Religion, Hellenism and Discourse in the Nineteenth Century Greek Revolution

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Abstract

The 1821 Greek Revolution has often been depicted as a conflict of Christians against Muslims. Previous studies; however, on the role of religion and identity in the Ottoman Empire have demonstrated that the conflict was much more complex, and was less the result of religious antagonism than of the challenges facing the empire as a whole at the time. This research; however, does not examine the discourse that developed as a result of the revolution, particularly as it concerns interactions between Greeks and the foreign nations. The failure to address this discourse has thus obscured an important element in the process of religious politicization and identity formation during the revolution and its impact on national identity in the years following it. My paper explores this discourse in greater detail with the intention of shedding light both on the environment in which the revolution emerged and the process by which religion became integrated in the social, political and historical identity of the Greeks.

Introduction

The 1821 Greek Revolution marked a turning point in Ottoman, European and Balkan relations. The preceding century had witnessed the emergence of a new social and political environment, in which states and societies were increasingly interacting and the relationships between and within the two underwent significant transformations. For the Ottoman state, which was dependent upon its ability to successfully navigate and direct these relationships, the effect of this new environment upon the Empire was substantial, disrupting the Ottoman economy, politics and society.

Additionally, sustained contact between foreigners and the Ottomans led to the development of new conceptions of the Empire and its inhabitants. Attempts to understand and familiarize the "other" often led to the formation of broad generalizations that obscured the complex nature of the societies encountered. People were classified into rigid categories defined by religion, ethnicity and nationality. Minorities in the Ottoman Empire were consequently portrayed as "oppressed" and separate communities that needed to be "liberated" from the Ottoman state by Europeans and Americans. The Enlightenment, and with it, a concurrent

renewed interest in the classical world had underscored this sentiment towards the Ottoman Greeks, who were portrayed by their supporters as the descendents of the ancient Greeks and whose great civilization, it was asserted, had been subsumed by the "barbarous" Ottomans.

It was in this environment, one in which the Ottoman state and Ottoman society as a whole were undergoing dramatic changes, that the Greek Revolution developed. The conflict was, in turn, depicted by the revolutionaries and their supporters as a battle against tyranny and oppression. Despite this, the reality of the conflict, especially in the initial stages, could not be as easily characterized and instead reflected the uncertain state of the Ottoman Empire. When the first rebellion broke out in 1821, it was largely uncoordinated and led by individuals whose motives were often inconsistent, reflecting the general frustration that was growing among all sectors of Ottoman society.[1] However, as will be discussed in the succeeding pages, as the hostilities between the Ottomans and the Greeks progressed, the conflict, and the ideological underpinnings of it, evolved and assumed new characteristics that carried religious overtones and reflected larger forces affecting the Ottomans and the world as a whole in the nineteenth century.

Previous scholars have studied the role of religion and identity in the Ottoman Empire and in the Greek case more specifically. This research, which will be reviewed below does not; however, examine the religious discourse that developed as a result of the revolution, particularly as it concerns interactions between Greeks and the foreign nations. The failure to address this discourse has thus obscured an important element in the process of religious politicization and identity formation during the revolution and its impact on national identity in the years following it.

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[1] Panagiotis Stathis, "From *Klephts* and *Armatoloi* to Revolutionaries," in *Ottoman Rule and the Balkans, 1760-1850,* ed. Antonis Anastasopoulos and Elias Kolovos (Rethymno: University of Crete, 2007), 179.

My paper will explore this discourse in greater detail with the intention of shedding light both on the environment in which the revolution emerged and the process by which religion became integrated in the social, political and historical identity of the Greeks. It will seek to show that within the environment created by greater interaction between the Ottoman Empire and foreigners, religion became a means of furthering non-religious aims and the resulting discourse, although built upon secular and strategic interests, nevertheless played an important role in shaping modern Greek identity. Major themes that emerged in this discourse were those that compared the Greek movement with ancient Greece and with conceptions of liberty, humanity, and nationality—concepts that the international community itself was grappling with. Although the discourse did not necessarily translate directly into actions on the part of the international powers, it served to strengthen conceptions by and of the different actors based on religious characteristics that became associated with the political and social ideology of the period. This, in turn, contributed to the development of Greek national identity, both as perceived by the Greeks themselves as well as by the Ottomans and foreign nations.

The Greek Revolution in an International Context

The international response to the Greek Revolution varied significantly according to the political and diplomatic interests of the international powers. Despite the discourse articulated by the revolutionaries and their international supporters, initially all foreign parties were wary of involvement in the hostilities, and it was not until the latter part of the conflict that the Russian and British governments, with the support of the French, became actively involved, eventually intervening in support of an independent Greek state. The lukewarm initial response to the revolution was the result of several competing factors, one of which was the desire of many European powers to adhere to the conditions set out by the Congress of Vienna. Furthermore,

these states faced the need to balance their internal interests, such as preventing rebellion and

stemming revolutionary sentiments in their own territories with external constraints and the

popular opinion of their constituents.[2]

The governments of France and Britain, which were experiencing challenges to their own

political and social structures sought to pursue diplomatic, as opposed to ideological, interests.

According to Allan Cunningham, British Foreign Secretary George Canning "was slow to

respond to the Greek cause, inconstant in the attention he gave it, frequently chagrined by the

behavior of the revolutionaries themselves, and only led forward on their behalf when larger

interests than those of the Greeks alone seemed to be involved…[he] was far more interested in

proceeding according to certain principles of diplomatic action than in achieving a definable

Greek goal."[3] In the United States, where the discourse, which was closely associated with the

American revolutionary experience, was arguably the strongest, the government was similarly

wary of involvement in European affairs, and preferred to focus on issues closer to home.

Nonintervention was particularly supported by John Quincy Adams, then secretary of state, who

persuaded Monroe to reconsider American involvement in the conflict.[4]

Russia, as the Ottomans' frequent adversary and the Greeks' fellow Orthodox, was

perhaps in the best position, or at least had the most to gain, from intervening on the Greeks'

behalf. But the state remained wary of the revolutionaries' actions and the international response

if they intervened. Speaking of the Greek rebels, Tsar Nicholas I declared, "I abhor the Greeks,

although they are my coreligionists. They have behaved in a shocking, blamable, even criminal

manner. I look upon them as subjects in open revolt against their legitimate sovereign. I do not

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[2] Paul Constantine Pappas, *The United States and the Greek War for Independence, 1821-1828,* (New York: Columbia Univ., 1985), 15-17.

[3] Allan Cunningham, "The Philhellenes, Canning, and Greek Independence," *Middle Eastern Studies* 14, no.2 (May 1978): 169, 176. http://jstor.org.

[4] Angelo Repousis, "The Cause of the Greeks: Philadelphia and the Greek War for Independence, 1821-1828," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* CXXIII, no.4 (Oct 1999): 338. http://jstor.org.

desire their enfranchisement…[I]t would be a very bad example for all other countries if they succeed in establishing it."[5] However, despite the Tsar's reservations, Russia also saw the Greek revolution as a means of furthering her own territorial interests in the Balkans. As Prousis writes, "Try as he might to isolate Europe's Greek affair from Russia's relationship with Turkey, Nicholas I found that the two issues interlocked. The Greek rising had precipitated Russo-Ottoman tensions, and the Akkerman Convention [at which the Ottoman sultan agreed to evacuate Ottoman troops from the Principalities and abide by treaty obligations] became a casualty of the Greek war. Furthermore, as the Eastern crisis of the late 1820s demonstrates, Nicholas I's disdain for Greek rebels did not prevent him from using their struggle to advance Russian designs."[6]

The British and the French, who were concerned about Russian influence in the region, feared that Russia might act without warning, forcing them into a conflict that they were unprepared to fight and sought a diplomatic solution to the problem that would satisfy both the Ottomans and the Russians. According to Cunningham, Canning, while recognizing the importance of Russian cooperation was, at least initially, opposed to war with the Ottomans. "The foreign secretary had, of course, wanted a measure of collaboration with Russia," Cunningham writes, "…[and] had warned the Turks in return that their obduracy might yet end Britain's neutrality and oblige her to stop the fighting in Greece by means of a naval intervention. But his chief hope in sending the Duke to Russia, as he explained to Granville, had been to restrain the Russians while keeping pressure on the Turks – 'to save the Greeks through the agency of the Russian name upon the fears of Turkey without a war…if the Tsar lost patience and proceeded against the Sultan, he would do so alone, abandoned by conservatives like

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[5] Theophilus C. Prousis, *Russian Society and the Greek Revolution.* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 1994), 53.
[6] Ibid*,* 53.

