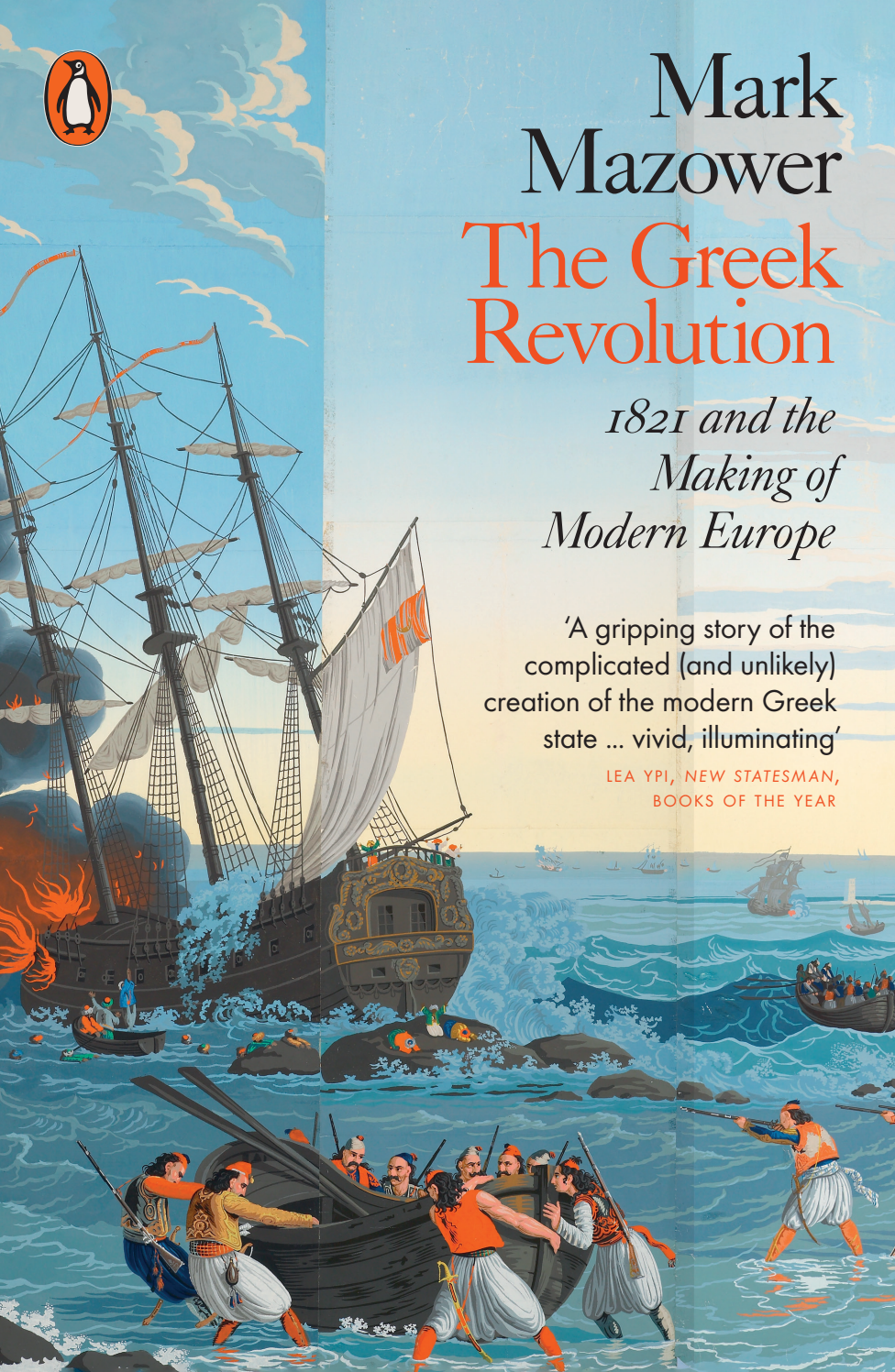

Mark Mazower

The Greek Revolution

1821 and the Making of Modern Europe

'A gripping story of the complicated (and unlikely) creation of the modern Greek state ... vivid, illuminating'

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The Greek Revolution

Mark Mazower is Ira D. Wallach Professor of History at Columbia University, where he directs the Institute for Ideas and Imagination. His previous books include *Inside Hitler's Greece*, *Dark Continent*, *The Balkans* and *Salonica, City of Ghosts*.

