Consortium on the Revolutionary Era 2021

Panel Proposal

**Under the Flag of Insurgency:**

The Greek Revolution in International and Imperial History

From their very beginnings, the revolutionary events that shook the Greek lands of the Ottoman Empire in the 1820s were not limited by national or imperial borders. What Ottoman contemporaries termed the Greek Uprising and later historiography would call the Greek War of Independence, commenced when a one-armed officer on leave from Russian service crossed the Pruth river from Bessarabia into Moldavia. The commander, Alexandros Ypsilantis, issued an insurgent proclamation, calling on Greeks to free themselves from ‘Turkish yoke’ as help from Europe was sure to come. Ypsilantis was soon after expelled from the ranks of Russia’s Imperial Cavalry, but this was hardly the end of international involvement in the surging revolution. Historians like Maurizio Isabella, Konstantina Zanou and the late Richard Stites have recently reminded us that the Greek struggle was, in fact, deeply embedded in contemporaneous revolutionary events, drawing foreign volunteers, shared discourses and insurgent practices from Spain, Italy and elsewhere.

Yet such international connections did not only exist and help steer the course of events on the insurgent side, they also shaped imperial reactions and diplomatic responses to the Greek Revolution. The presentations in this panel will treat understudied aspects of the revolution’s border-crossing dynamics. They will show how the insurgency in Greece presented problems and opportunities to different imperial actors, including feuding Ottoman elites, British administrators in the Ionian Isles, Central European abolitionists and French admirals with expansionist ambitions. The Greek Revolution brought clashes between empires, but also initiated new forms of imperial cooperation. The panelists will bring these connections to light, generating new insight into the revolution’s overlooked border-crossing reverberations.

Moderator:

Prof. Beatrice de Graaf, Utrecht University

Speakers:

Dr. Erik de Lange

Dr. Christopher Mapes

Dr. Ozan Ozavci

Dr. Evangelos Zarokostas

**Navigating the Revolution before Navarino:**

Imperial Interventions in Aegean Waters, 1821-1826

*Erik de Lange, Utrecht University*

Few historians, or contemporaries who witnessed it first-hand, would argue against the Battle of Navarino’s pivotal importance for the Greek War of Independence. The infamous clash of 20 October 1827 tipped the military scales of the conflict, as the concerting navies of Austria, Great Britain, France and Russia destroyed a combined Ottoman fleet including Egyptian and North African ships of war. Virtually every publication on the Greek Revolution rightfully signals this violent episode as a turning point in the international involvement with events in Greece. What the historiography tends to ignore, however, is the significant degree of military intervention that preceded 1827, particularly at sea. The fleets that amassed in Navarino’s cluttered bay did not appear out of nowhere.

As this paper will show, there was a gradual build-up of naval presence during the generally overlooked years between 1821 and 1826. European navies, Ottoman fleets and contingents from subsidiaries to the Sultan came to the waters of the Aegean in increasing numbers. They initially had to protect merchandise and communities from the ravages of revolutionary violence and piracy. As they did so, these different military actors together confronted a series of pressing questions on what defined legitimate belligerence, characterized rightful practices of war and amounted to a warranted intervention. The answers would create a lasting legacy in international law and inform subsequent interventions in other conflicts. In making this apparent, the paper will clarify how nineteenth-century empires tried to navigate the complexities and consequences of the Greek Revolution’s early stages.

**Under the Yoke of Ottoman Domination:**

Slavery and Central European Philhellenism

*Christopher Mapes*

Slavery remained a problem for Central Europeans after the defeat of Napoleon. As most antislavery advocates turned their attention to the increasing volume of the slaves traded between Africa and the New World, as well as the persistence and entrenchment of New World slavery, Central Europeans turned their attention to the Christian, Greek subjects of the Ottoman Empire. Central Europeans had long viewed the domination of Christians in Islamic North Africa as the central problem of slavery until increased German migration and involvement in the New World brought new tensions to the ideas surrounding slavery. Greek insurrectionists against the Ottoman Empire breathed new life into older ideas about Christians enslaved in North Africa and the Middle East. Much of this interest owes to German philhellenes although it has been seldom analyzed. Indeed, as Sue Marchand has written “the obsession of the Schillerian German literary and scholarly elite with the ancient Greeks has become an accepted-if severely underanlayzed-cliché.” This paper uses archival documents to demonstrate how Central Europeans interest and participation in the Greek War of Independence helped to revive old ideas about Christian enslavement at a time when New World slavery became the central concern of European humanitarian protest.

**“They kissed each other affectionately…”:**

Interpersonal and Transimperial Histories of the Greek Crisis, 1801-1841

*Ozan Ozavci, Utrecht University*

This paper departs from the premise that the Greek crisis of the 1820s needs to be considered not only in relation to its immediate causes, theatres and implications. It is also essential to take into account the biographies of historical actors. They serve as analytical windows to see connections between what may otherwise be deemed as separate episodes of political crises, taking place in different historical moments. Foregrounding the life stories of an Ottoman swashbuckling gangster and a Caucasian slave, the paper points to the impact of the interpersonal rivalry that existed between the two men since the 1800s over the Ottoman response to, and political repercussions of, the crisis. It documents how their rivalry grew in relation to their budding political power in the Ottoman Empire, and links the interpersonal and transimperial histories of the ‘insurgency’, offering a fresh account of how the Eastern Question was constituted and why it proved to be one of the most complicated international issues in the nineteenth century.

**Islands in a state of emergency:**

Ionian neutrality and martial law during the Greek Revolution of 1821

*Evangelos (Aggelis) Zarokostas, University of Bristol*

The British Protectorate of the Ionian Islands, and particularly Corfu, was a nodal point in maritime communications. Since its very creation under the Treaty of Paris (November 1815), it gave the British a significant advantage in terms of information-gathering. When a general uprising broke out in the Greek mainland, the British authorities put the islands in a state of emergency. Strict Ionian neutrality was declared and harsh measures were justified, which aimed to maintain ‘public tranquility’ and to secure the islanders from any revolutionary ideas coming from the mainland. The implications of this neutrality are little studied, perhaps because of the perceived peripheral role of the Ionian Islands in the Greek struggle.

Yet, as this paper shows, the islands were deeply affected by developments taking place in the mainland, such as the rebellion of Ali Pasha of Ioannina between 1819 and 1822, when the British increased military presence in the region. The paper analyzes how British officials utilized disproportionate fears over the spread of revolutionary ideas in the islands, as well as military escalation in the region, to impose harsh measures on the islands. It builds upon relevant literature on the movement of information in the Mediterranean but also on British policy over the so-called ‘Greek Question’.