Metternich, but abandoned too by Britain, a country which 'would not see Turkish power destroyed.'"[7] To address the issue, representatives from Russia, Britain and France met in London in 1827. The result of the London Conference, as the meeting came to be known, was a treaty between the powers which agreed to the creation of an autonomous Greek state under Ottoman suzerainty, an agreement that London hoped would curb Russian influence while also preventing war and mollifying the Ottomans. The powers then issued an ultimatum to the Porte to meet the conditions outlined in the treaty or face military intervention. The Porte promptly rebuffed their offer, and when the European powers responded by destroying the Turco-Egyptian navy at the Battle of Navarino, the Sultan closed the Straits, repudiated the Akkerman Convention, and declared war on the Russians. The war between the Russians and the Ottomans concluded in 1829 with the Russians claiming victory, and resulted in the creation of an independent Greek state, albeit under foreign tutelage, in 1832.

The international powers' decision to intervene, thus, was less a result of ideological concerns, than of diplomatic interests that had evolved as the conflict progressed. However, despite their ambivalence, the discourse that emerged in concert with the conflict reflected a far more supportive and ideologically motivated environment. This discourse connected the Greeks' Christian religious identity with themes of liberty, humanity and nationality that were coursing throughout Europe, Russia and America. Furthermore, these themes were closely tied to the Hellenistic and Classical periods of Greek history, which connected earlier conceptions of Greece and the Greeks, such as Athenian democracy and Christian Byzantium, with the modern Greek experience. Religion, when associated with the above themes, became a conduit through which the revolutionaries could articulate their cause in the international environment. In this context, the conflict forced the Greeks, and the Ottomans, to reevaluate their identity, and

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[7] Cunningham, "The Philhellenes, Canning, and Greek Independence", 174.

cultivated the development of the associations being made through the discourse. Although it would be several decades before the Greek state took the form that it holds in the present day, the themes and discourse that emerged during the revolution were repeated in later years and contributed to nation's modern identity.

Ottomans and Greek Society: Divided or Shared?

Early literature documenting the Greek Revolution tends to emphasize the religious nature of the conflict. The impression that Orthodox Greeks were a single community occupying an ancient land and were motivated by oppression and religious persecution to rebel lasted well into the early twentieth century. Writing in the 1930s, Charles William Crawley in his book "The Question of Greek Independence," asserted that "a sense of injustice, a growing measure of prosperity and power, combined with religious zeal to bring about this revolt of a half-Eastern people…the people were ready at the bidding of their priests and of the itinerant preachers to join the ranks of the *klephts* and to drive out the infidel from Greece."[8] Similarly, George Finlay writing in the 1970s, asserted the following:

"The importance of the Greek race to the progress of European civilizations is not to be measured by its numerical strength, but by its social and religious influence in the East…They have thus constituted themselves the representatives of Eastern Christianity, and placed themselves in prominent opposition to their conquerors, the Ottoman Turks, who invaded Europe as apostles of the religion Mohammed. The Greeks, during their subjugation to the yoke of a foreign nation and a hostile religion, never forgot that the land which they inhabited was the land of their fathers; and their antagonism to their infidel masters, in the hour of their most abject servitude, presaged that their opposition must end in their destruction or deliverance. The Greek Revolution came at last. It delivered a Christian nation from subjection to Mohammedanism, founded a new state in Europe, and extended the advantages of civil liberty to regions where despotism had for ages been indigenous."[9]

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[8] William Charles Crawley, *The Question of Greek Independence* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 10.
[9] George Finlay, *History of the Greek Revolution and the Reign of King Otho* (London: Zeno Booksellers and Publishers, 1971), 1-2.

These early accounts construct a picture in which Greek and Turkish Ottomans inhabited a deeply sectarian society divided by religious and ethnic identity. Recent scholarship, however, has revealed that boundaries between people in the Ottoman Empire, despite early reconstructions of the period, were not static. On the contrary, identities were fluid, and relationships between people and the government were much more complex than early writers had asserted. European stereotypes proved to be huge inaccuracies. Furthermore, this scholarship has demonstrated that the Ottomans were much more flexible and tolerant of the empire's religious minorities than their foreign contemporaries and the early historians had suggested, and that the causes of the Greek Revolution were complex, involving political, social and economic aspects. Karen Barkey has asserted that it was precisely this flexibility that enabled the Ottomans to develop and maintain a powerful state. "Once they [the Ottomans] became brokers and brought together diverse populations, they understood better than anyone else that the acquisition of power and respect, the construction of a new order, necessitated working with differences, accepting them, and crossing over boundaries."[10]

Similarly, Mark Mazower has demonstrated that in certain areas of the empire, Christians, Jews and Muslims lived together relatively harmoniously and even at times shared similar beliefs. Speaking specifically of Salonica (Thessalonki), a port city located in northern Greece, Mazower writes that, "boundaries were constantly being subverted by accident or design and in a bustling commercial port in particular, religious communities could not be impermeably sealed from one another. Young Muslim boys served as apprentices to Christian shoemakers; Jewish and Muslim *hamals* and casual laborers scoured the docks together for work."[11] According to an eighteenth century traveler to the island of Chios, similar conditions existed

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[10] Karen Barkey, *Empires of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge Univ., 2008), 59.
[11] Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 65, 79.

elsewhere. "Here they [the Turkish inhabitants] all know how to speak Greek, and sometimes are even ignorant of their own tongue…the Greeks there have almost complete self-government, and the form of their administration is a sort of aristocracy…the governor has no power. For if he wants to carry out some act of authority, one sees the Turks unite with the Greeks to chase him out."[12] Another traveler, William Martin Leake, who visited northern Greece in 1809, wrote of the striking similarities between wealthy Christian Greeks and Turkish Muslims. "The best Greek houses differ not much in plan from the Turkish," Leake writes, "…but they are rather more comfortable, partly because the Greeks, especially the traveled merchants, have acquired some of the feelings of civilized Europe in this respect…[Greek manners] are almost identical to those of Turks, except in those points in which their respective religions have drawn a line…among the Turks and Musulman Albanians every tenth word of the Greek which they speak is Turkish, and this among the native Mahometans is often all the Turkish they know."[13]

Furthermore, power, and the corruption often associated with it, was not limited to Muslims. William Wilkinson, the British consul in Bucharest, describing Phanariot rule in the Danubian principalities in 1820, wrote that the "the princes of Wallachia and Moldavia, since the choice of them falls on the Greeks, receive their investiture at the Porte, with the pomp and ceremonies usually observed on creating *Pashahs* and *Veziers…*they make their oaths of allegiance to the Sultan…they go in solemn ostentatious procession to the patriarchal church, where prayers and ceremonies are performed similar to those formally observed at the inauguration of the Greek Emperors. They are accompanied to their principalities by Turkish officers appointed to install them…they assume, from the ceremonies which are practiced, the

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[12] Ambroise Firmin Didot, *Notes d'un Voyage fait dans le Levant en 1816 et 1817* (Paris, 1826) 136-7, *The Movement for Greek Independence 1770-1821: A Collection of Documents,* ed. Richard Clogg (New York: Harper and Row), 1976, 14.
[13] William Martin Leake, *Travels in Northern* Greece (London, 1835) IV 139-50; 205-10; 266-8; 269-70; 272-4, in Clogg, *The Movement for Greek Independence*, 11-12.