MARK MAZOWER

The Greek Revolution

1821 and the Making of Modern Europe

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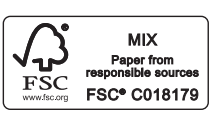

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Note on Names

Transliteration is a pedant's dream and a perfectionist's nightmare. In this book, I have tended to use 'k' for the Greek letter 'kappa' and 'y' for 'ypsilon' – thus Kefalonia and Ypsilantis rather than Cefalonia and Ipsilantis; on the other hand, I have generally retained the conventional English form of well-known names – thus Capodistrias and Hydra. By the same token, I prefer Athens, Corfu, Jannina and Crete to less common variants. Greek place names have undergone dramatic changes over the years and I have generally gone with names in common use at the time such as Navarino (rather than Pylos), Vostitsa (rather than Aigion), Modon, Jassy, Salona and Constantinople, though I drew the line at Napoli di Romania, which few readers would associate with the Peloponnesian port of Nafplion, and I have kept Syros rather than Syra, Kythera over Cerigo, and have always preferred Evvia to Euboea. Ottoman Tripolitsa was to all intents and purposes a different town to Greek Tripolis which today stands in its stead; Mesolonghi is a more faithful transliteration than Missolonghi. Where there are names in alternative variants in the sources, I have generally remained faithful to the original.

Topography creates more problems. I generally refer to the Cyclades and the islands of the east Aegean rather than to the Archipelago, which is how contemporaries commonly referred to them all or to the Isles of the White Sea which was the Ottoman term. The Morea is a well-known synonym for the Peloponnese but some readers may be unfamiliar with the use of Rumeli for the mainland north of the Gulf of Corinth; it was, however, a term used by both Greeks and Turks. Speaking of which, while I do use the term 'Greek', meaning Orthodox Christians who spoke Greek, I try – for reasons explained in the Introduction – to avoid the term 'Turk' unless it appears in an original source or cannot otherwise be avoided.

The Orthodox Christians of the Ottoman Empire still used the Julian calendar in the 1820s and Greece would not move to the Gregorian calendar, in general use in the rest of Europe, until 1923, sometime after

the Ottoman Empire (1917) and Russia (1918). In the period in question, the Julian calendar was twelve days behind the Gregorian. The approach taken in this book is to refer to the Julian calendar for events inside Greece, the Ottoman Empire and Russia, and to the Gregorian for events taking place in western and central Europe; in one or two places, I give both to avoid possible confusion.

