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Introduction

The Greek Revolution and Our Modern World

Theodore Kolokotronis and the Arc of Modern Europe

THEODORE KOLOKOTRONIS IS not the subject of this book but he is a good way to introduce it. Kolokotronis was a commander of the Christian forces during the Greek Revolution, and today he is celebrated as a national hero. Rightly so: he was probably the most talented strategist of the Greek revolutionary era, rivaled only by his nemesis, Ibrahim pasha of Egypt. He lends his name to countless streets across Greece and his statue overlooks town squares. As a statue he is permanent and inevitable, like so many statues that oversee squares the world over. He has a determined frown. He knows where he is going, to Greek independence, and he points the way with an extended finger or sword, or leads with one foot forward. He was more interesting than that. He was all about motion, choices, uncertainties, and surprises to which he adjusted, until he made the final transformation: he abandoned the empires he had served most of his life and became a Greek in the nation-state of Greece. He was change itself.[1]

For most of his life Kolokotronis was known as Little Theodore (Thodorakis). Thodorakis is familiar and affectionate. It is a diminutive that captures something of the prerevolutionary setting of clans, friendships, loyalties, clientelism, loathing, and conspiracy that come from personal knowledge and intimacy. He was very much a man of the

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Morea (today the Peloponnese), specifically its western coast. His friends and collaborators were both Christians and Muslims, and so were his enemies. In 1821 he used his networks of clan and region to carry out the Revolution and help create a nation-state that superseded the networks of clan and region and put an end to Islam in the region. From that time he became Theodore (Theodoros), the formal rendering of his name that befitted a man who would become a statue, the leader of a nation that seemed eternal as soon as it was created. And so he was fixed, as Theodore, in the history books, coins, stamps, coloring books, and board games. His life of choices and risks is lost; the circumstances and conjunctures that made Greece are also lost. This book aims to recover the uncertainty that preceded the Greek Revolution and made the Revolution, and Greece, a surprise.

Kolokotronis was born an Ottoman subject in 1770. Like his father and grandfather before him, Kolokotronis was a bandit for hire in the Ottoman Morea, working for Christians and Muslims alike. He was a man of his region and he was also an imperial creature, traveling easily from employer to employer. This was an age of empires, and there was no shame or treason in changing patrons. It was, at worst, a breach of contract.

Kolokotronis fought on many sides of the small-scale civil wars in the Ottoman Morea and worked with all sides of the Napoleonic Wars. Around 1800 he was hired by Christian landowners in the Morea to protect them against bandits like himself. When the anarchy was too much for the Christian landowners, when they were losing out on the economic boom that was the Napoleonic Wars, the Christians joined with Muslim landowners, Orthodox priests, monks, and Christian peasants to hunt him down. He escaped to the Ionian Islands in 1806 and left behind the corpses of many of his relatives and followers.

The Ionian Islands were only a boat ride away, a day or less in favorable winds. But the islands were in a different empire. They had been Venetian territory, from 1797 they were French and in 1806 they were Russian. The Napoleonic Wars had arrived in the region and opportunity beckoned. Kolokotronis became a corsair flying the Russian flag until he was arrested for attacking the wrong places. The order to

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arrest him came from Count Giovanni Capo d'Istria, later known as Ivan Kapodistriia the Russian statesman, Jean Capodistrias the European diplomat, and finally Ioannis Kapodistrias the first governor of Greece. (Given his evolutions, in places we will call him simply the Count, the one stability in his varied life.) But in 1807 the Count was an Ionian Islander in Russian service, and Thodorakis was an Ottoman Morean mercenary who had breached his contract. Thodorakis apologized and asked for his back wages. The Count released him, an act of *noblesse oblige*.

Undeterred, Kolokotronis returned to the Morea when he was hired by a Muslim notable named Ali Farmaki. Ali was his blood brother, a Muslim and a Greek speaker, and together they fought against the Morean pasha, also a Muslim and also a Greek speaker. When the two were defeated they again fled to the Ionian Islands. Now the islands were French again, and the conspirators asked to go to France to meet Napoleon; relations should be personal. They did not meet Napoleon but their proposal was transmitted up the army hierarchy. They wanted France to invade their homeland and end the rule of the sultan in the Morea. Under France, Muslim and Christian notables would share power and continue their pitiless exploitation of the peasantry. But just then the British were invading the islands and evicting the French, so Thodorakis abandoned the French plan and joined the British to fight the French. He attacked other Ottoman Christians and Ionian Islanders who were fighting on the side of the French, and he became an officer in the Duke of York's Greek Light Infantry. He affirmed his loyalty to "my king," George III of Great Britain.