title of 'God's Anointed.'"[14] Similarly, the Englishman William Eton, wrote that "they [Phanariots] have in general all the vices of the Turks of the seraglio; treachery, ingratitude, cruelty, and intrigue, which stops at no means…they are nothing different from Turkish pashas in tyranny…and their pride is to appear in their dress like Turks."[15]

As the above passages demonstrate, there was considerable fluidity between power, religion, and identity in the Ottoman Empire. However, as Mazower cautions, "one should not, obviously, ignore the powerful evidence for the mutual contempt and hostility that could be projected across religious divides."[16] For the Ottomans, religion served as means of organizing and providing order to society, although non-Muslims were able to acquire and exert power, Islam retained a position of primacy, and was made known through taxation and regulations. As Barkey explains, "their [the Ottoman] perception of the "other" as the ethnic, religious, and heterodox communities in the empire…was tempered by the order that could be established over it. That is, if the "other" could be organized and channeled for productive activity in the ways that imperial rulers could control, state actors were accommodating. However, if the "other" was assembled in ways that escaped and defied organization, in loose, ramified and contentious, somewhat organized and concealed networks, estranged and detached from state networks, the center declared the "other" to be heretical and dangerous, and pursued ways to mobilize a legitimate Islamic discourse and a state centered imperial project."[17]

Globalization, Identity and Revolution

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[14] William Wilkinson, *An account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia: with various political observations relating to them* (London, 1820) 46-59, in Clogg, *The Movement for Greek Independence,* 47.
[15] William Eton, *A Survey of the Turkish Empire…*(London, 1799), in Clogg, *The Movement for Greek Independence*, 46.
[16] Mazower, *Salonica,* 65.
[17] Barkey, *Empires of Difference,* 290.

During the eighteenth century, as the Ottomans began to face a series of challenges brought about by the changing international landscape, their ability to retain order and legitimacy among the empire's diverse inhabitants, began to disintegrate. The government and economy faced challenges from the development of life-term tax farming, European merchants and governments, and the rise of newly empowered political communities, such as the provincial nobles and minorities.[18] It was in this context that the Greek Revolution emerged. Recent scholarship, acknowledging these conditions, has discerned that there were a number of indirect and direct causes for the revolution, almost all of which are connected to the weakening authority of the Ottoman Empire and the arrival and intervention of foreigners and their governments. Religion, however, as a motivating factor has remained largely absent from this literature. When hostilities finally broke out in 1821 between the Greeks and the Ottomans, the force behind the revolution, significantly, was not comprised of intellectuals, religious leaders, or merchants, but of the *klephts*[groups of armed bandits not associated with the Ottoman government], and *armatoli* [armed corps empowered by the Ottoman government to maintain law and order in the countryside]*,* who, as Panagiotis Stathis[19] asserts in the passage below, had little interest in the political or social movements being advanced by the merchant and educated classes:

"In the Revolution of 1821 the chief and most significant part of the revolutionary armed forces, for the duration of the Revolution, originated from the *klephts* and *armatoloi* of the pre-revolutionary period…the goals of those who decided to join in were not uniform. For the more impoverished ones, the war provided a means of survival with opportunities for social ascent; for others who were more powerful, the aim was to regain previous positions and prestige. For the incumbent *armatoloi,* the motive was the maintenance and improvement of their social status. For others, those who had close ties to Ali Pasha, it seems that their wish to support him in his conflict with the Sultan played an important role in their decision to take part. What is beyond any doubt is that the overwhelming majority of the klephts and *armatoloi* did not seek changes in the social structure through their participation in the Revolution. Quite the contrary, they sought to maintain the existing social structure, only that, with the eventual withdrawal of the Muslims and within the new Christian political entity to be formed, they envisaged taking the place

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[18] Barkey, *Empires of Difference,* 193-296
[19]Panagiotis Stathis, "From *Klephts* and *Armatoloi*," 167-181.

previously held by the Ottoman elite. In other words, they wanted to become pashas and *beys* in the place of the original Muslim pashas and *beys.*"[20]

Although the revolution was supported by many Greek intellectuals and merchants, the main military force of the revolution did not have a clear political or religious agenda, only the goal of furthering their own interests. Furthermore, as the revolution unfolded deep divisions emerged between the intellectuals, the *Philiki Etairia* (the organization, largely organized by merchants, credited with much of the revolutionary activities), the *klephts* and the *armatoloi,* and the peasants, all of whom, had different interests invested in the movement.[21] According to Misha Glenny, "The most significant operational dispute was the gulf separating the engine of the revolution, the *klephtic* and *armatolik* military leaders known as the *kapoi* and the civilian leadership," Glenny writes, "the primary concern of the *kapoi ,* beyond the overthrow of the Turks, was the consolidation and expansion of their local power. The *kapoi* had the vaguest notion of a Greek national identity and certainly no concept of a nation state. They were equally unaware of the Hellenic revival inspired by the Greek diaspora and inspired by the philhellenes."[22]

Furthermore, not all of the inhabitants who fought were ethnic Greeks, and not all ethnic Greeks joined the cause.[23] The religious establishment itself was divided, the Greek Orthodox patriarch opposed the Revolution (although he was nonetheless executed by Ottoman authorities for suspected revolutionary sympathies and his inability to maintain order amongst the Orthodox population),[24] and there was often significant opposition by the Orthodox clergymen to the revolution, who saw it as an affront to both their political and spiritual authority. A statement

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[20] Stathis, "From *Klephts* and *Armatoloi*", 179.
[21] Misha Glenny, *The Balkans* (New York: Viking, 1999), 29.
[22] Ibid*,* 31.
[23] Victor Roudometof, "From Rum Millet to Greek Nation: Enlightenment, Secularization, and National Identity in Ottoman Balkan Society, 1453-1821," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 16, (1998): http://muse.jhu.edu, 31.
[24]Ibid, 31.

issued by the Patriarch of Jerusalem in 1798 warned of the treachery associated with liberal and

revolutionary ideas:

"The teachings of these new libertines, Christian brethren, are deceitful. And beware: guard
steadfastly your ancestral faith and, as followers of Jesus Christ, resolutely give your obedience
to the civil government, which grants you that which alone is necessary to the present life...These
newly-appeared teachings, being hostile to the Holy Scriptures and to the Apostolic teaching,
even if they were to enable you to obtain all the wealth of the world they should still be hated as
a device of the fiendish devil, ever alert for the spiritual destruction of Christians. How much
more so when these promises are false and fraudulent, and the consequences are not wealthy and
blessings but poverty, misfortune and disorder, and what is aimed by this freedom is a hated
oligarchy and tyrant, as experience has shown."[25]

P.M. Kitromilides in his essay "The Enlightenment and the Greek Cultural Tradition" has

asserted that although the Orthodox Church had initially fostered enlightenment ideals of

education and classical studies, the Greek identity that emerged was ultimately secular and in

direct opposition with Church authority. "It was an identity premised on the espousal of the

classical heritage but directed this time against the Orthodox tradition that had nurtured that

heritage for so long. In short it was a modern *secular* identity premised on a reconnection of

Modern Greek society with classical republican Hellenism."[26] Similarly, Victor Roudometof in

his essay "From *Rum Millet* to Greek Nation", has asserted that the importation of the European

Enlightenment and development of a "Greek Enlightenment" in the later part of the nineteenth

century, led to a reconceptualization of the Orthodox *Rum millet* into a secular "Hellenic"

national identity. According to Roudometof, a unified Greek identity was not fully developed

until after Greece became a state and other Orthodox ethnic minorities began to agitate for the

creation of independent states.[27]

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[25] Patriarch Anthimos of Jerusalem, *Syntetheisa para tou Makariotatou Patriarkhous...*(Constantinople, 1798), in
Clogg, *The Movement for Greek Independence*, 56.
[26] Paschalis Kitromilides, "The Enlightenment and the Greek Cultural Tradition," *History of European Ideas* 36.1,
(2009): http://www.sciencedirect.com.
[27] Roudometof, "From *Rum Millet* to Greek Nation."