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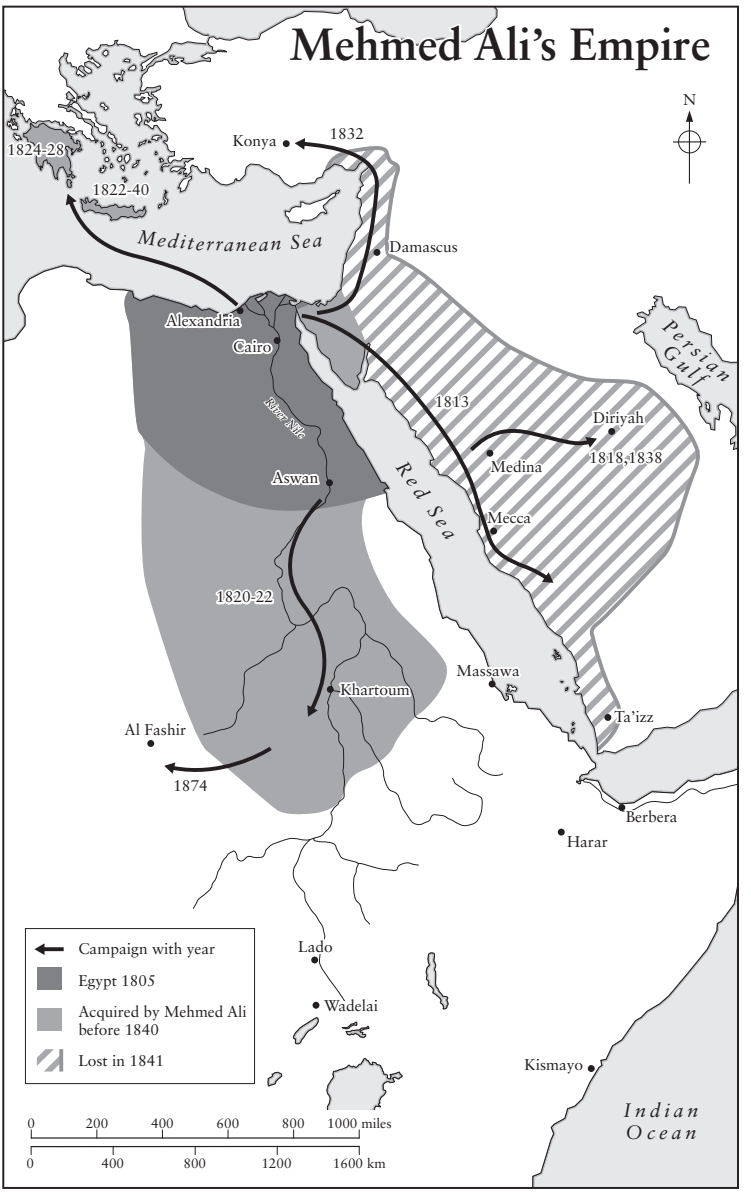


Introduction: On Heroes, Greeks and Turks

What did the people of Greece want to do in 1821? . . . I will proclaim it concisely. They wanted to establish the reign of the Greeks. Why? I run to the Church for an answer. I leaf through the holy scripture and what do I discover? God made man in His image according to His likeness. And He made him master of the earth, its animals, plants and so on . . . Power has authority, the state virtue, when it is founded in the holy attributes of His image. [When it is not], the scepter shrivels in the hand of the ruler . . . The people of Greece wanted to restore the reign of that image in those heroic days when we cried for joy.

Georgios Tertsetis, 1855[1]

Located along the harbour wall in the port of Ermoupolis, the terrace of the Hermes hotel shelters guests from the summer *meltemi*, the north wind that sends the waves crashing onto the shingle beach below and keeps all but the most intrepid swimmers from venturing out. Tall stone mansions line the bay; the hill beyond is crowned by the blue dome of the church of Ayios Nikolaos. The island of Syros in the Cyclades, just over a hundred miles south-east of Athens, is a busy shipping hub for Mykonos, Naxos, Santorini and other tourist destinations, and in the port the ferries come and go from morning to night. But round midday the shops along the front close up, the quayside empties and the tavernas set out their tables in the shade of the back alleys.

It might seem as if this beautiful town has been there for centuries. Yet before the Greek war of independence there was little on this shoreline besides sand and marsh: since Roman times, the seas had been too unsafe and the threat from pirates too great to settle down by the

waterfront. There were a few scattered buildings along the bay – a small church, some storerooms and a tiny café on whose wooden boards travellers occasionally passed the night waiting for their boat. The main town was set back at a remove from the shore, clinging to the sides of a craggy hill a good mile away, its narrow medieval lanes crowned by a Catholic cathedral. Known now as Upper Syros, it remains a largely unspoiled example of a medieval settlement, well worth a visit but a steep and arduous walk in the summer heat, and almost crowded out from view by the modern town that has sprung up at its feet.

