

Introduction: Under the Flag of Insurgency: The Greek Revolution in International and Imperial History

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From their beginnings, the revolutionary events that shook the Greek lands of the Ottoman Empire in the 1820s were neither contained nor constrained by national or imperial borders. What Ottoman contemporaries termed the ‘Greek mischief’ (*fesad*) and later historiography would call the Greek war of independence, became a protracted inter-imperial crisis as soon as it commenced.¹ The present bicentennial of the Greek Revolution makes it all the more relevant to reassess and rethink this history from more than just a national perspective. Of course, a sizeable literature on the border-crossing dynamics of these events already exists. Historians have long debated the transnational appeal of the Greek cause. They have thoroughly unpacked the international involvement in the war of independence, whether it be with an emphasis on diplomatic or military events.² The Greek revolutionaries, for their part, drew on crucial support networks that spanned the world and

1. For the terminological discussions, see O. Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts. Imperialism, Security, and Civil Wars in the Levant, 1798–1864*, Oxford 2021, 116–117.
2. Most recently, M. Mazower, *The Greek Revolution. 1821 and the Making of Modern Europe*, New York 2021; P. Kitromilides / C. Tsoukalas (eds.), *The Greek Revolution. A Critical Dictionary*, Cambridge, MA 2021. To name but a small selection of other works: L. Frary, *Russia and the Making of Modern Greek Identity, 1821–1844*, Oxford 2015; I. Coghill Nichols, *The European Pentarchy and the Congress of Verona, 1822*, The Hague 1972; V. Puryear, *France and the Levant. From the Bourbon Restoration to the Peace of Kutiah*, Berkeley, Los Angeles 1941; P. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848*, Oxford 1994.

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explicitly situated their struggle in a pan-European political setting. Maurizio Isabella, Konstantina Zanou and the late Richard Stites have shown this in excellent recent works.³

Border-crossing cooperation was not limited to the revolutionaries or the elite circles of high diplomacy. Contemporary imperial actors (whether they were Ottoman, Prussian, French, Russian, Austrian or British) also reacted to the upheaval of the 1820s and tried to manage it collectively. Historians have not probed the depths of this empire-crossing aspect of the Greek revolutionary struggle with the same vigour as the traditional themes of ideology, mobilization and diplomacy. Therefore, this special issue situates the Greek Revolution in its inter-imperial context and provides new insight into the upheaval as a shared crisis of empires.

Scholars have mainly discussed the international dynamics of the Greek Revolution in terms of liberal nationalism and nascent humanitarianism.⁴ This emphasis has failed to explore the importance of the insurgency as an inter-imperial security concern rather than an event that was limited to the Greeks or Ottomans. The articles gathered here touch upon overlooked topics, such as the following: international and maritime law, imperial cooperation and competition, intra-imperial rivalries, anti-revolutionary policing, colonial administration and the international slave trade. Weighty historiographical frames emphasizing national 'reawakening' or the 'onset of modernity', which sometimes border on the anachronistic, have obscured these themes that were of immediate concern to contemporaries—and which shaped events in the 1820s to a significant degree.⁵ Even before its beginning in 1821, the 'Greek Question' provoked geopolitical concerns in Europe's imperial capitals over the expansionism of rivals. Public outrage and revolutionary sympathy from philhellenes spread as far away as the Americas.⁶ Yet, in the most direct manner, the uprising caused grave security concerns to humble sailors, colonial officials and low-ranking diplomats. The present issue analyses these immediate concerns to situate the Greek Revolution in a new, inter-imperial framework. As such, it shows that the revolution was: (1) a concern of multiple empires, (2) a cause for imperial cooperation, and (3) a driver of innovations in colonial rule and international law.