Thus the revolution presented the Greeks with competing forces and ideologies that made it difficult to determine a single cause, motivation, or shared sentiment that led to conflict. Despite numerous attempts by the revolutionaries to form a coordinated central organization, the movement remained largely divided throughout the revolution. It was only upon the intervention of Europeans, who were motivated by their own political and economic interests, that the Greeks were granted independence in 1829.

The Ottoman Response

The Revolution presented a considerable challenge to the Ottoman government as well. While the Sultan necessarily sought to suppress the revolt and prevent further rebellion—a number of Greeks were imprisoned, eliminated from state service and had their property confiscated—he also sought to retain the established order and prevent the conflict from turning into a sectarian battle, and condemned accounts of unwarranted plunder and violence. According to Virginia Aksan in her article "Ottoman State Transformation in a Globalizing World," "Mahmud II rejoiced at the suppression of the rebels, but he was equally incensed by the excessive violations of the Janissaries and their officers. He responded fiercely to the dispatches of his commanders, labeling insolent armed bands 'plunderers, bandits or rebels…Mahmud II saw restoring order (*nizam*) as his absolute right, without outside interference. For the Ottomans, the Greeks had violated the *zimmi* pact [the system by which the Ottoman state allowed minorities to largely self-govern their communities with the understanding that they would maintain order and respect the authority of the central government] that regulated relations between Muslims and non-Muslims."[28] Aksan quotes a public manifesto that was issued to all

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[28] Virginia Aksan, "The Ottoman Military and State Transformation in a Globalizing World," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, 27.2 (2007): http://muse.jhu.edu, 269.

diplomatic representatives in Istanbul in 1827, in which the sultan asserts that Greeks are integral

members of Ottoman society and underscores that the present conflict is not a religious battle,

but one against rebels who undermine Ottoman authority:

"[The Greeks], from generation to generation, have been tributary subjects to the sublime
Porte,…[and] have been treated like Mussulman in every respect, and as to every thing which
regards their property, the maintenance of their personal security, and the defense of their honor;
that they have been particularly, under the glorious reign of the present sovereign, loaded with
benefits far exceeding those which their ancestors enjoyed…everything relating to [Ottoman
sovereignty rests exclusively upon its holy legislations, to which the rebels fall to be treated. The
Ottomans are (Porte is) merciful, and has never refused to pardon, and…replace them as before
under the aegis of its protection. The measures which the sublime Porte has adopted from the
commencement, and which it still pursues against the Greek insurgents, ought not to make the
war be considered a war of religion, For those measures do not extend to all people in general,
for they have for their sole object to suppress revolt…The sublime Porte has never refused
pardon to those who submit."[29]

Hakan Erdem in his essay *'Do Not Think of the Greeks as Agricultural Laborers'*,

supports Aksan's argument, asserting that "there is enough data to establish that the main

concern of the Ottoman administrators was to force or persuade the *reaya* to assume their status

as *zimmis.*"[30] He cites an incident in which Ottoman marines, who had plundered a Greek town,

were censured by the grand vizier and disowned by the janissary *aga* and his officers. According

to Erdem, the vizier concluded that "plundering and killing the poor harmless *reaya* without any

reason and in violation of the established patterns could not be condoned at all. Otherwise, all the

reaya would be in sorrow and terror. If they escalated such a course of action and infected other

regions, 'the law and order of the land would deteriorate' beyond any control. Moreover, as these

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[29] Ottoman Manifesto, 1827, cited in Aksan, "The Ottoman Military and State Transformation in a Globalizing World," 270.

[30] Hakan Erdem, "'Do Not Think of the Greeks as Agricultural Laborers': Ottoman Responses to the Greek War of Independence," in *Citizen and the Nation-state In Greece and Turkey,* ed. Faruk Birtek and Thalia Dragonas (New York: Routledge, 2005), 72-73.

soldiers were intent on nothing but plunder they would not be of any use at all in suppressing the rebellion."[31]

However, despite the attempt by the Ottoman government and local officials to, at times, prevent escalation of the revolution into a religious conflict that could threaten the state's authority and its relationship with the empire's minority communities, they also employed measures that were in direct contradiction to that goal, and increasingly incorporated religion into their own discourse. The inclusion of religion was partially a reflection of the prominent, largely administrative role, that it had played within the Empire since the fifteenth century, but it was also a reflection of the changing landscape that had been brought about in the years leading up to the revolution. Relationships between the minority communities and state were strained by foreigners who sought to strengthen their own relationships with these communities. This was particularly evident in the field of commerce, where through contracts with foreign powers the Ottoman government was forced to cede special privileges to merchants of religious minorities, which disadvantaged Muslims and drew divisions between religious communities. This in turn cultivated the politicization of these groups or *millets*, and was reflected in the Ottomans response.[32] As Barkey explains, "the state reaction under such conditions of increasing Christian privilege and nationalist mobilization and decreasing Muslim status and dominance, as well as the reconstitution of a more homogeneous Muslim population base across the empire, was to dispense with diversity as an asset of the empire. Once diversity was recast as a weakness, another essential component of empire was stripped away. As such, economic, political, and

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[31] Ibid, 71.
[32] Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World,* (New York: Cambridge Univ., 2001), 98-129.

religious transformations were occurring, and ruling groups were reconfiguring ways to maintain legitimate rule, moving toward a more uniform and national legitimacy."[33]

While the politicization of religion with the Ottoman Empire during the eighteenth and nineteenth century has been studied previously, these authors, like Barkey and Erdem, tend to focus on the politicization of Islam. Scholars, such as Raymond Detrez[34], Bruce Masters[35], and Fatma Müge Göçek, who have focused specifically on the Greeks and other minorities during the period, have alternatively placed a stronger emphasis on the emergence of nationalism without addressing the religious discourse employed by the Greeks specifically. For instance, Göçek in her essay "Decline of the Ottoman Empire and the Emergence of Greek, Armenian, Turkish, and Arab Nationalisms," has asserted that the Ottoman *millet* system created "ethnoreligious" categories, by which cultural and religious elements combined to create a shared identity that separated them from other ethnoreligious groups. Referring specifically to the Greek and Armenian communities, Göçek writes that the two became "ethnoreligious categories in the empire as the religious elements identifying these minority groups combined with cultural ones…restrictions[on the groups], whether present in theory or practice delineated and maintained the boundaries of minorities as a separate social group and led them instead to develop social ties with other non-Muslims who were either members of other Ottoman minorities or with foreign residents who were often connected to European powers."[36] These ties, she asserts, would in turn foster the development of distinct national identities.

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[33] Barkey, 289.

[34] Raymond Detrez, "Relations between Greeks and Bulgarians in the Pre-Nationalist Era: The *Guildas* in Plodiv," in *Greece and the Balkans*, ed. Dimitris Tziovas (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 30-47.

[35] Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World.*

[36] Fatma Müge Göçek, "Decline of the Ottoman Empire and the Emergence of Greek, Armenian, Turkish, and Arab Nationalisms," in *Social Constructions of Nationalism in the Middle East,* ed. Fatma Muge Gocek (New York: SUNY Albany, 2002), 18-19.

While these previous studies have provided insightful analyses of the politicization of

Islam and early Greek nationalism, and presented readers with an alternative means of explaining

what early observers simplified as an ideological battle between Ottoman oppression and liberty,

they fail to address the presence of religion itself in the conflict and the discourse that surrounded

it. This discourse is important because it demonstrates the process by which religion became

closely associated with a largely secular movement, and the contribution of that discourse both

during the nineteenth century and later as the Greeks constructed a modern state and national

identity. Major themes that emerged within this discourse—liberty vs. tyranny, civilization vs.

barbarism, Christianity vs. Islam—reflected predominant social and political movements of the

period that had been spreading throughout Europe and America and had begun to make inroads

within the Empire in the years leading up to the revolution.