The port of Ermoupolis was born out of a wartime catastrophe when Ottoman irregulars crushed a Greek uprising in 1822 on the island of Chios, barely a hundred miles to the north-east, massacring the inhabitants amid scenes that horrified Europe. Of the thousands of survivors who fled, some arrived on Syros: bringing their mercantile skills to what had formerly been a farming island, they created the modern town and named it after Hermes – the god of trade and prosperity. 'Syra is a place of mushroom growth,' wrote a young American philhellene who visited in 1826 on the paddle-steamer *Karteria*, a sight that drew crowds along the front. 'It contains thirty thousand inhabitants while three years ago there were but five or six shops along the shore.' By the middle of the nineteenth century, no less than one-third of all the shipping of the Kingdom of Greece was based there and the population around the port vastly outnumbered that of the old town up on the hill.[2]

A steam frigate – not only the first steamship to visit the islands but the first to be deployed in hostilities anywhere in the world – the *Karteria* had been a portent of the coming of capitalism and industry that followed independence. The great shipyards that lined the southern side of the harbour reflected Ermoupolis's emergence as a key refuelling stop in the eastern Mediterranean. Cables laid by the Levant Submarine Telegraph Company linked the town to Athens, Chios and Constantinople. An elegant central square lined with porticos, palm trees and a small Italianate opera house testified to its embrace of modern bourgeois culture. Such profound changes shaped not just Syros but Greece as a whole: the country that tourists visit today was born to a large extent out of the revolution of 1821. In the Peloponnese, devastated settlements were rebuilt with rectilinear avenues and neoclassical villas in a Western style. In a previously quiet Ottoman backwater that had been left in ruins by the fighting – Athens – a new capital arose with wide

boulevards, hotels, a parliament, a university and a palace. Across the new kingdom, an older, largely agrarian way of life came under the spell of a society run by banks, newspapers, clocks and private property rights. And just as the gap between Syros's new Orthodox port and the older Catholic town on the hill gradually narrowed, so the country's numerous distinctive local and regional cultures gave way to a larger sense of national belonging. This transformation of a society, a polity and an economy was the product of a peasant uprising that turned into a revolution and created a nation. What the Greeks fought for, and won, was a harbinger of Europe's future in which new states would be carved out of pre-national empires to emerge as sovereign nations within a global capitalist order. Driven by the desire for freedom, the Greek struggle inevitably became a search for the meaning of statehood in the modern world.

The uprising of 1821 came near the end of a half-century of revolutions. This epoch of global transformation had begun with the United States successfully shaking off colonial power and it continued with the French overthrow of their monarchy and Haiti's bid for freedom.[3] As the Greeks rose up, the Spanish colonies in South America were fighting for independence, and much of southern Europe was in turmoil. The American independence movements had the advantage of being an ocean's remove from their oppressors, but the European revolutionaries were not so lucky and uprisings in Spain, Sicily, Naples and Piedmont were easily suppressed. Only the Greeks fought on and, against the odds, prevailed.

What they accomplished thereby was unique, not merely eradicating the power of the Ottoman state in their lands, but also sweeping away an entire ruling philosophy and the institutions that had supported it. Not the legitimacy of dynasties, but nation, faith, capitalism and constitutional representation were the watchwords of this new order. The fundamental principle, wrote Lord Acton in his 1862 essay on 'Nationality', was that 'nations would not be governed by foreigners': it was this principle that marked the Greek war out from the other revolutions of southern Europe and helps explain why it was sustained and widespread, and also unusually brutal and violent. Members of other oppressed peoples – Italians, Poles, Germans and others – flocked to join the struggle, seeing in the success of the Greeks a promise of their own future. And though it took longer than many of them anticipated for that future

to come, they were right to do so. The Greek revolution, wrote an economist in 1910, was 'the first manifestation of that theory of nationalities which would dominate the nineteenth century'. And the twentieth, too: Europe's principalities, composite monarchies and land-based empires – some of which had lasted nearly as long as the Ottomans – gave way to new states based on the same principles of ethnic homogeneity and democratic rule that had emerged in Greece. This was the world of nation states, the world in which we live, which has survived even late twentieth-century globalization.[4]