The Greek Revolution as an inter-imperial problem

Historiographically, the Greek Revolution has been increasingly embedded in an international setting. Glenda Sluga, for instance, begins her narrative on the plight of the Ottoman Greeks and the question of international responsibility for them with the Congress of Verona in 1822. She situates the Greek question at the crossroads of imperial interests and liberal, societal campaigns for a 'humanitarian intervention'—particularly in Britain, France and Switzerland. She points to the fact that 'the Greek Question marked a growing equivalence between Christian and humanitarian causes' as well as a new tendency to define the remit of the European society of states along the lines of 'humanity' and 'civilization'. This meant that the Ottoman Empire was pushed and kept

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3. M. Isabella / K. Zanou (eds.), *Mediterranean Diasporas. Politics and Ideas in the Long 19th Century*, New York 2016; R. Stites, *The Four Horsemen. Riding to Liberty in Post-Napoleonic Europe*, Oxford 2014; K. Zanou, *Transnational Patriotism in the Mediterranean, 1800–1850. Stammering the Nation*, Oxford 2018.
 4. P. Kitromilides, 'The Greek Revolution and the Age of Revolution', in: idem (ed.), *The Greek Revolution in the Age of Revolutions (1776–1848). Reappraisals and Comparisons*, New York 2021, 32–42; F. Klose, "In the Cause of Humanity". *Eine Geschichte der humanitären Intervention im langen 19. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2019; D. Rodogno, *Against Massacre. Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815–1914*, Princeton 2011.
 5. P. Lekas, 'The Greek War of Independence from the Perspective of Historical Sociology', in: *The Historical Review* II (2005), 161–183.
 6. M. Connors Santelli, *The Greek Fire. American-Ottoman Relations and Democratic Fervor in the Age of Revolutions*, Ithaca, NY 2020; D. Dakin, *British and American Philhellenes during the Greek War of Independence, 1821–1833*, Thessaloniki 1955.

outside that remit, whereas Russia struggled to redefine itself in its support for a rebel cause. In Sluga's account, the Greek Revolution marked the transformation of the international system towards a new, inter-imperial order.⁷

Various other historians share this emphasis on the revolution's transformative, international impact. Holly Case argues that the so-called 'Greek Question' helped to trigger the emergence of a European public sphere, in which debates on international problems were framed as questions demanding solutions.⁸ Jennifer Mitzen similarly explained how, by framing the Greek Revolution as a shared problem for the European empires, the continent's Great Powers kept their own competition in check. It took them some years to find consensus, but concerted Great Power diplomacy kept sporadic military outbursts limited (e.g. the Russo-Turkish war of 1828–1829). The tried-and-tested consultation mechanisms of ambassadorial and ministerial conferences ultimately reigned in their diverging imperial interests.⁹

Anxieties over collective security, continental peace and even bare human life ensured that the Greek Revolution stayed on the international agenda throughout the 1820s. Although much has been written about the importance of humanitarian sentiments, this should not be the sole explanatory factor behind imperial diplomacy. Indeed, Roderick Beaton stresses that we need to forego the inclination to depict the Greek struggle for independence as a romantic echo of 19th-century philhellenism. In his view, the struggle was, 'quite simply, a bloodbath', involving a 'frenzy of terror, mutual hatred and bloodletting' that persisted because the Greek nation could only emerge with the help of cooperating European empires and inter-imperial interventions.¹⁰

Other ideas, sentiments and narratives shaped the international history of the Greek Revolution rather than revolutionary sympathies alone. In their recent publications, Glenda Sluga and Mark Mazower stress the importance of conservative pundits (such as Chateaubriand) and diplomats (such as Dorothea Lieven), who reframed the need to defend the Greeks 'on the grounds not of revolutionary politics, but of Christian solidarity'. This framing broke the 'stronghold of the Holy Alliance' that initially blocked the unified support of the Great Powers for the Greek struggle. That, together with British Benthamite mobilization of capitalist and financial support for the Greeks, reshaped 'fundamental principles that would guide the international relations of Europe and the world'.¹¹