Foreigners, Greeks, and Discourse

Travelers to Greece during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century had been

inspired by renewed interest in the Classical and Hellenistic world brought about by the

Enlightenment. These travelers, often referred to as Philhellenes, sought to visit the places where

they believed European civilization had its roots. Greece, along with Italy, was portrayed as the

birthplace of the civilized world and the home to the arts and ideas that these modern travelers

praised. Robert Wood, an Englishman, who toured Greece in the mid-eighteenth century, wrote

that "it is impossible to consider with indifference those countries which gave birth to letters and

arts, where soldier, orators, philosophers, poets and artists have shown the boldest and happiest

flights of genius, and done the gravest honor to human nature. Circumstances of climate and

situation, otherwise trivial, became interesting from that connection with great men, and great

actions, which history and poetry have given them: the life of Miltiades or Leonidas could never

be read with so much pleasure as on the plains of Marathon or at the straits of Thermopylae."[37]A half-century later Nicholas Biddle, an American, wrote that he "had long felt the desire to visit Greece. The fate of a nation whose history was the first brilliant object that met my infancy, and the first foundation of my early studies was so interesting that I had resolved to avail myself of any opportunity to witnessing it. The soil of Greece is sacred to Genius and to letters."[38]

Increased interaction with foreigners and the spread of the Enlightenment throughout parts of the Ottoman Empire, had elicited a similar interest in Greece's past among educated and wealthy Greeks, some of whom traveled or studied abroad in Europe. Writing of his visit to France in 1788, the Greek intellectual Adamantios Korais expressed remorse that Athens no longer held its early stature and blamed the Ottomans for its decline. "I have been in the illustrious city of Paris," he writes, "the home of all the arts and sciences, the new Athens…all this would amaze anyone, but for a Greek, who knows that two thousand years ago in Athens his ancestors achieved a similar (perhaps a higher) level of wisdom, this amazement must be mingled with melancholy, when he reflects that such virtues are not only absent from Greece today, but have been replaced by a thousand evils…we are governed by, alas, by whom? By riff-raff (*hamals)* and camel-drivers or monkish barbarians, who are worse than the external tyrants for those, like wolves, can be guarded against, but who can escape those in the guise of sheep?"[39]

When the Revolution broke out in 1821, philhellenic sentiments did not necessarily translate into direct action. As Alan Cunningham has written, Philhellenes were often content "to enjoy themselves, to indulge their classical enthusiasms…it was a craze, a game, a sentimental

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[37] Robert Wood, *The Ruins of Palmyra, 1753,* cited in Ian Macgregor Morris, "'To Make a New Thermopylae': Hellenism, Greek Liberation, and the Battle of Themopylae," *Greece and Rome,* 47, no. 2, (Oct. 2000): 214. http://jstor.org.
[38] Nicholas Biddle, "First Greek Journal," 1806, ed. R.A. McNeal, *Nicholas Biddle in Greece: the Journals and Letters of 1806* (University Park: Penn State, 1993) 49.
[39] Adamantios Korais, Letter to Dimitrios Lotos, Sept 15, 1788, in Clogg, *The Movement for Greek Independence,* 47.

journey, a profoundly moving homage, a state of mind, a fad, an affection."[40] And, many

European travelers, like Wood and Biddle, often lamented the degradation of modern Greece. "A

traveler is disappointed and mortified at the very few and imperfect remains which Greece can

offer to curiosity," Biddle asserted, "… there are few places which retain more than enough to

indicate their position, and to verify in the midst of their humility, the history of their

greatness."[41] However, the interest they aroused in Greece and the parallels drawn between the

modern and ancient Greeks became a platform on which the revolutionaries could garner support

for independence. As the movement progressed, supporters of the Greeks, many of whom had

studied the Classics, employed these parallels in their discourse.

Committees were set up to raise money to send abroad and to lobby governments to

intervene on behalf of the Greeks. Artists at home produced plays, poems and paintings that

depicted the Greeks' struggle, drawing comparisons with the Ancients, and called upon their

audiences to show their support. Some foreigners, like the English poet and Philhellene George

Gordon Lord Byron even traveled to Greece and took up arms against the Ottomans.   In

Russia, as elsewhere, prominent writers used their work as a means of expressing these

sentiments. Aleksandr Pushkin, eulogized the Greeks modern struggle. "Arise, O Greece, arise!,"

he wrote, "Not in vain did you exert your strength, not in vain did battle shake Olympus, Pindus,

and Thermopylae. Beneath the ancient shade of their peaks and upon the marmoreal graves of

glorious Pericles and Athens, youthful freedom has arisen. The land of heroes and gods has

broken the fetters of slavery, inspired by singing the ardent verses of Tyrtaeus, Byron, and

Rigas."[42]

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[40] Alan Cunningham, "The Philhellenes, Canning, and Greek Independence," 152-153.
[41] Biddle, "First Greek Journal," 230.
[42] Alexander Pushkin, *Polnae sobranie sochinenii,* 3: 148, 504-4, cited in Theophilus C. Prousis, *Russian Society and the Greek Revolution,* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Univ., 1994), 157.

In France, the newspaper *Le Constitutionnel,* in reviewing a play depicting the heroism of Leonidas, a king of Sparta, compared the ancient Thermopylae, at which Leonidas lost his life fighting the Persians, with the modern Greek conflict, writing that "the prodigies of modern Greece make credible the prodigies of ancient Greece, and the heroism of the Greeks of the nineteenth century in fact surpasses the pompous fictions that the genius of Homer lent in the past to the victors of the Trojans. Achilles, Ajax, Patroclus are resurrected from their ancient ashes; we have witnessed the re-enactment of the passage of Thermopylae with equal glory and more success; for, more fortunate than the three hundred Spartans of Leonidas, the heroes led by Canaris at Chios and at Tenedos have shown courage, devotion, and skills comparable to the patriotic devotion of these three hundred brave men who knew how to die for their country."[43] In Britain, the poet Percy Shelley, who had been influenced by Byron, asserted that "We are all Greeks – our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts, have their root in Greece. But for Greece, Rome would have spread no illumination with her arms and we might still have been savages and idolaters; or what is worse might have arrived at such a stagnant and miserable state of social institution as China and Japan possess…The modern Greek is a descendent of those glorious beings whom the imagination almost refuses to figure to itself as belonging to our kind, and he inherits much of their sensibility, their rapidity of conception, their enthusiasm, and their courage."[44]

These comparisons were not limited to artists. Politicians and revolutionaries also incorporated them into their discourse. Albert Gallatin, an American diplomat and politician, in a speech honoring the Marquis de Lafayette, who was a strong advocate for Greek independence,

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[43] *Le Constitutionnel,* 21 May 1822, pg. 4, cited in Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, *French Images from the Greek War of Independence 1821-1830,* (New Haven: Yale Univ., 1989), 57.

[44] Percy Shelley, *Hellas,* cited in William St. Clair, "Byron in Greece," ed. Tom Winnifrith and Penelope Murray, *Greece Old and New* (New York: St. Martin's, 1983), 164.

asserted that "The flame of liberty has spread from the Peruvian Andes, from the extreme western boundary of the civilized world to its most remote confines in the East. Greece, the cradle of European civilization and of our own,— Greece, the classical land of firstborn liberty, had for centuries, groaned under the most intolerable yoke. Her sons believed to be utterly debased by slavery, degenerated, lost beyond redemption: their name had become a by-word of reproach, themselves an object of contempt rather than of pity. Suddenly they awaken from their lethargy, they fly to arms, they break their chains asunder…"[45]

The pre-revolution Greek intellectual Rigas Velestinlis in his anthem sought to elicit revolutionary sentiment by bringing forth the ancient experience and comparing it with the need to revive the present state of the Greeks.