It was here that the British gifted him the famous helmet that he wore through the revolutionary decade. It was the helmet of a dragoon, and dragoon helmets at the time were modeled on ancient Greek designs.[2] The British no doubt wished to honor his Greek heritage. Kolokotronis appreciated the symbol of British imperial might. Decades later, when the helmet was put on display in the National Historical Museum in Athens, his helmet became a symbol of modern Greece. In front of the museum is the equine statue of Kolokotronis in that same helmet, a good resting place for pigeons. What the British thought he should be,

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FIGURE 0.1. Statue of Theodore Kolokotronis in Front of the National Historical Museum, Athens. Sculpted by Lazaros Sochos, 1895. Photograph by Paschalis Basios, 2023. *This is the most known of the Kolokotronis statues that adorn squares in Greece.*

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why he valued the helmet, how he is remembered, and the indifference of the pigeons are all captured nicely in this one artefact.

With the end of the Napoleonic Wars in the region, in 1814, he was discharged and unemployed. He stayed on the Ionian Islands under British rule and became a butcher—not figuratively, but literally, a purveyor of beef—as well as a grocer and a moneylender. His life under the British in Zante (today Zakynthos) was secure if boring and predictable, and his records from the time are ledgers and IOUs. As an Ottoman subject and a professional warrior, he had lost most of his relatives and his homeland. On the Ionian Islands he lost court cases. When the authorities discovered that he was using a house in town to keep his sheep and goats, which was against local ordinances, they did not extort him or loot the premises, they asked him to move his livestock. His neighbors were all Christians, like himself. Could the stability of the European empires since 1815 be recreated in his homeland in the Morea, with Orthodox Christians in charge? Was the Christian predominance in Europe, the relative homogeneity of the population, the source of European stability and power?

During his stays on the Ionian Islands he learned of the French Revolution, of nations, and of the mass mobilizations of the revolutionary era. He learned of the Greeks past and present, and read stories that were not in ancient Greek or church Greek. They were in a vernacular that was close to his own. The books were financed and shipped by a network of Greek merchants from around the Mediterranean and Black seas who were promoting an idea of Greekness that they were just learning about themselves. He identified with the people in the histories and identified with the people bringing the books. They were all part of an ancient continuum and a current community. He had not met all the Greeks and they were not on intimate terms, but they existed in his thoughts and in his books. Greece was an abstraction but it was acted out in a new solidarity. And soon the abstraction was armed.

From Greek merchants hailing from Russia he learned of a secret society formed in Odesa that recruited Orthodox members in the eastern Mediterranean. Its goal was to overthrow the sultan and create a Christian Greece. He joined. It matters that that the merchants were

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from Russia and he was in exile: nationalism sometimes flourishes when it incubates abroad, where unimaginable radicalisms can be imagined. At a meeting in Izmail (then in the Russian Empire, today in Ukraine) the members were told that there would be an uprising in March 1821. Word reached Kolokotronis on Zakynthos. He settled his business, boarded a boat, met up with his kin and comrades, and took the region of Kalamata from the Ottoman Muslims.

In his memoirs he was proud and careful to describe the flags he created and took into each campaign, including a flag with the cross and the crescent. In the 1820s he flew only the cross. In 1821 he and his men scoured the countryside and killed Muslims, and they persuaded and intimidated the Christian villagers to join them in a mass assault on all Muslims. As the commander of the Greek Christian forces, he oversaw the siege of the Morean capital Tripolitsa and witnessed its storming. He rode over some of the fifteen thousand corpses of men, women, and children that his men left behind. At the battle of Dervenakia in 1822, he commanded the forces that annihilated an Ottoman army and secured a purely Christian peninsula. He was at the head of not only a band of men but a national mass mobilization. This was new and it explains how the Christians, now united as Greeks, overcame the armies of the sultan. It was the *levée en masse* and he had learned it from the French. It was to put a bloody end to the chaotic violence that was the Ottoman regime in the region.

It was a demographic solution to a political problem. It was the mass mobilization of people into one category (the Greeks) in order to create another (the Turks) and make it disappear. Like any revolution that deserves the name, it was a great reorganization of people, territory, and allegiances. The same Kolokotronis who killed Christians and Muslims alike for most of his life, and who fought alongside Christians and Muslims alike, would now kill Muslims and refrain from killing Christians if possible. The Christians who would have gladly killed Kolokotronis in 1806 refrained from killing him when they fell out in the 1820s. They put him in prison. Muslim adversaries received no quarter, or they were enslaved, or they were ransomed, or they converted to Orthodoxy, or they went into permanent exile. Cohabitation was no longer an option.