In fact, the recent historiography showcases how truly pivotal inter-imperial interference in the Greek Revolution was. In this special issue, we proceed from that basis to better grasp the workings, and impact, of this inter-imperial interference. What exactly triggered Great Power involvement? How did inter-imperial entanglements play out on the ground? And how can we connect the micro-history of the Greek struggle to the broader inter-imperial context? The Ionian Islands, then under British imperial dominion, offer one example where these questions came to the fore as the revolution progressed. Aggelis Zarokostas argues in his contribution that local reactions to the events cannot be separated from empire-spanning modes of governance. As such, the handling of the revolution in the Ionian Isles became linked to 'the aims and attitudes of the regimes of the new conservatism in Great Britain'.¹² Imperial entanglements such as these form the core of this special issue.

7. G. Sluga, *The Invention of International Order. Remaking Europe after Napoleon*, Princeton 2021, 228–233.

8. H. Case, *The Age of Questions. Or, a first attempt at an aggregate history of the Eastern, social, woman, American, Jewish, Polish, bullion, tuberculosis, and many other questions over the nineteenth century, and beyond*, Princeton 2018.

9. J. Mitzen, *Power in Concert. The Nineteenth-century Origins of Global Governance*, Chicago 2013, 142–176. For the importance and emergence of ministerial and ambassadorial conferences, see B. de Graaf, *Fighting Terror after Napoleon. How Europe Became Secure after 1815*, Cambridge 2020.

10. R. Beaton, *Greece: Biography of a Modern Nation*, Chicago 2019, 74, 77.

11. Mazower, *The Greek Revolution*, 249–250, 326–327. See also Sluga, *The Invention of International Order*, 230–247.

12. C. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian. The British Empire and the World, 1780–1830*, London, New York 1989, 194–195.

Overlooked forms of imperial cooperation

Our first argument on the Greek Revolution as an inter-imperial concern leads into our second postulation: that imperial *cooperation* was as crucial to the revolution as it is overlooked. Mark Mazower briefly indicates this in his latest monograph as well. According to him, the Great Powers wanted to retain the ‘tranquillity of Europe’ that they understood to be a shared responsibility. Although this aim sounds lofty, ‘[i]t meant above all using European naval power to re-establish the security of international commerce by stamping out piracy’.¹³ Mazower only touches upon this matter in passing, but the naval commanders in the Aegean quickly realized that they alone could not ensure security against piracy. Early in the revolution, Europeans and (and sometimes Ottomans) found ways to protect their imperial interests from the ravages of the conflict together. Subsequent interventionist mandates, such as the London Treaty and its merger of British, French and Russian naval forces, were built on this ad-hoc basis of cooperation at sea. Approaching the Greek Revolution as an inter-imperial concern brings these previously overlooked forms of cooperation to light. This approach not only broadens our understanding of imperial involvement beyond the circles of high diplomacy, as Erik de Lange shows in his article; it also shows the crucial role of understudied actors.¹⁴

Building on this, the contributions collected here take into account Ottoman perspectives. The history of the Great Power interventions following the London Treaty of 1827 have been well-documented in all their political, diplomatic and cultural aspects.¹⁵ Yet, throughout this revolutionary episode, the Ottoman positionality in the European handling of the Eastern Question has received less detailed attention.¹⁶ The studies that investigate the Ottoman world during the revolution have trained their eyes on the immediate reception of the ‘mischief’. They have traced the imperial policies and vocabularies employed, but they did not analyse how the Sublime Porte charted its diplomatic path in a newly emerging inter-imperial order. In his article, Ozan Ozavci asks why Sultan Mahmud II and the Ottoman ministers remained unable to quell the ‘insurgency’ and fend off Great Power intervention diplomatically. To this end, Ozavci departs from the focus on the European powers and redirects our attention to the rivalries among the pashas of the sultan that shaped the Ottoman war effort and diplomacy.