Sparta, Sparta, why in slumbers
Lethargic dost thou lie?
Awake and join thy numbers
With Athens, old ally!
Leonidas recalling,
That chief of ancient song,
Who sav'd ye once from falling,
The terrible! The strong!
Who made that bold diversion
In old Thermopylae,
And warring with the Persian,
To keep his country free;
With his three hundred waging
The battle, long he stood,
And like lion raging,
Expir'd in seas of blood[46]

Similarly, Alexandros Ypsilantis, who led the initial uprising that led to the Greek War for Independence, in his proclamation of revolt compared the Greeks' current struggle with those

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[45] Thomas Jefferson, Letter to A.D. Coray, October 31, 1923, in *America in Greece: A Traditional Policy,* ed. David M. Robinson (New York: Anatolia Press, 1948), 40.

[46] Rigas Velestinlis, *Hellenic Marseillaise,* 1798, cited in Ian Macgregor Morris, "'To Make a New Thermopylae': Hellenism, Greek Liberation, and the Battle of Themopylae," *Greece and Rome,* 47, no. 2, (Oct. 2000): 227. http://jstor.org.

of the ancient Greeks and likened the ancient Persians, an adversary of the ancient Greeks, to the

Ottomans.

"Fight for the faith of the Motherland!," he cried, "Time has come, O Hellenes…Europe will
admire out valor. Our tyrants, trembling and pale, will flee before us. The enlightened people of
Europe are occupied in restoring the same well being of our forefathers towards them, desire the
liberation of Greece. We, seemingly worthy of ancestral virtue and of the present century, are
hopeful that we will achieve their defense and help…Unite, then, O brave and magnanimous
Greeks! Let national phalanxes be formed, let patriotic legions appear and you will see those old
giants of despotism fall by themselves, before our triumphant banners…Let us then once again,
O brave and magnanimous Greeks, invite Liberty to the classical land of Greece! Let us do battle
between Marathon and Thermoplyae! Let us fight on the tombs of our fathers, who, so as to
leave us free, fought and died there. The blood of Tyrants is acceptable to the shades of
Epameinodas the Theban and of Thrasybolous the Athenian, who crushed thirty tyrants, to the
shades of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, who destroyed the yoke of Peisistratus, to certainly to
those of Miltiades and Themistocles, of Leonidas and the Three Hundred, who cut down the
innumerable armies of the barbarous Persians, who most barbarous and inhuman descendants we
today, with very little effort, are about to annihilate completely. To arms then, friends! The
Motherland calls us."[47]

The battle that the Greeks were fighting was, in the words of the revolutionaries and their

international supporters, one of barbarism against civilization. The Ottomans, in occupying the

ancient Greek lands, they asserted, had subsumed the great culture of the Greeks and inhibited its

development. According to Cunningham, foreigners, although disappointed with the present state

of Greece, believed that 'liberation' from Ottoman 'ignominy' and 'despotism' would allow

them to once again prosper. "In a country like England," he writes, "there was a strong feeling

that the condition of political independence itself would rekindle the ancient virtues. This may

have been a romantic opinion, but it was held by the Benthamites too, who thought of themselves

as pragmatic folk. The removal of the Turks, followed by the emancipation of the Greeks from

their distressing condition of ignorance, would produce a renaissance of democracy and

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[47] Alexandros Ypsilantis, Proclamation of Revolt in the Danubian Principalities, February 24, 1821, in Clogg , *The Movement for Greek Independence*, 201.

prosperity in the immortal land. It was strongly implied that the world just needed light, as if

ignorance only, and not vested interests also, resisted change."[48]

The belief that Ottoman rule had thwarted Greek prosperity and that the Greeks could be

relieved of this imperial burden with foreign assistance was echoed in other countries as well,

including Russia, where the government had often showed ambivalence to the Greek's plight.

Grigorii Strogonov, Russia's ambassador to Constantinople, who favored supporting the Greek

cause, in a letter to Tsar Nicholas I asserted that it was in Russia's national interest to aid the

revolutionaries, writing that declaring war on the Porte would "emancipate from Ottoman

oppression Christian peoples who would then become Russia's natural allies."[49] Similarly

Russian General Ivan V. Sabaneev in a letter to General Pavel D. Kiselev, wrote that "the

Greeks, until now scorned, appear to be the worthy descendents of Aristides, Themistocles…and

others,"[50] and in a second letter Aleksandr Rudzevich, a military commander, asserted that the

Greeks were fighting against "a barbarous yoke which they have borne for so long,"[51] but with

Russia's assistance could be relieved of this burden.

Furthermore, particular among liberals, but also among some conservatives, the conflict

was perceived as one of tyranny against liberty and humanity. The Greeks were portrayed as the

bearers of freedom and virtue and the unfortunate victims of Ottoman cruelty and oppression.

This was particularly true in the United States where strong connections were drawn between the

Americans' own experience against the British and the Greeks' present battle against the

Ottomans. The discourse between Greeks and Americans often emphasized a shared

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[48] Cunningham, "Philhellenes, Canning, and Greek Independence", 155.
[49] Grigorii Strogonov, Letter to Nicholas 1, January 1826, cited in Theophilus C. Prousis, *Russian Society and the Greek Revolution,* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Univ., 1994), 38.
[50] Ivan V. Sabaneev, Letter to General Pavel D. Kiselev, February/March 1821, cited in Prousis, *Russian Society and the Greek Revolution,* 41.
[51] Aleksandr Ia. Rudzevich, Letter to General Kiselev, March 1821, cited in Prousis, *Russian Society and the Greek Revolution,* 41.

understanding of these experiences, highlighting their common fight against tyranny and oppression. The prominent revolutionary Alexandros Mavrocordatos in a letter sent to Edward Everett, the secretary of the U.S. Greek Committee, in 1824, asserts that their present struggle against the Ottomans had been inspired by the U.S. struggle for independence. "You know Greece, but you know it as oppressed by the Turkish yoke," he writes, "Everything is now changed. We too, in imitation of the Americans, have resolved to recover out liberty and assume a place among civilized nations. God grant that we may be as fortunate as you in the result. The success which the Greeks have obtained both on land and at sea in the campaign just closed, inspires us with confident hopes, and there is now no one as formerly, who will pretend to question out independence."[52] Similarly Ionnias Capodistrias, a Greek revolutionary with ties to Russia, in a letter to the U.S. President John Adams in 1827, expressed appreciation for American interest in the Greeks' plight, writing that "I deem myself exceedingly happy in having been selected as the organ of this communication; and I pray God, the Protector of America and Greece, to afford me, in future, other opportunities of witnessing the reciprocal sentiments of two nations, to one of whom I belong, and offer to the other the sentiments of my admiration and the homage of my gratitude"[53]

Correspondences and newspapers articles written by Americans emphasized that the war being fought was just and right and that Americans in the name of liberty and humanity should act on behalf of the Greeks. Several city and state governments also voiced their support for the Greeks and formed local committees to raise funds for humanitarian efforts. For example, an 1824 resolution passed by the state of South Carolina and communicated to the House of Representatives expressed sympathy for the Greeks, stating that "The State of South Carolina

[52] Alexandros Mavrocordatos, Letter to Edward Everett, 1825, in Robinson, *America in Greece,* 25.
[53] Ionnias Capodistrias, Letter to the President of the United States, 1827, in Robinson, *America in Greece*, 32.

regards with deep interest the noble and patriotic struggle of the modern Greeks to rescue from

the foot of the infidel and the barbarian the hallowed land of Leonidas and Socrates; and would

hail with pleasure the recognition by the American Government, of the Independence of

Greece."[54] Similarly, a resolution passed by the state of Maryland asserted that "we view with

deep solicitude and anxious interest the noble and heroic struggle which the Grecians are waging

against their relentless and barbarous tyranny; and that we experience a high gratification in

believing he has forever lost his power over them and that Greece will again resume an

independent station among the nations of the earth."[55]

In Europe and Russia the depiction of the Greek revolution as a conflict between liberty

and tyranny served the dual purpose of aiding the Greek cause while also serving as a platform

for politicians and activists to further political interests in their home countries. According to

Theophilus C. Prousis, writing of the Russian Decembrists' support for the Greeks, "[their]

philhellenism was also rooted in their state patriotism and national consciousness. Like many

nineteenth-century liberal nationalists, especially in eastern and central Europe, the Decemberist

liberals were ardent nationalists for whom political ideology and national expansion were the

chief means to build a viable nation-state…The Greeks were not just rebels but fellow Orthodox

Christians who were traditional allies against the Turk and whose liberation under Russian

auspices would benefit state interests."[56] This is exemplified in a letter that the Decembrist

conspirator Petr G. Kakhovskii, wrote to the Nicholas I, in which he, in urging support for the

Greeks, states that "A single feeling enlivens all peoples in Europe and however much it is

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[54] State of South Carolina, Communicated to the House of Representatives, January 2, 1824, in Robinson, *America in Greece*, 70.