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Kolokotronis learned from the empires. He merged revolutionary enlightenment with Ottoman confessional governance, the brotherhood of citizens with the exclusivity of a nation, his long experience in warfare with a national cause. Absolute national belonging informed notions of total war where entire peoples were thrown at other peoples in a final confrontation. All in all, Kolokotronis had learned that people rather than only land and things were a source power that could function as a new weapon. By the same token, people rather than only generals and rulers were his enemy. His tactical innovation was the *levée en masse*. His strategy was the nation itself. His greatest discovery was popular sovereignty.

Kolokotronis died of old age in 1843 and became a statue. It is a monument to the nation that had recently come into being, soon styled eternal and unchanging. I hope we can look at the statue and recall the many things that he had been that made him interesting, and the many things that Greece might have been and might yet be.

The Empires that Made the Nation

National heroes like Kolokotronis were the children of empires,[3] and what would become Greece was an imperial crossroads. Most of the people who would become Greeks were subjects of the Ottoman sultan. Like so many empires—Russia, for example—the Ottoman Empire was organized around religion, and confessional institutions were a part of Ottoman governance. In theory each religion was protected.[4] It became common after the Greek Revolution to propose that the Ottoman Muslims persecuted the Christians as Christians but we know that this is untrue. Before the Revolution schools teaching Greek and Orthodoxy flourished and were patronized by regional Muslim rulers. The Orthodox patriarch in Istanbul was appointed by the sultan and the church was a part of the Ottoman administration. The problem lay in the inability of the Ottoman old regime to deliver on its promises of protection and security, and people of all religions suffered from official theft, arbitrariness, banditry, and each other. Ottomans of all religions fought each other in small rebellions and civil wars. Poverty was deep and

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endemic, with layers of Christian and Muslim notables, and Christian merchants and moneylenders, feeding on a mass of impoverished peasants.

Violence and poverty alone do not make revolutions. Were that the case, revolutions would be happening every day. Solidarity within the elite, in this case the Christian and Muslim elite, ensured that peasant disaffection would not go beyond small acts of resistance, banditry, and migration. Revolutions occur when it becomes possible to imagine something better, when expectations are higher, unrealized, and dashed.[5] These possibilities arose when new empires entered the region with different models of statehood, of law and order, and of security that made daily existence in the Ottoman regime seem retrograde, unacceptable, and brittle enough to overthrow. These ideas infected the Christian elite in particular because the European empires entering the region sought out the Christians as their natural allies. The encounter produced a rupture with their Muslim counterparts. People may rebel as they often did, but a crisis in the elite can land a rebel in a revolution.

The first outside incursion was Russian. Russia's victories on a broad front from the Danubian region (roughly today's Romania and Moldova) to the Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia) from 1768 stripped the sultan of the entire northern coast of the Black Sea. The fighting spilled southward through what is today called the Balkans (roughly Romania to Greece). Russian expeditions stirred up rebellions as far south as the Morea and the Aegean Archipelago. Locals could see a more powerful army and state in action as it defeated the Ottoman armies in wars that erupted regularly. Balkan Christians, some uprooted, most in search of wealth and careers, streamed northward and settled the new cities of the Black Sea with Odesa at its center. It was in Russia that the hodgepodge of Balkan Christians consolidated their sense of Greekness, it was in imperial Odesa (today Ukraine) that the conspiracy that sparked the Revolution was hatched, and it was in Izmail (Ukraine) that the insurrection was planned.

The Napoleonic Wars further changed regional politics, as they changed politics around the world. Three empires entered the region through the Ionian Sea in the west. The Venetian Empire was over-

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thrown by France in 1797 and France took the Ionian Islands. From that time the Ionian Islands were taken successively by the Russians, the French again, and finally the British in 1814. From the Ionian Islands one could gaze at the Ottoman mainland across the narrow channels, at the Morean Peninsula and Epirus centered in Yanena (Yanya in Ottoman, Ioannina in formal Greek). From the Ionian Islands the European powers intervened in the politics of the Ottoman Balkans. Invasion seemed possible, sometimes imminent.