Our special issue thus extends the scope of actors, activities and localities that historians traditionally associate with the Greek Revolution. A last party that has often been overlooked in much work on the 1820s are the philhellenic movements in other European countries than Britain, France or Russia—particularly in a larger, imperial setting.¹⁷ Christopher Mapes’ article demonstrates how German philhellenes played a distinctive role in tying the revolution to older ideas of white, Christian slavery. The results were wide-ranging, as German sympathy for the Greeks simultaneously deflected Central European abolitionist attention away from the deadly practice of New World slavery. Mapes’ contribution shows how events in Greece thus reverberated across many topics and places of imperial importance. As such, our inter-imperial focus also

13. Mazower, *The Greek Revolution*, 428.

14. The study of the international involvement in the Greek Revolution is still heavily focused on traditional diplomatic actors. For instance, I. Stefanidis, ‘Diplomats and Diplomacy’, in: *The Greek Revolution. A Critical Dictionary*, 364–384.

15. Particularly, W. Smiley, ‘War without War. The Battle of Navarino, the Ottoman Empire, and the Pacific Blockade’, in: *Journal of the History of International Law* 18 (2016), 42–69.

16. One recent and notable exception, S. Ilıcak, ‘Ottoman Context’, in: *The Greek Revolution. A Critical Dictionary*, 58–78.

17. For a recent discussion, see M. Vöhler / S. Alekou / M. Pechlivanos (eds.), *Concepts and Functions of Philhellenism. Aspects of a Transcultural Movement*, Berlin 2021.

entails linking the Greek Uprising to other issues that shaped relations between imperial entities—whether they be the abolition of the slave trade or the regulation of maritime warfare.

Imperial innovations and afterlives

What happened in Greece was not beholden to Greece. The modes of international cooperation, security practices and interventionist measures that the Great Powers developed in reaction to the revolution had a long-lasting legacy. Inter-imperial efforts to foster security at sea, for instance, precipitated changes that reshaped the 19th-century Mediterranean region. Concerted military interventions, based on European naval pre-eminence, became more common in the wake of the 1820s—particularly along the coasts of North Africa.¹⁸ Mazower sees the anti-piracy campaigns of the Greek Revolution as ‘an early example of the new internationalism of the Restoration decades’.¹⁹ The new internationalism first centred on the three allies of Great Britain, France and Russia, but would eventually involve more countries as the 19th century progressed.

This argument also applies to the afterlife of innovations in the colonial administration. Colonial measures on the Ionian Isles were instrumental in the British process of local state-building, as Sakis Gekas states in his *Xenocracy*.²⁰ Zarokostas builds on this insight when he shows that the ‘state of emergency’ during the Greek Revolution was aimed to become part of a new constitutional system in the isles. British officials integrated public hangings, for example, into the first criminal code of the protectorate in 1823.

The inter-imperial interventions in the Greek Revolution also left deep tracks throughout the Ottoman Empire. It started a legacy of insurrectionism and secessionism, as numerous independence struggles followed after Greece. Some of these resulted in partitions or autonomous regions, others in the emergence of foreign-mediated administrative bodies that were staked onto Ottoman territory. Perhaps even more disruptive were the unleashed ambitions of local Ottoman powerbrokers, who remained subordinate to the Sultan only in name. Mehmed Ali of Egypt began an independence campaign with the successes of the Greeks in mind. His efforts precipitated a new history of Great Power interventions in the eastern Mediterranean coasts. Ozavci’s contribution here rightfully reminds us that the revolution brought a string of successive eruptions and echoes, which had the potential to shake and shatter empires.

Issue outline

This special issue brings to light the inter-imperial aspects of the Greek Revolution by pointing to overlooked actors, innovative measures and far-flung localities.²¹ It aims to place the events of the 1820s in their broader Ottoman, Mediterranean and European settings through a series of case studies. These case studies show how the insurgency in Greece presented problems and opportunities to different imperial actors, including feuding Ottoman elites (Ozan Ozavci), British administrators in the Ionian Isles (Aggelis Zarokostas), German police authorities (Christos Aliprantis), Central European abolitionists (Christopher Mapes) and Great Power navies (Erik de Lange).