[55] State of Maryland, appeared in *New York Commercial Advertiser,* Dec 23, 1823, in Robinson, *America in Greece,* 71.

[56] Prousis, *Russian Society and the Greek Revolution,* 47.

persecuted, it is impossible to destroy it: compressed gunpowder acts all the more powerfully!

As long as there are people, there will also be the desire for freedom."[57]

In England the political manifestation of the conflict was reflected in the composition of

the London Greek Committee, whose members, according to Cunningham, "had records or

intentions as reformers of one kind or another, and many had done battle for parliamentary

reform, economic reform, administrative reform, slavery abolition, overhaul of the criminal code,

and other such causes…The parliamentary members of the [sic] Committee were Whigs,

radicals, Benthamites, and therefore seen by the majority party as men who would forever find

causes, if for no other reason than to harass the government with them."[58] And, the French writer

Auguste Jal, rebuked the French government for its indifference towards the Greeks, exclaiming,

"What! These are the last remains of a rich a valiant population! The most beautiful area in
Greece is devastated…churches have been profaned, the steps of the sanctuary are soaked with
Christian blood…Cruel Osmanli!...Christians even more cruel! How much do I loathe you! How
do I despise this ungenerous and shameful policy that forces you to sacrifice the last of the
Greeks without thinking of assisting him…But liberty frightens you, and you want no part in the
dispute for it against Oriental despotism! How do I admire you! And you pretend that you are
Christians! Christians! You who let your brothers die! Christians! You whom the idea of
independence frightens! Christians! You who pretend to ignore that the Gospel is the code of the
oppressed! No, you are friends of oppression…"[59]

Religion and Discourse

The revolutionary discourse, as is reflected in the above passage, significantly, also

adopted a religious tone that portrayed the Greeks as defenders not only of liberty and humanity,

but of Christianity. This discourse, seemingly ignoring the deep divisions between Orthodox and

non-Orthodox that had existed for centuries, combined the characteristics associated with both

the Classical Greeks and the contemporary political and social conditions of the countries

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[57] Petr G. Kakhovskii, Letter to Nicholas I, cited in Prousis, *Russian Society and the Greek Revolution,* 48-49.
[58] Cunningham, "Philhellenes, Canning, and Greek Independence," 156.
[59] Auguste Jal,. *L. Artiste et le philosophe,* pg. 48-49, cited in Kallmyer, *French Images from the Greek War of Independence,* 36.

involved with religion, depicting the conflict as a war against the tyrannical barbaric Muslim

Ottomans. Although all the actors, which spanned several nations and sectors of society, had

different motivations and perceptions of the conflict, many, as will be evident below, employed

similar language that evoked an image of righteous Christians against iniquitous Muslims. Much

of this discourse drew a strong connection between Islam and Ottoman barbarism, contending

that it was Islam that served as the source of the perceived cruelty of the Ottomans and the of the

empire's decadence. Both foreigners and Greeks frequently referred to the Muslim Ottomans by

derogatory terms that emphasized their religious identity, including, among other things "the

"blood thirsty…followers of Mohammed,"[60] "enemies of the Christian name,"[61] and "infidels."[62]

Similarly, in an article that appeared in the 1821 edition of the *Connecticut Courant* the author

berates the Turkish Ottomans for their actions against Christians.

"They are furious, bigoted, and persecuting enemies of Christianity," he writes. "How often, and
for how many centuries, have their swords been red with Christian blood! How often have the
Turks persecuted to death, all who acknowledge Christ and him crucified. Did they not for ages
raise the Crescent against the Cross and advance against Christendom? Has not all Christendom
been in self-defense, compelled to league against the Turks?."[63]

The discourse also emphasized the importance of defending Greece, as a Christian land,

from Muslim conquerors, who were destructing Greek culture and society. For example, in his

Proclamation of Revolt, Ypsilantis cries, "Fight for the Faith of the Motherland! The time has

come, O Hellenes...It is time to overthrow this insufferable yoke, to liberate the Motherland, to

throw down the [Turkish] Crescent from the clouds, in order to raise up the symbol by which we

always conquer, I mean the Cross, and thus rid the Motherland and our Orthodox faith from the

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[60] Niles' Weekly Register, Address from the Greeks at Constantinople to the Brethren in London, May 25, 1822, in "*Founded on Freedom and Virtue": Documents Illustrating the Impact in the United States of the Greek War of Independence*, ed. Constantine G. Hatzidimitriou (New York: Aristide D. Caratzas, 2002), 53.

[61] Andreas Miaulis, *Connecticut Mirror*, Greek Official Report, January 24, 1825, Report of the Greek Admiral Andreas Miaulis to the Greek Government, in Hatzidimitriou, "*Founded on Freedom and Virtue",* 83.

[62] Andreas Miaulis, *Connecticut Mirror*, Greek Official Report, January 24, 1825, Report of the Greek Admiral Andreas Miaulis to the Greek Government, in Hatzidimitriou, "*Founded on Freedom and Virtue*, 82.

[63] Connecticut Courant, August 7, 1821, in Hatzidimitriou, "*Founded on Freedom and Virtue,* 43.

impious scorn of the heathen."[64] Furthermore, when seeking support from the international community, Greeks often emphasized the importance of all Christians in fighting against the Muslims. By asserting thus, the discourse both provided the revolutionaries with a means of eliciting support from foreign Christian nations while providing those nations with a justification for intervention.

In a letter to the British Colonel Stanhope, the provisional government of Greece, thanked the Greek Committee of England for "spreading the intelligence of the nineteenth century over Greece, plunged as it is in its ignorance by the most barbarous of tyrannies. These are sentiments truly philanthropic! These are sentiments which are truly pleasing before God, and worthy of true Christians!"[65] Similarly, in a letter to Edward Everett in 1825, Greek General Kolkotrone, asserted that the Americans, as "Christian brothers" naturally sympathized with the Greeks "who are fighting for their liberty."