The Balkan Ottomans gazed back. Muslims as well as Christians conspired with these powers and entertained offers of collaboration. One can understand why. The new empires in the region represented alternative models of stability and discipline, and it was their stability and discipline that impressed the Ottoman notables who ruled locally. The arriving empires may have been liberal, autocratic, or constitutional, they may have been Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox, but they were all regularized states. To be sure, the European empires were hugely violent: what else could one call two decades of almost constant war, from Moscow to Madrid, from Germany to Italy, from Haiti to Cairo, from Spain to India? But the violence of the European empires was organized in a different way. It was largely predictable, it was in pursuit of a shared policy, the soldiers more or less followed orders, and they fought toward a strategic goal. They privileged the Christians.

The empires were also better paymasters and they offered careers to the aspiring mercenary. Tens of thousands of armed men from the Ottoman mainland worked for these empires. The people loosely called Greeks by the Europeans (they meant the Orthodox Christians) could pick and choose their empires. Familiar local wars were globalized, Ottoman Christians marched in all the imperial armies, and they sailed the seas under a dizzying variety of flags. Merchants and landowners sold their goods to all the armies and navies as they capitalized on a war boom.

The arrival of the new empires was a threat to Ottoman sovereignty. Different sultans reacted with efforts to direct more resources to a single imperial policy and defend the realm from outside incursions. The more the sultan tried to mobilize his subjects to defend the realm,

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the more intense the local violence and warfare. Local people pushed back and they conspired to seize resources from each other. In the long run Ottoman reform could produce system, predictability, and security, but in the short run the vestiges of the old regime competed even harder to carve out or maintain wealth and influence.[6] The most dangerous time for a weak regime is when it tries to reform itself.[7]

With the wars in the region over in 1814, tens of thousands of Greek mercenaries were unemployed, as were tens of thousands of soldiers across Europe. Some of the merchants and notables who had done so well off the wars saw their revenues shrink, and the incomes of craftsmen fell. Sailors were unemployed.[8] For many others trade continued to yield huge fortunes, and the dashed expectations of some were joined by the rising expectations of others. But there was not yet a good reason to suppose that there was to be a revolution, let alone a national one that pitted one confession against another. Christian notables could complain of their lost affluence or chronic insecurity, but so could the Muslims. Peasants could complain of their enduring poverty, but this was not new.

It took something more to make Ottoman multiconfessionalism into national exclusiveness, and that something was Europe—both the Enlightened version that produced the French Revolution, and the reactionary version that gathered in Vienna from 1815 to assert that Europe was Christian.

The Greeks of 1821 drew on both versions of Europe: they mass mobilized, and they created a nation of Christians.

Which Europe? The Greek Revolution as a European Event[9]

For some decades handfuls of Orthodox intellectuals had been exploring the European Enlightenment as a way to address the character of the would-be Greeks inhabiting the sundry empires. Some adopted the liberal creed. In the 1820s, in the midst of the Revolution, they wrote constitutions and laws. Quite a lot has been written about these intellectuals but these were a few people who wrote quite a lot.[10] In the

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history books they overwhelm the people who actually did the fighting in 1821–2. And yet the basic concept that was at stake in these writings was popular sovereignty, and this was acted out and practiced during the mass mobilization that gripped the southern Balkans. The tens of thousands of fighters did not read documents—most could not read—but for a brief moment they took control of their lives and went into action. They were entitled and empowered. Some concepts filtered to them and gave them an idiom and a direction, legitimizing and shaping what they were doing. The distinction between Muslim and Christian became an absolute binary opposition. The very term that the revolutionaries used to describe themselves changed rapidly in 1821: people who called themselves some variation on Christian revived the ancient term for a Greek: *Ellinas* or Hellene. It is what the Greeks call themselves today, living in land called Hellas. Armed in a new national whole, the Greeks mobilized.

Mass mobilization was the most important idea that the Greeks learned from the revolutionary and Napoleonic era: the peasant soldiers learned it from the warlords; the warlords had learned it in the European armies; the privileged Christian notables feared it but were forced to accept and use it. Without mass mobilization a Greek victory was unimaginable. Popular sovereignty was very much at issue for the peasant warrior but it was not always a matter of pristine liberty, and it was not bound by the legalistics of the sundry constitutions. It empowered people to march, kill, loot, enslave, and burn, and it gave the victors and survivors a basis to demand a better life. An imperial subject could supplicate and negotiate with a distant authority; a citizen was a member of the nation and could demand.