But that is only one side of the story, for along with the nation state came a new way of thinking about international affairs that would reshape Europe and beyond. Writing in 1916, the British political theorist and publisher Leonard Woolf discerned in the 'conferences which settled the question of Greek independence . . . the central point of a new, if rudimentary, international system'. For Woolf, and for many others, those far-off diplomatic conferences provided a model of how to manage the peace of the world, and indeed the spread of the principle of national self-determination at the end of the First World War went hand in hand with the founding of the League of Nations – the precursor of the United Nations and the landscape of international organizations that we inhabit today. It is thus not only nationalism's triumph but that of the very idea of an internationally organized society of states whose origins may be found here, conjoined, in the story of 1821.[5]

The war on Syros was one of diplomatic manoeuvres and shrewd commercialism, not battlefield heroics. When the Ottoman fleet moored offshore, the notables rowed out to present the imperial admiral – the *kapudan pasha* – with the customary gifts. They paid their taxes and for some years managed to maintain a unique kind of neutrality. Down in the port, the main source of its prosperity was a thriving market in plunder and pirate loot that included captives and slaves along with church bells, clothes, precious metals, weapons and other valuables. When the insurgents made their appearance, it was in the shape of a private flotilla of armed men who mixed political slogans with outright robbery and from whom the islanders defended themselves with all the means at their disposal.[6]

What a contrast with the conventional depiction of the Greek war of independence as an epic drama of national unity starring fighters such

as Odysseus Androutsos and Giorgios Karaïskakis, 'Old Man' Kolokotronis and Nikitaras 'the Turk-eater'. Warriors whose moustaches and fierce gaze testify to their manliness and courage, they still stare down from the walls of *kafeneia* and schoolrooms, their yataghan (sword) or rifle raised high, leading the struggle against the turbaned barbarians. A subject for popular lithographs ever since Peter von Hess, a Bavarian painter with a fondness for set pieces, romanticized them for Greece's first king, Otto, many of the heroes of 1821 had in reality loathed, maligned, ousted, betrayed and even occasionally killed one another. Yet with time they became emblems of moral virtue, inspirations and models of patriotic self-sacrifice for future generations. The most famous of them all, Theodoros Kolokotronis, made the leap from brigand to national hero thanks not only to his wartime exploits but also to the works of a small circle of veterans who burnished his image through the written word with such success that in a 2008 national poll to find the greatest Greek of all time he came third, bested only by Alexander the Great and Georgios Papanikolaou, cancer specialist and hero in a different kind of war.[7]

Heroes come with certain drawbacks. They populate static tableaux designed to illustrate immortal values; they do not exist in a historical landscape whose meaning changes with time and perspective. Moreover, the heroic drama highlights one group and one set of mostly martial virtues at the expense of others that were in reality no less important. The politicians involved in Greece's struggle have fewer admirers even though they were just as influential upon events and no more morally flawed, self-interested, cowardly or mercenary than the leading chieftains. The men with swords, cutting through moral complexity as readily as they lopped off heads, have overshadowed the landowners and the merchants who bankrolled them, not to mention the farmers whose olives, vines, sheep and goats fed them. It goes without saying that they have overshadowed the women as well, save the few who feature in the popular telling as honorary men.[8]

