s talent in the almost impressionistic rendering of matter and to understand why this realism could be shocking.

**Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi** aroused a certain interest when it was shown at the Galerie Lebrun in 1826, at the exhibition held to benefit the Greek insurgents. But it was, it seems, a mostly negative reaction. One of the rare critics to have expressed himself on the painting was Boutard, who wrote in the Journal des Débats, “Talent is evident, struggling in a singular manner with the systematic vagaries and disordered technique of the artist, as one sees gleams of reason, sometimes even strokes of genius, showing through the deplorable discourse of insanity.” Hugo showed himself much more positive without, however, completely understanding the artist’s intent. In his review he limits himself to a very general interpretation: “M. Delacroix has just delivered to their [the critics'] ill humor and to the heightened attention of an enlightened public a new canvas in which one again finds to a great degree all the qualities of this young and already great colorist. It is Greece on the ruins of Missolonghi. We do not like allegories; but this one is profoundly interesting. This woman, who is Greece, is so beautiful in attitude and expression! This triumphant Egyptian, these severed heads, these stones stained with blood, all of it has something so pathetic! And then there is such knowledge and art in M. Delacroix's daring! His brush is so broad, so proud, and especially so true!” The painting was misunderstood until its purchase by the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Bordeaux in 1851; although it was exhibited many times between 1826 and 1830 (for example, in England in 1828, but never in the Salon), it did not find a buyer. In Delacroix’s mind, it was no doubt intended for a public collection, as were The Barque of Dante, Massacres of Chios, and The Death of Sardanapalus. But no connoisseur was found who could be seduced by this moving figure of a woman that, in its realism, renewed and modernized the already disused genre of allegory. It is not certain that this figure is fully appreciated in just measure today.

**Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi** is also an essential step toward The 28 July. To use the exact title that Delacroix gave the painting, Liberty Leading the People (fig. 96) was no doubt his most famous and popular work. There is yet again a certain ambiguity concerning the intentions of the painter in treating this subject, a question posed here with much greater acuity than in the rest of his work. One can make infinite glosses and propose literary or philosophical analyses without much risk of being proved wrong. One can find in one picture or another the expression of Delacroix’s love of women, or his attraction to death, or his flight into the past or into a more-or-less inaccessible elsewhere, in a word, the expression of his rich sensibility. In the case of Liberty Leading the People, the question is reduced to fundamentals: the canvas is obviously symbolic and clearly charged with meaning; how then does it reflect the political opinions of Delacroix? He painted it at exactly the time of the Three Glorious Days, between October and December 1830,” and the title he gave the work invites us to place it in precise historical context, or at least to identify its beginnings.

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From J. Barbeyrac
Delacroix
Two sources inform us about the painter’s reaction to these events. The memoirs of Alexandre Dumas, to be used cautiously as always, have often been cited: “When I saw Delacroix near the Pont d’Arcole on 27 July, he pointed out a few of these men that one only sees in times of revolution, who were sharpening their weapons on the pavement, one had a saber, the other a foil. Delacroix was terribly afraid, I tell you, and showed his fear in most energetic fashion. But when Delacroix saw the tricolor flag floating above Notre Dame, when he recognized—he, a fanatic of the Empire, whose father was prefect under the Empire of the two most important cities of France, whose brother, having been promoted to general, was wounded on five or six battlefields, whose second brother had been killed at Friedland—when he recognized, we have said—he, the fanatic of the Empire—the standard of the Empire, ah! ma foi, he did not restrain himself! Enthusiasm replaced fear, and he glorified the people, who at first had frightened him.” Delacroix’s correspondence fills in Dumas’s description without contradicting it: “What do you think of these events?” he wrote on 17 August 1830 to his nephew Charles de Verninac at his post in Malta. “Isn’t it the century of unbelievable things: we who have seen it cannot believe it. . . . For three days we have been in the middle of shooting and gunshots, for there is fighting everywhere. The simple pedestrian like me has exactly as much chance of being shot, neither more nor less, as these improvised heroes who march against the enemy with bits of iron attached to a broomstick handle. Up to now things are going the best way possible. Everybody who has any sense hopes that the promoters of the republic will agree to stand at ease.” And to his brother Charles, a little later, in October, he writes: “The spleen is going away, thanks to work. I have undertaken a modern subject, A Barricade . . . and if I have not fought for the country, at least I will paint for her. This has put me in a good mood.” Pierre Gaudibert, in an article published on the occasion of the centenary exhibitions in 1963, has shown how, in 1830, it was possible to confuse Republicanism and Bonapartism, a confusion that was no longer possible after 1848, the moment when Delacroix’s opinions became more firmly “rightist.” Probably frightened by the beginnings of the uprising, he was then convinced by the turn of events and the accession of Louis-Philippe. The stabilization of the situation, the consolidation of a constitutional monarchy reintegrating the acquisitions of the Revolution and especially of the Empire, were satisfactory in every way. After the fact, Delacroix favored the July Revolution. Probably he neither expected it nor hoped for it, as critical as he had been of the Bourbons in his caricatures, which go back, it is true, to 1818–20. His friendships were liberal, but he had no complaints regarding the regime, which had bought his major paintings and had just commissioned others. Liberty Leading the People retrospectively explains his sentiments, while reconstructing the momentum that was then shared by many. As Dumas’s lively passage indicates, the painting “has a great quality: it lives the life of 1830, it breathes an atmosphere charged with saltpeter, it teems under the July sun. . . . These are real paving stones, real boys, real men of the people, real blood; and the soldiers, how well they are killed! look at the cavalryman in the corner. . . . That Liberty is not at all the classic Liberty; it is a young woman of the people, one of those who fight not to be tutoyé, outraged, violated by the great lords.”