The revolutionaries spoke and acted the ideas of rights and sovereignty, but in this time and place these ideas, once a matter of the rights of man, were being particularized as the rights of the nation. The new nation was exclusive and limited to the Christians. In this regard the Greeks were appealing to a different kind of Europe, where liberalism was on the retreat. The imperial and royal courts and cabinets were part of the Congress System and the Holy Alliance, that system of monarchial domination that was established in Vienna in 1815 and continued

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to oversee European affairs into the 1820s. Led by Russia, the European cabinets were responding to the upheaval of the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars with a heightened sense of hierarchy, superordinate power, and Christianity. There were liberal elements in this system, to be sure, but not much of this was left by the time of the Greek Revolution in 1821.[11] At that moment the European powers were in the midst of a full-blown reaction and putting down revolutions in Italy. The Spanish Revolution was put down by French troops in 1823. Even Britain, which fancied itself aloof of the continental patterns, was reacting to revolutions with retrenched hierarchy authority.[12] The Greeks who rose up in 1821 sought European support and they were rebuffed because they seemed like one more conspiracy against established authority. It was exactly the wrong time for a revolution of the Greeks, and the European powers quietly hoped that the sultan would do to the Greeks what they themselves were doing to the Italians and Spaniards.

The Greeks adjusted to appear less liberal and not even revolutionary. Theirs was a war of separate peoples, Greeks and Turks, and the Turks were not compatriots and neighbors but foreign occupiers; what happened in Spain and Italy were civil wars among Christians. Contemporaries said all this at every opportunity and we need to listen more carefully. The Greek Revolution was exceptional, they held, not on a continuum with 1789 or the revolutions of Spain and Italy that erupted in 1819 and 1820. (Or even 1776: "banish the thought," *alimono*, wrote the notable Sisinis when writing about the connection between the American and Greek revolutions.) It was religious, a Christian war against the sultan and Islam. Liberty would apply to the nation only, and that nation was Christian. The movement of Philhellenes—the friends of the Greeks—came into existence across Europe to support the Greeks as Christians. They covered the whole spectrum from ultra-royalism and autocracy to liberalism and republicanism, but as Christians defending Christians they could find common cause. Many called their support for the Greeks a crusade and religious language permeated their appeals.

The Greeks and their supporters fused the two Europes into a new kind of nation. The talk and performance of liberty and rights, the stuff

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of the Enlightenment and the Age of Revolutions, were real and persistent, but these ideas were encased in a limited and exclusive nation. The background to the entire revolutionary decade, the setting in which liberty was understood, was exclusively Christian, and the axis of confrontation was religion. It was a historic compromise between the rights of man and the Romantic essence of a nation.[13] Greece was Christian. Others would have to convert, leave, or die.

European diplomats began to listen, though for their own reasons. They were impatient and alarmed by the regional instability that was a breeding ground for piracy along a major trading route. They had given the sultan five years to settle the matter, in the way that they themselves had settled matters in Spain and Italy. In 1826 and 1827 three powers (Russia, Britain, and France) warmed to the Greek cause because, they could now argue, it was not even a revolution. It was a Christian war of liberation from an alien, Oriental power. It was a war of nations. It was a War of Independence. The powers intervened. By 1830, with the Revolution redefined as something other than revolutionary, the European powers decreed a Greece with full independence for one reason in particular: it had a majority Christian population, it had been ruled by Muslims, and it was in Europe. French troops arrived to evacuate the last Muslims. The process that made Greece into a homogeneous space was begun on the ground in 1821 and blessed and completed by Europe around 1830.

There is a quiet paradox underlying the whole sequence leading to Greek independence and it requires more attention that is usually receives. It concerns Russia. For well over a century historians have worked mightily to associate the Revolution with Europe to the west, not to the north. And yet anti-revolutionary Russia incubated the nationalist movement that would produce the Greek Revolution. Autocratic Russia led the way to recognizing popular sovereignty insofar as it recognized the nation, in Greece to begin with but more generally in European diplomacy and finally worldwide. Multiconfessional Russia had agreed that a new nation be recognized with only one official religion. Russia had opened a Pandora's Box, mostly unwittingly.

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The Demographic Revolution

The decade 1821–30 saw a thoroughgoing demographic revolution. This aspect of the Greek Revolution, its novel and shocking violence visited on towns, villages, households, families, and persons, as it sought out and destroyed an entire category of population, is too often missed because it is subordinated to words like "victory" in battle, the "fall" of a given town, and the "liberation" of a region. Some allowances are made to cast the massacres as the unfortunate side-effects of war. But this targeted and categorical violence was not an unintended consequence; it was the goal of the warfare. Contemporaries said as much as they attacked their neighbors, and we should listen more carefully. Muslims should not inhabit the land and they should never return. Popular sovereignty made all people in some way significant—significant enough to be empowered and to make demands, or significant enough to be worth killing.[14] The creation of modern totalizing categories can be the prehistory of their destruction.[15] In this time and place, the creation of two antagonistic demographic categories—Christian against Muslim, Greek against Turk—made the violence total and final.