18. C. Zwierlein, ‘Mediterranean Transformations. From the Security of Mercantilist Trading Empires to a Modern Security Regime’, in: *Pedralbes* 40 (2020), 323–366.

19. Mazower, *The Greek Revolution*, 429.

20. S. Gekas, *Xenocracy. State, Class and Colonialism in the Ionian Islands, 1815–1864*, New York, Oxford 2017, 51–78.

21. The editors would like to thank the organizers of the Consortium of the Revolutionary Era’s 2021 online conference for hosting the panel where this special issue originated, as well as the journal editors and anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions.

The articles gathered here bring inter-imperial connections to light and uncover the revolution's overlooked border-crossing reverberations.

First off, Erik de Lange's article looks at the early years of the Greek Revolution, namely from 1821 to 1826, and clarifies how different imperial powers tried to manage the chaos and threats that the struggle brought to Mediterranean waters. It draws from source material on the navies of Great Britain, France, Austria and the Ottoman Empire. His argument provides three insights into the significance and contingencies of imperial involvement in the first phase of the revolution. As contemporaries sought to navigate the confusing situation that the revolution created, rife with privateers and pirates, they confronted questions of recognition and interventionism. This brought them to uncharted waters of inter-imperial importance.

Christopher Mapes, in turn, shows how Greek insurrectionists against the Ottoman Empire breathed new life into older ideas about Christians enslaved in Islamic portions of Europe and Africa. Greek independence gave Germans a *bête noir* closer to Europe than slavery in the Americas. Much of this interest owes to an enduring German philhellenic tradition, although it has been seldom analysed. Mapes' contribution uses archival documents to shed more light on how Central Europeans' interest and participation in the Greek War of Independence helped to revive old ideas about Christian enslavement at a time when New World slavery became the central concern of a broader European humanitarian protest against servitude.

Subsequently, Ozan Ozavci's piece departs from the premise that the Greek crisis of the 1820s needs to be considered not only in relation to its international origins, violent theatres of combat, and immediate political implications. It is also essential to foreground the biographical experiences of historical actors, their agendas, fears, expectations and resentments. His article points to the impact of an old interpersonal rivalry on the Ottoman responses to, and the political repercussions of, the Greek crisis. In addition, he situates the Ottoman conduct of the Greek Revolution squarely within the local understanding of the new international order that was taking shape in the post-1815 world.

Aggelis Zarokostas then zooms in on the colonial 'despots' on the sites of revolution. British authorities put the Ionian Islands in a state of emergency when the general uprising broke out in the Greek mainland. Strict Ionian neutrality was declared and harsh measures were put in place by officials. These aimed to maintain 'public tranquillity' and cut off the islanders from any revolutionary ideas coming from the mainland. His article shows that the islands were deeply affected by developments on the mainland. Instead of discouraging the ties between the islanders and the Greek Revolution, the British imperial reaction produced the opposite result and gradually put calls for Enosis (Union with Greece) firmly on the agenda of Ionian politics. British officials went on to utilize disproportionate fears over the spread of revolutionary ideas in the islands, as well as a military escalation in the region, to impose harsh security measures.

Finally, Christos Aliprantis outlines how the Greek Revolution inspired the Great Powers to develop new, inter-imperial security practices. His contribution investigates the police measures taken by the Habsburg authorities against philhellenes. He examines these policies to understand better the uses and implications of 19th-century political policing as forms of everyday security practices. These efforts focused predominantly on border controls against moving philhellenic agitators en route from or to Greece; censorship measures against likeminded literary production (newspaper, pamphlets); and surveillance or arrest of notable philhellenes.

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