What Delacroix painted is first of all a scene of riot, in the most realist manner. It does not, however, occur in an exactly identifiable context, as Charles Lenormant understood: “Is it not a real tour de force to have painted at a distance of five months a Barricade that is true, beautiful, and poetic all at once? Delacroix seems to me to have perfectly understood the matter from a perspective as short as our own; he has not tried to paint the barricade at a particular crossing, which would provoke someone to demand an account of the paving stones or a forgotten bullet. An open scene, a cloud of smoke through which the towers of Notre Dame, in the distance, designate very generally the city where the great Revolution has taken place, dispensing with all topographical explanation; the actors on the scene are the same ones that one saw everywhere and that one does not recall having precisely met anywhere.” The characteristic clothing of the different personages immediately identifies them as belonging to a certain type of rioter. Thus, in the three men at the left, there are three precise categories of worker: the factory worker (the man with the saber); the artisan, foreman, or chief of a workshop, higher up in the social hierarchy (the man with the gun, often considered a bourgeois or a student); and the worker from the country, probably employed in the building trade (the man kneeling at Liberty’s feet). In the background, one recognizes the cocked hat of a polytechnicien, whose school distinguished itself in the
uprising. The two dead soldiers at right, a Swiss guard and a cavalryman, belong to regiments of the royal guard that had fought the insurrection. The bits of uniform and the weapons (including the one recovered by the revolutionaries) are perfectly identifiable and are painted with the greatest exactitude. As for the setting, particularly Notre Dame (of which the silhouette is easily recognizable and from which waves the tricolor), the angle of vision that Delacroix adopted—with the cathedral seen from the left bank and hidden by houses on the quay—was completely impossible at the time. He has rearranged the setting to suit his convenience without losing the necessary verisimilitude.

_Liberty Leading the People_ is a realist painting, including even those figures who are the most emblematic, Liberty herself and the urchin who accompanies her. He is often identified with Gavroche, but in fact the character was born more than twenty years after the painting was done. Delacroix created an archetypical image to which Hugo would give a literary equivalent in _Les Misérables_. As for Liberty, she is first of all, to use Lenormant’s terms again, “a young, strong, brilliant woman, dressed like one of the people, but shining with an unknown light, odd, however, in the nudity of her shoulders, the bonnet on her head, the standard that moves in her hand. This woman, whom many people would think for a moment is one of their acquaintances, so much is she of our time and place—this woman is none other than the Liberty of the people. No doubt someone will complain about the appearance of this allegory; as for me, I found it so living, so true, so tied to the subject it poetically subsumes that I could not help deciding in favor of M. Delacroix.” The artist may have been inspired by more precise sources: a poem by Auguste Barbier celebrating Liberty as “a strong woman with powerful breasts” or the memory of an episode of the July days known through an anonymous handbill describing a young laundress in her apron, who, finding her brother dead, fires on the Swiss guard before being killed herself by a lancer. Delacroix may also have been thinking of a painting by Le Barbier, _Jeanne Hachette at the Siege of Beauvais_, done in 1778 (lost at Beauvais in 1940). Various antique models (Lee Johnson suggests the _Venus de Milo_ and modern ones (in particular Raphael) are equally possible. All of these fade before a new and original creation in which the real and the ideal are indissolubly united. The head seen in profile, as on a medallion, the bared torso, the red bonnet (brighter before Delacroix progressively muted it), the determined and deliberate gesture, the tricolor flag—they transform the woman of the people into the figure of Liberty. The composition of the canvas also accentuates her symbolic character. She stands out as the summit of a pyramidal structure solidly resting on the cadavers in the foreground, souvenirs of Gros and David (the half-nude man at left recalls the traditional academic figure called “Hector” in the ateliers, somewhat subverted by the stocking that he is still wearing). Her relatively static position is not incompatible with the diagonal movement, which makes the entire work more dynamic. The warm tonality of the whole also emphasizes the figure of Liberty, who stands against a background of clouds, subtly recalling the three colors of the flag, the single vivid note of the canvas.