It is easy to call this "ethnic cleansing," a term coined in the 1990s for Yugoslavia, but this does not capture the process that not only removed the Muslims but also made the myriad Christians into Greeks. It is better called simplification: the creation of two new national totalities, the one unified for the first time, the other erased. The disappearance of Islam is remarkable, and so is the merger of such a diverse patchwork of languages, dialects, regions, and localities into a single Greek nation. Nations destroy and nations create; they efface and they empower.

It was a great realignment. People loved and loathed in new ways, they marched with people they had recently fought, and they killed people who had recently been their comrades and neighbors. The new binary of Greek and Turk was absolute, and the myriad ethnicities of the region were simplified into two. The Muslims may have spoken Greek, Turkish, Albanian, or Roma, but henceforth they would be Turks and they belonged in Asia, not Europe. Christians also spoke Greek, Albanian, Turkish, and Roma, as well as Vlach and Italian. They

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could stay, and they would now be Greeks in Europe. Later they would be taught a standardized Greek language. Out of a mix of cultures emerged a totalizing binary, a war of total destruction, and a new kind of total unity. Changing masters was no longer normal; it was treason.

The empires converged on this place to create modern Greece. It was recognizably French in its totalizing tendencies and its capacity to mobilize the masses, Ottoman in its assumption that populations were defined by confession, and European in its heightened sense of Christian exclusivity, its civilizational superiority. Together these tendencies produced a demographic engineering of geography. They produced the national state.

And yet Muslims were and are indigenous to Europe.[16] Muslims were in Europe at the very time that a geopolitical Europe came into being in 1648. Writing them out of the history books was part and parcel of a new Christianization of Europe. To be sure, Muslims had been pushed out of the continent before, most notoriously in Spain from the eighth to the fifteenth centuries. But those expulsions were carried out by sovereign kings, not a mass movement; in warfare between kingdoms, not peoples; and did not leave in their wake a nation. It was also piecemeal, and it was only termed a single process after the fact, in the nineteenth century when nations were new and real, and historians began to term it a Reconquista and a national movement.[17] The Greek Revolution was thoroughly modern: it entailed mass mobilization, it rested on popular sovereignty, and it put in place a new kind of belonging that was national.

The Greek model spread. Since the 1820s new Balkan states have been systematically removing the traces of Islam, both the people and the landmarks.[18] The Yugoslav War of the 1990s is only the most recent instalment. The outward trickle of Muslims from Bulgaria is ongoing. Bosnia and Kosovo persist as precarious islands of Islam in a decidedly Christian sea. Europe as a whole has worked concertedly into the present day to keep Muslim migrants out of the continent. The front line of the continent was established by the European powers in 1830 and is patrolled into the present day: Greece, a cartographic, diplomatic, and demographic fact.

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The Congress System had made Europe absolutely Christian. The granting of Greek independence made the Balkan Christians absolutely European. Both the land and the population would be the eastern boundary of Europe and of European civilization. 1821 was the start of the Balkan Century as more Ottoman peoples claimed nationhood based on their Christianity. The final act came a century later, in 1923, when the remains of the Ottoman Empire were overthrown by the Muslims who now called themselves Turks. The population of the Republic of Turkey was homogenized using the same axis as the Greeks of 1821, but in mirror-image. Now it was the Christians who had to leave, and Turkey made its way to becoming absolutely Muslim.

Writing the Nation: The Making of an Eternity

Explaining how Greeks became Greek is important. Historical actors become people facing circumstances and making choices rather than characters following a script written by Cleo.

We have a veritable sea of histories of the Revolution of 1821, which around the bicentenary became an ocean. In the buildup to 2021 the Greek press dutifully reported each new publication with a detectable groan and good humor. Most of this literature is in Greek and it can be very good. There are accessible overviews that synthesize large bodies of research and are good reads.[19] We have revealing and suggestive case studies that delve into specific topics, question the factual basis of the existing narrative, and put on display excellent research and methodologies.[20] The Russian-language scholarship, much of it from Soviet times, is expert and compelling.[21] In English there are some beautifully written books, from William St. Clair on the Philhellenes to the biographies written by C. M. Woodhouse.[22]

The Greeks rose up, then, but how did the Greeks become Greek? How did an imperial existence produce a national state? The usual answer is that the nation already existed but this is problematic because the Greeks had been imperial creatures, like most of the world. Historians of Greece have worked to extract from an imperial mosaic a discrete and homogeneous people. This is not unusual and much the same

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was done by historians of Britain, for example, from the nineteenth century: a certain race or people was pulled out of the fluidity of global empire, and a nation existed, untouched, despite revolutionary changes that gripped every facet and level of the polity.[23] Someone describing the American Revolution as the work of lifelong patriots is at odds with the historian of colonial America where those same patriots were loyal subjects of the king; George Washington fought for George III before he fought against him.