"…Even now," Kolkotrone continues, "my dear Sir, Greece considers herself fortunate in partaking of the bounty of her fellow-Christians who extend their sympathy and who support her just war for independence by their relief drives…we are confident that from their beneficent efforts will emanate the salvation of Greece, and that Greece will at last reach her long awaited goal, Independence… Therefore, do not cease the continuance of your relief. Be assured that in supporting our just war you will achieve the name of being the only one who sympathized with our undeserved suffering, thus benefiting all mankind and keeping your consciences clear that you are carrying out the commands of Jesus Christ."[66]

The Revolution, emerging as it did at a point at which international relationships and national identities were transforming, served as a means of cultivating difference between Ottoman Muslims and Greek Christians. By pitting people with a common, shared recent history, but increasingly differentiating identities against each other, the Revolution accentuated their

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[64] Alexandros Ypsilantis, Proclamation of Revolt in the Danubian Principalities, February 24, 1821, in Clogg , *The Movement for Greek Independence,* 201-202.
[65] Provisional Government of Greece Letter to Colonel Leicester Stanhope, in *Greece in 1823 and 1824: Being a Series of Letters and other Documents on the Greek Revolution Written during a Visit to that Country,* ed. Leicester Stanhope (Philadelphia: Wilder and Campbell, 1825), 243-244.
[66] Theodore Kolkotrone, Letter to Edward Everett, July 5, 1826, in Robinson, *America in Greece*, 33-35.

perceived differences, which was underscored by international involvement in the conflict. In

this context, the Greeks religious identity became closely associated with the previously

discussed themes that tied the modern Greeks to their ancient counterparts. The collision of these

themes is evidenced in a letter written in 1825 that appeared in *The Boston Patriot* by the

Marquis de Lafayette, a French liberal who had shown a particularly strong interest in the Greek

Revolution, in which he appeals to the American people, as Christians and beacons of liberty, to

take a more active role in the Greeks' cause:

"I have perused with deep interest the letters which have been lately received from our gallant
young countrymen in Greece, who have embarked in her noble cause. Regarding the struggle in
that country, as the struggle of liberty against tyranny, Christianity against a false superstition
and civilization against barbarism…I should have calculated on a little more ardor, in the cause
of a people, whose case differs from ours, only in appealing more strongly to all that is generous
and high spirited in the heart of man. From a religious and a Christian people, that thinks the
utmost bounds of the globe not too remote for the exercise of its pious charities, I should have
looked for more inquiry after the events of a war, which will result either in the extermination of
the oppressed remnants of Churches founded by the Apostles, at the dawn of the gospel, or in
adding a new fertile, and more interesting country to the domains of the Christian Church…I
must think that very great and generous principles and objects have been sacrificed to rather a
paltry consideration."[67]

Conclusion

In the context of the conflict, the distinction between Muslims and Christians may seem

obvious or easily understandable given that the majority, if not all, Greeks who fought were

Christian and likewise, the majority of Turkish Ottomans were Muslim. However, as noted

earlier, this distinction had not always been so easily defined; although religion had played a

distinct role in the Ottoman Empire prior to the revolution, and was an important part of Greek

and Ottoman identity, this distinction was largely administrative in character and boundaries

between people of different faiths were often fluid. This changed in the years leading up to the

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[67]Marquis de Lafayette, Letter to the editor of the *Boston Patriot*, Sept. 17, 1825, in Robinson, *America in Greece*, 158.

revolution as relationships between the Ottoman state and society and foreigners were transformed and religious identities were strengthened. With the outbreak of revolution in 1821, religion, combined with the other characteristics that had been adopted by the Greeks through their relationships with foreigners and the Ottoman state, served as means of distinguishing between the Ottomans and the Greeks. By utilizing religious terminology both the Ottomans and the Greeks were able to garner support among the people with whom their ethno-religious communities most easily identified.

Furthermore, the Greeks, by merging religious characteristics with that of the Classical and Hellenistic Greeks were able to forge an identity that was also supported, and partially developed, by international actors, who, in turn, used the revolution as a means of pursuing their own diplomatic and domestic interests. By the end of the conflict religion had become an integral, although not concrete, part of the Greeks social and political identity. While this discourse was not used by all of the international actors, the use of it among prominent revolutionary figures and a wide swath of their supporters helped to accentuate its significance to Greek identity, particularly after the Greeks acquired independence and began to construct a new state.

By allowing religion to become the main distinguishing characteristic, both the Ottomans and the Greeks contributed to a hardening of this divide. By associating religion with characteristics that were concurrently being ascribed to the Greeks as a result of both their history and the context in which the conflict appeared, the Greek identity and the perception of the Greeks as the righteous defenders of Christianity and liberty became more closely tied to their political and social identity. This identity was not firmly established after the war, but rather continued to evolve as Greece developed a modern state. The revolution, as the event from

which the Greeks acquired their independence from the 'decadence' of Ottoman 'despotism'

became an important marker in modern Greek history and the socio-political and religious

discourse that surrounded it helped to shape the modern Greeks' memory and understanding of

the conflict. By acting as thus, this discourse, not only cultivated the development of a Greek

identity, but obscured the heterogeneous nature of the Ottoman Empire prior to the revolution

and distorted the shared history of the Greeks and the Ottomans.

The Greek state that emerged after the war, an independent kingdom under foreign

tutelage (Britain, France and Russia as guarantor powers installed Prince Frederick Otto of

Bavaria to the Greek throne), hardly resembled the nation that the revolutionaries had advocated

for. It would, in fact, be several decades before Greece acquired complete independence and

adopted its present form. Significantly, however, the themes that permeated the revolutionary

discourse continued to hold currency throughout the state's development and remain prominent

characteristics of the Greek identity in the present day.

Speaking of the forces facing the formation of a single Greek state, in 1857 S. Zambelios

wrote that the Greeks had to contend with three different, but related "unities", which included

"(a)Greek unity, which connects regenerated Greece to ancient Greece, (b) Christian unity,

which links the present struggle to all the struggles of the Christian religion, and (c) Roman

unity, which springs from the Middle Ages and sets the limits of the modern Greek nation. In

other words, three traditions are embodied in the people of Greece for the establishment of the

nation: the historical, the spiritual and the political…"[68] These "unities" continue to hold an

important place in Greece today. For instance, the modern Greek state scorns its Ottoman past,

and reduces the period of Ottoman rule to a dark period in Greek history, while concurrently

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[68] S. Zambelios, *Byzantine Studies* (Athens: Kavaria, 1999), 32-33, cited in Ioannis A. Tassopulos, "Constitutionalism and the Ideological Conversion to National Unity under the Greek Constitution of 1864," ed. Anna Frangoudaki and Caglar Keyder, *Ways to Modernity in Greece and Turkey* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 13.

emphasizing its Classical and Byzantine past and its revival after the Greek Revolution. As Mazower writes, "today, acknowledging its Ottoman legacy still appears to be as unimaginable to most people as when the historian Kostas Moskof first proposed the idea, more than twenty years ago. The city's older museums cover classical antiquity, Macedonian folklore and the Macedonian Struggle; newer ones, created in a recent frenzy of museological activity, cater for interest in Byzantium, photography, the cinema, modern art, water supply and musical instruments."[69]

Moreover contemporary Greece closely identifies with its religious identity. The majority of people in Greece are Orthodox, and non-Orthodox communities continue to face obstacles to their growth and free expression of their religion. This is a consequence not only of the place of religion in the region's history, both in its administrative form under the Ottomans and later among the revolutionaries and modern Greeks, but of the way religion has been used by individuals and states to cultivate identity and nationalism. As Yannis Stavrakakis has written, "Orthodoxy seems to have been always already 'secular' and 'political,' either under the Byzantine and the Ottoman system, or under the auspices of Greek nationalism and the direct control of the Greek state. Although the borders between secular and the sacred are always unclear and socially constructed, in Greece one has to admit that the situation was more acute due to the burdens of history…by nationalizing and politically investing (manipulating) the Church, the Greek state further encouraged and renewed trends already dominant, leading to the current Crisis."[70]

The revolution, like other periods in the history of Greece, has played a significant role in the shaping and understanding of its modern identity. The discourse surrounding the revolution

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[69] Mazower, *Salonica,* 437.
[70] Yannis Stavrakakis, "On the 'Politicization' of Greek Church Discourse," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 21 (2003): 166. http://muse.jhu.edu.

contributed to the later understanding of the conflict as one in which the Greeks recovered their early glory from 'despotic' and 'barbaric' Muslim rule. Reconstruction of history to align with a national story is not singular to Greek case, and in fact, it permeates the discourse in nearly, if not all, all modern nations. It is nonetheless important to consider how specific events or contemporary perceptions and dialogue surrounding those events, like the Greek Revolution, influence our modern understanding of them. This provides insight not only into the conflict itself and the environment in which it unfolded, but also reminds us of the importance of considering these forces when examining the past.

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