

200 Years after: Reassessing the Greek Revolution of 1821

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Should the Greek Revolution of 1821 be considered mostly as a national event? Or should it rather be seen in the context of the greater European and Ottoman timeline and turn of events at the same time? Should perhaps prevailing views of the European philhellenic movement and the Vienna Greek communities vis-à-vis the Greek Revolution be reevaluated in light of recent historical research? These were some of the questions this digital international conference on the occasion of the bicentennial of the Greek Revolution tried to answer through vibrant speeches and vivid discussions – also among the numerous followers of the conference – to reassess the character and the impact of this seminal event of Greek contemporary history.

Following a welcome address by the Dean of the Faculty of Historical Cultural Studies, Sebastian Schütze, and the director of the Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Christophe Erismann, as well as by Maria A. Stassinopoulou on behalf of the organizers, the first panel revolved around the greater international context shortly before, during, and after the Greek Revolution, examining also the interrelations between the Great Powers and the newborn Greek State.

ŠÜKRÜ İLİCAK (Rethymno / Athens) provided an examination of the Greek War of Independence through the Ottoman perception and in particular the role of the Ottoman army during the military operations as well as the perception of the Greek War by the Ottoman bureaucracy. After presenting the events of almost a decade of wars both internally and externally, Ilıcak described the status of the state's control throughout the Em-

pire at the time of the Greek War, suggesting the use of the term „de-ayanization“ instead of centralization, explaining how and why this process affected the Ottoman state's ability to mobilize military force. Moreover, emphasis was given to the role of the Albanian mercenaries and their „armed neutrality“ policy in the course of the war. Regarding the second aspect under examination, Ilıcak looked at the role of Ibn Khaldun's concepts in the attempts of the Ottoman statesmen to deal with the Greek War of Independence ideologically, since they struggled to comprehend the „national idea“. The influence of these concepts led to and legitimized the call to arms to all-male urban Muslims, which in turn led to massive waves of violence within the cities in the early phases of the war.

STEPHAN KURZ (Vienna) and KARIN SCHNEIDER (Vienna) dealt with Greece's position as represented in the documents from the Congresses of the Great Powers, from the early stages of the revolution until the firm establishment of the Greek War of Independence. They first underlined the altering attitude of the members of the European Concert of Powers towards the Eastern Question and the subsequent revolutionary movements within the Ottoman Empire. As the archival sources denote, they started adopting a more positive stance towards the Greek insurgents in the mid-1820s. Kurz and Schneider then demonstrated the use and the importance of a groundbreaking digital database they devised with the help of XML data, for the transcription and annotation of archival documents, their web presentation, and digital preservation. As these digitization processes are ongoing and are influencing the humanities, this was an important contribution to understanding similar projects.

An analysis of the stance taken by Austrian Chancellor Metternich vis-à-vis the Greek War of Independence was provided by MIROSLAV ŠEDIVÝ (Pardubice/Klagenfurt), who elaborated on why Metternich was neither a friend nor a foe of the Greeks but rather a rational, realist politician of his time, assessing the particular situation. In this regard the actions of Metternich should be examined through the lenses of his attempt to maintain the legal status quo, without this

meaning that he didn't feel for the hardships faced by the insurgents, hence advocating in favor of reforms. In other words, the basic issue for Metternich was control, what he perceived as damaging and to allow no violation of the international agreements of the Congress of Vienna only a few years earlier, a perception which according to Šedivý was indirectly adopted by other European great powers in other instances.

Within the same context of the Habsburg Empire's interconnection with the Greek War of Independence ANNA RANSMAYR (Vienna) gave a short presentation of the prevailing view in Greek public history that the Vienna Greeks contributed significantly to the ideological preparation of the 1821 uprising. Ransmayr argued, that at least during the revolutionary events the solid economic privileges they enjoyed played a crucial role in their indifference and interest-driven attitude towards the Greek Revolution. She focused in particular on the Greek Orthodox who were Ottoman subjects. Comparing the community of St. George and the Turkish-Israelite community in Vienna she discussed the similarity of the advantages these two communities had, which led them to carefully balanced relations with the Porte.

NATHALIE PATRICIA SOURSOS (Vienna) explored the impact of the foundation of the Greek State on endowments for purposes located outside Vienna and administered by the Viennese Greek Orthodox communities, namely of St. George and the Holy Trinity. Presenting the detailed networks of donors, the speaker examined the reasons why only a few of the Vienna Greeks have donated to the newborn Greek state and its capital Athens, arguing that their regional and „diasporic“ identity affected their attitude in this matter. In her closing remarks, Soursos presented findings on women as donors and identified possibilities of expanding research concerning the gender aspect of endowments in the future.