We all, collectively, tend to assume the existence of the nation and we project it backward, onto a time when there was no such thing. Professional history writing and national states emerged at the same time, in the nineteenth century, and historians have tended to assume and often identify with the nation. Writing history becomes part of an ongoing national project, not a study in national projects.[24] With history written in, for, and about the nation, it is a way to affirm and reaffirm the timeless reality of the nation, often traveling from some sort of darkness (the nation under a foreign yoke or absolute monarch) to some sort of light (national liberation, popular sovereignty, and the current nation-state).

But there was no nation until there was, and this is something worth writing about. For Greece, Konstantina Zanou began a rethinking in her study of the Ionian Islands in the revolutionary era, as a variety of people were faced with the new and simple choice, to decide whether they were Italian or Greek. One's sense of self was up for grabs, and this is a good way to think of the Greek Revolution as a whole. Anta (Ada) Dialla tells of Russian imperial ambition in the Mediterranean and points out that before 1821 Russians could not say for sure if the Aegean Archipelago and the eastern Mediterranean were Europe, Asia, or Africa. The ambiguity did not go away. Christine Philliou looks at the matter from the Ottoman perspective after 1821, when many of the people called Greeks remained in the Ottoman Empire and led imperial, not national, lives. In Greek Kostis Papagiorges tells of the tumult and violence of the Greek mainland from Yanena to Athens in the 1820s, and shows that national belonging was new, and for very many it was optional. Dionysis Tzakis shows the same in revealing case studies. Roderick Beaton

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enriches the story of Byron and breathes savvy life into Philhellenism as a quest for purpose on the part of men like Byron who was always ambiguous about the Greeks to whom he was, in the last few years of his life, committed.[25]

Outside of these studies it is something of an orthodoxy that a Greece and the Greeks have always existed. Like any nation, it claims to be eternal, which means that a revolution is a natural and perhaps inevitable event: a preexisting people finally pulls the trigger on a foreign conqueror and occupier. In fact no state called Greece had ever existed before. Loose references to Greece as a place around 1800 located it in any number of places. Revolutionaries thought that Greece might include today's Romania, which is in fact where the uprising of 1821 began, or that it might include the rest of the Balkans, Constantinople, and Anatolia. Some maps called the same places Macedonia, Turkey, Illyria, Serbia, Albania, and a host of local designations.

As for the people, it is a consensus, implicit or explicit, that there have always been Greeks who trace a line to Classical times, to Byzantium, or to both. By that reckoning they were persistently Greek, and three centuries of Ottoman and Venetian rule were a veneer. The Revolution was the proof. But the people whom others called Greek, and who called themselves Greek from 1821, called themselves a variety of things before 1821, and Greek was not one of them. Most often they were the Christians, what the Ottomans called the Rum, derived from Romans. In Greek it was Romios (plural Romiï), and colloquially it still is. They were the descendants of the Eastern Roman Empire and latterly the subjects of the sultan. But by that standard all Orthodox peoples from Trabzon to Bucharest, from Damascus to Athens, from Romanians and Serbs to Arabs and everyone in between, were Greek because they were all heirs to Byzantium. The Roma (Gypsies) claimed the same heritage.

Language does not narrow the field. Very many Muslims spoke Greek. People who spoke Greek and practiced Orthodoxy were distinct from the Ottoman Christians if they lived in lands to the west or north of the Balkan mainland, in Italy and Russia. They were Graiki (singular Graikos). Nor did all Greeks in 1821 speak Greek at home. Very many of

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the leaders of the Revolution spoke Greek but swore and sang in Albanian: Botsaris, Tzavellas, Androutsos, Karaiskakis, Miaoulis, Kanaris, and Bouboulina, to name only a few. The Greek revolutionary Righas Velestinlis was Vlach. The native language of the first governor of Greece was Italian and his Greek was halting. And yet somehow this Tower of Babel became the Greeks, and a Greek nation became very real.