The painting was understood in various ways when it was shown at the Salon of 1831. The realistic representation of the rabble (Heinrich Heine even spoke of “heads from the Court of Assizes”) shocked most of the critics, although political opinion was not a determining influence: leftist or rightist tendencies were less important than aesthetic presuppositions. The figure of Liberty was called working class, a fishwife, a whore. Some critics did recognize Delacroix’s daring in reworking and renewing the traditional iconography. Thoré, revisiting the painting in 1837, praised it for having modernized sacred pictorial conventions and for adapting them to modern times: for him, _Liberty Leading the People_ “is both history and allegory. Is this a young woman of the people? Is it the spirit of liberty? It is both; it is, if you will, liberty incarnate in a young woman. True allegory should have this quality, of being at the same time a living type and a symbol, as opposed to the old pagan allegories that are no longer anything but dead forms. We cannot adopt these banal mythological allegories, which no longer represent the idea for which they were created. The Greek Minerva is no longer the modern myth of wisdom. It seems to us that the things of contemporary civilization, like those of ancient civilization, can best be personified in living and original forms. . . . Here again, M. Delacroix is the first to employ a new allegorical language.”

The canvas, which won the cross of the Legion of Honor for the painter, was bought at the Salon by the Minister of the Interior and immediately placed in the Palais du Luxembourg.
But its fate during the whole of the nineteenth century reveals the scandalous and subversive charge that it seemed to raise against conservative governments. The painting was taken down from the wall in 1832, when the Republican opposition was becoming increasingly violent and when the July Monarchy was turning in less and less liberal direction. Finally it was returned to Delacroix himself, no doubt in 1839, when his friend Cavé was Director of Fine Arts. The work was requested of him again after the revolution of 1848. Thore suggested at that time that the painter make a companion piece, Equality on the February Barricades, and that the two be hung together in the Palais-Bourbon. The matter was settled by reinstating the painting once considered dangerous at the Luxembourg, where it remained until its disappearance into storage in 1850, when the director of the national museums, Jeanron, was replaced by a protégé of the Prince-President, Nieuwerkerke. Delacroix wanted Liberty Leading the People to be included in the Exposition Universelle of 1855 in the retrospective that was dedicated to him. He addressed a request to Prince Napoleon, who was in charge of the artistic section, and justified himself in these terms: “This work, which represents a fact of history, did not seem to the former government proper to be shown to a generation that is far from having repudiated the consequences of that event. It has seemed to me that under a powerful government, itself born of a great national manifestation, this painting could be removed from oblivion.” Nieuwerkerke was of a completely different opinion: “I hope you have been kind enough to transmit to His Royal Highness the important reasons that, from my point of view, argue against the exhibition of a painting representing liberty in a red bonnet at the top of a barricade and French soldiers trampled under the feet of the riot [he had first written, ‘the populace’].” The canvas was finally presented to the Exposition after a decision made by Napoleon III himself, according to Dumas. But it was not reinstated at the Luxembourg until 1861, then it was moved to the Louvre in 1874. The political meaning of Liberty Leading the People was evident to contemporaries and to the painter himself. It was reinforced in a way by the iconographical slippage of the figure of the Republic, with which Liberty was finally confused. Thus the extraordinary fate of this painting is explained, unique for Delacroix and probably for all of French painting. Its exceptional popularity was symbolized by its use on the hundred-franc bill in 1979, and on a postage stamp in 1982. But even then, some were offended by Liberty’s bare breasts.

Delacroix thus saw his work escape him, taking on a deeper meaning than he had probably thought of. But one ought not to neglect what the painting meant from a strictly stylistic point of view. Liberty Leading the People stands out not only for its theme, but also for its return to Classicism, not only in its use of allegory but also in its composition. The paintings that Delacroix sent to the Salon of 1831 included some that were clearly more romantic: Cromwell at Windsor Castle, Cardinal Richelieu Saying Mass in the Chapel of the Palais-Royal, and especially Tam o’ Shanter and The Murder of the Bishop of Liége. With Liberty, however, one senses the affirmation of a less fiery vein, one that is more reflective, almost more sensible. This is confirmed in two history paintings that occupied Delacroix at the beginning of 1831: Mirabeau Confronts the Marquis de Dreux-Brézé and Boissy d’Anglas at the National Convention. In September 1830, Guizot, now Minister of the Interior, had announced a competition for the decoration of the meeting room at the Chambre des Députés. At the center of the wall behind the presidential rostrum there was to be The Royal Session of 9 August 1830, where the King Louis-Philippe i accepts the Constitutional Charter. At the left, another painting was to show The Session of the Constituent Assembly of 23 June 1789, when Mirabeau replies to the master of ceremonies (the marquis of Dreux-Brézé) who urges the assembly to dissolve: “Go tell your master that we are here by the order of the people, and that we will leave only under the power of bayonets.” At right, a pendant was to show Boissy d’Anglas, President of the National Convention, saluting the head of the Deputy Féraud that the rebels of 1 Prairial, year IV, present to him as a menace. Guizot had chosen the subjects himself, selecting them “exclusively from our legislative history during the French Revolution. The deputies, and the country that is anxious to hear them, need to see examples of motifs that connect them to constitutional institutions.” Hence, the choice of the vow taken by Louis-Philippe, a dignified close to “the series of events to which we owe our political guarantees,” and of the two other scenes, which represent the two principal duties of the deputies: “the resistance to despotism and the resistance to sedition.” For the first time in his career (and it was to be the only one), Delacroix was confronted with a rigorous iconographic program.