The second panel was dedicated to the socio-cultural aspects of the Greek Revolution. Kickstarting the session, VASO SEIRINIDOU (Athens) examined the landscape of interpersonal violence and crime as they interacted with the emergence of police

and criminal justice institutions in revolutionary Greece. Based on hitherto unpublished archival material from Greek police and court records, Seirinidou argued that the general insecurity after the first revolutionary year created not only a new milieu of crime but also an enhanced demand for safety among the local Greek population, leading to the legitimization of the judicial institutions of the emerging state.

DIMITRIS KOUSOURIS (Vienna) examined the stance of the Catholic inhabitants of the Aegean Islands towards the Greek War of Independence and the different players in the region. Their activities have left important archival material regarding the role of religion and its correlation with the formation of the Greek nation-state. Moreover, the agency of the communities themselves and in particular of the extended trade networks with the West of which they were part were discussed as part of the efforts of Catholics to maintain their status as a religiously defined group and the rights associated with it. While exploring these subjects, Kousouris applied the concept of overlapping jurisdiction and examined the importance of the protection granted by European Powers as well as the interaction between the different interest groups of the population. The situation remained complicated and ambivalent until the consolidation of the Greek State, especially on the island of Syros, which was a different case of its own due to the high proportion of Catholic inhabitants and the mobilization of actors on their behalf such as the Holy See.

A fascinating chapter of philhellenism and war volunteerism was the subject of IOANNIS ZELEPOS (Bochum) focusing on the bottom-up experience of the German philhellene and war-volunteer in the Greek revolution, Friedrich Müller. Zelepos discussed the prevalent narrative of upper-class European war-volunteers motivated by the ideal classical might and memory of Ancient Greece. Based on the memoirs of Müller with a more down-to-earth approach, the speaker argued that the volunteer movement involved a broader spectrum of philhellenes. Müller, who didn't hesitate to mingle with the local population and discussed in his text simple everyday experiences, is an example of a dif-

ferent type of volunteers, part of the middle and lower classes and who do not necessarily carry the baggage of Classicism, thus relating to the events and the people they meet in a different manner.

The impact of Hegel on the historical essays of Spyridon Zambelios, who considers 1821 to be a milestone not only for Greek but for European history as well, was discussed by VASILIKI DIMOULA (Vienna). By approaching the event of 1821 in an organicist manner, Zambelios, known for the incorporation of the Byzantine Era into the Greek national narrative in the 1850s, conceived of the Ottoman Era as a transitional period: in his view, the very collapse of the Byzantine Empire made way for the national Renaissance, marked by the 1821 momentum. The paper approached this historical- philosophical idea in parallel to the Hegelian concept of the transition from an old to a new national spirit.

The conference was concluded by OLGA KATSIARDI-HERING (Athens), who offered a structured commentary on all contributions and positioned them in the active debates taking place this year in numerous conferences in Greece and all over the world. She highlighted matters of international perception, the engagement of several different actors, the socio-political changes that led to and were the outcome of the Greek War of Independence, as well as the role of the center and the peripheries and the perception of the events from the upper echelons and from below. Thanks to this open end summary, a lively discussion arose, regarding the national and international character of the events of 1821.

The presentations, the individual session discussions and the general discussion after the closing statement contributed to a lively conference which brought together colleagues and participating followers from several countries.

Conference overview:

Sebastian Schütze / Christophe Erismann / Maria Stassinopoulou (University of Vienna): Welcome address

Panel 1: Empires, States and a New Reality

Chair: Yavuz Köse (Vienna)

Şükrü Ilıcak (Institute for Mediterranean Studies, Rethymno / Athens): The Greek Revolution in the Ottoman Imperial Framework

Stephan Kurz (Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna) / Karin Schneider (Library of the Austrian Parliament, Vienna): Der griechische Unabhängigkeitskampf und die Mächtekongresse

Miroslav Šedivý (University of Pardubice / University of Klagenfurt): Metternich, the Great Powers and the Greek Revolution

Anna Ransmayr (University Library of Vienna): Die Auswirkungen des Jahres 1821 auf die Organisationsstrukturen der Wiener Griechen

Nathalie Soursos (University of Vienna): 1821 und die Stiftungen der Wiener Griechen

Panel 2: Sociocultural Aspects of the Greek Revolution

Chair: Maria A. Stassinopoulou

Vaso Seirinidou (University of Athens): Zum Umgang mit Gewalt im revolutionären Griechenland

Dimitris Kousouris (University of Vienna): Confession and Revolution. The Catholic Communities of the Aegean

Ioannis Zelepos (University of Bochum): Philhellenismus ohne Säulen. Der griechische Unabhängigkeitskrieg Friedrich Müllers aus Alfdorf

Vasiliki Dimoula (University of Vienna): Rereading 1821 in Greek National Historiography. Spyridon Zambelios with Hegel

Closing statement and open discussion

Olga Katsiardi-Hering (University of Athens): The Greek Revolution. National and International Perspectives

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