Nations happen. With this truism in mind, Greece becomes a study in national formation, not national awakening. Since just about any Greek of 1820 was an imperial subject, the empires become the spaces where Greek nationalism was produced, not simply the regimes that held it back. This book tells the story of the many things that people could be, until the Revolution, quite suddenly, produced only two: Greek and Turk, though the Turks did not yet know it. Lost in the re-sorting were the Albanians, Catholics, Vlachs, Jews, and Roma who had to choose one or the other side—there was no third way—or leave.[26]

This story will tell of the many other things that the regional Christians were (chapters 1–6), suggest how this was changing by looking at one man (chapter 7), and consider where and how the Greeks arrived at their Greekness in their new settlements in Russia (chapter 8). It will remain to explain how a nation was consolidated from 1821 onward, how imperial complaint congealed into a national movement during the Revolution itself (chapters 9–14). The Greek nation was very nearly quashed by an Egyptian invasion that the Greeks could neither resist nor understand (chapter 15), and saved by a European mobilization of public opinion, diplomacy, armies, and navies (chapter 16). The independence that followed was ambiguous: a tiny country visited periodically by the gunboats of the empires and burdened by foreign loans, it anticipated a world of nation-states, governed and disciplined by sovereign debt (Epilogue).

The Crooked Line to 1821

The point of this book is to depart from the straight-line narrative and make the line to 1821 and 1830 crooked.[27] We should not be concerned with the coherence of the narrative, because at the time events seemed

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incoherent and the narrative seemed to lead in multiple directions. We should not follow our actors to their destination because they themselves did not know where they were going. The individual stories and microhistories that follow illustrate these many possibilities. Nor will it do to fit all the pieces into their place because contemporaries did not know what that place would be. We should remind ourselves that Greece and its Revolution were a novelty to all, including most of the revolutionaries. We should not recognize the Greek Revolution but encounter it. Cliché should be replaced by marvel and curiosity. But the same is true of any historical event and the story of Greece is a case study in something universal. It is a way of approaching what seems normal and natural and then doubting it, recovering its newborn glow. The world should be made strange[28] and once again interesting. We should marvel at its novelty.

The Archival Remains of the Empires

We will visit the less-known characters that are languishing in archives and old books, in Paris, Nantes, London, Geneva, Athens, and Corfu. The Greeks in 1820 were all subjects of the empires and a few kingdoms, and there was no Greek state to organize their lives into archives. Greek archivists have done an excellent job gathering together personal collections and scattered documents. But many of the stories surrounding the Greek Revolution are to be found in the archival remains of the empires. During my visits to Paris, Nantes, and London, I was in the company of north Africans, west Africans, south Asians, and southeast Asians investigating their national pasts and family genealogies, who by their very presence affirmed that our pasts are also imperial. Similarly, the magnificent archive of Corfu is in fact the records of successive imperial masters, the Venetians, French, Russians, and British.

I do not read Ottoman. I do read the main Ottoman language of the Balkans in that period, Romaic Greek. (Romaic is only partly legible to users of today's Demotic Greek.) Otherwise I rely on my colleagues who have begun the work of translating the Ottoman documents of Istanbul, and on one erudite historian who mastered the necessary

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Ottoman, Arabic, and Persian alongside the Greek.[29] Russia is an important part of this book but visits to the archives of Moscow and St. Petersburg were postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic, and I had no desire to go following Russia's renewed assault on Ukraine in 2022. Luckily there is a long Russian and Soviet tradition of publishing documents as well as the excellent work of Soviet and post-Soviet historians. By reading them in a different way I make a point about the centrality of Russia to the story.

1821 as a Current Event

Greeks have a remarkable historical awareness of the Revolution. Just about any town and many villages have an amateur historian or two, people who gather documents, locate the sites they describe, trace lineages, and willingly and enthusiastically share their knowledge. One need only go to the café in the main square and ask, and it is worth listening to them. They make the landscape come alive, they have knowledge, and they connect a past to a present. More than once I found these encounters revealing, about the issues and about myself. Each chapter begins with an account of my visits to the sites and persons in question and conversations with locals, specialists, or fellow-travelers about events that happened two hundred years ago, give or take, and these introduce the historical account. These vignettes help me open questions and beckon toward the stakes, in a personal way that may be lost in the standard historical narrative.

It is common for locals to tell of historical events as if they are happening now, as if they witnessed them, and to narrate in the "we." At times they intimate that the goals of 1821 were not attained, that Greek independence and the social revolution were only ever partial. The Revolution is still with us and there are new stories to be told.

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