Yet heroes have their uses too and in the Greeks' struggle with a far mightier foe, heroism had been at the heart of revolutionary thinking. Heroes had been needed in 1821 because despite the evident burdens borne by all Christians in a polity based upon the Sultan's wishes and the unquestioned primacy of Islam, many who endured those indignities did not favour rebellion. Some Greeks were 'disposed to fly from the

calamities which they groaned under'; over the preceding decades they had colonized Minorca and Corsica, British Florida and Russian Alaska. Others had undeniably prospered by staying. The large landowning dynasties, whose leaders controlled districts of the Peloponnese, hesitated to embark on a struggle that was unlikely to leave them better off than they already were. Tax breaks and imperial privileges gave prosperous shipowners pause too. The most important Greek chieftain in the western Pindos declared for the revolution late and soon returned to the Ottoman fold. In the spring of 1821 insurgents waited impatiently for weeks for the townspeople of Mesolonghi and the islanders of Hydra to join them, castigated the Chiots for their lack of revolutionary zeal, and at one point even impersonated a Russian general in an effort to whip up enthusiasm.[9]

Those to whom the prospect of revolution did appeal included sea captains bankrupted by the downturn in trade after the Napoleonic Wars; brigands driven from their homes into precarious exile; and bright young men studying republican ideas in universities abroad. All of these groups were prominent within the conspiratorial society that popularized the idea of taking up arms in the run-up to 1821.[10] Once the machine had been prepared, in the words of its activists, the question was how to set it in motion. This is why they appealed for heroes. They demanded men who sought to emulate the ancients, who would heed the call of the fatherland without reckoning the risks since that, as one of the revolution's leaders later observed, would have doomed the cause from the start. 'Better one hour of freedom than forty years of slavery', in the words of the most famous revolutionary song of the time: that was their calculation. The war's emblematic figures were thus men whose greatest deeds were acts of almost foolhardy bravery.

Just how foolhardy can be measured. The population of the Ottoman Empire in 1820 was probably about 24 million, and while there were possibly three million or so Greeks scattered throughout the empire, the number of them living in the provinces directly affected by the fighting was probably around a million at most. In terms of money, organization and resources the mismatch was even greater. The Sultan of the Ottoman Empire had at his disposal one of the world's great bureaucracies to govern a realm that extended from the Ukraine to the Sudan, from the Persian frontier to Tunis. His navy and his armies were far larger, better organized and more easily replenished than the small forces of

the Greeks. The latter could with difficulty raise 15,000 to 20,000 men, few of whom would move far from their homes; the Sultan could raise four, five or six times that number. He could wipe out communities with impunity – as he had in the past, with devastating consequences. This is why so many well-informed Greeks regarded the prospect of fighting as worse than foolish and why those who instigated the revolution promised anyone who would listen that the uprising was supported by the Russian Tsar. In fact, it was not, but the fiction bolstered what otherwise seemed a hopeless cause.

But while the Tsar hesitated, much of Europe was enraptured. It saw ancient heroes come back to life in the descendants who were emulating their achievements and displaying their virtues. The Greeks recognized this European obsession with the past and capitalized on it. Chieftains from the mountains of the Peloponnese were urged to rival Themistoklis and Leonidas. The same more or less illiterate chieftains, through their educated young secretaries, made grandiloquent appeals to the peoples of Europe to help the new 'Spartans' shake off the shackles of servitude. The talk of heroes was endless, part of that special appeal that the Greek cause held for educated men and women on both sides of the Atlantic. But there was always something slightly unreal about it too. One evening in 1825 a young English volunteer fighter in the mountains began declaiming Homer in the English fashion to the warriors he was spending the night with. He paused after a few lines. The chieftains were flummoxed: 'What language is that?' one of them quietly asked.[11]

'My family came originally from Epirus: my father settled at Chios.' Sketching the parameters of an unfamiliar Greek world for an English audience, this was the opening sentence of one of the literary sensations of 1819, the anonymously published novel entitled *Anastasius: or Memoirs of a Greek Written at the Close of the Eighteenth Century*. Its narrator is an anti-hero – an amoral young adventurer who impregnates a young woman and then flees his native island as he embarks on a picaresque odyssey through the world of the Ottoman Levant, changing identities and faiths with every voyage. Anastasius is a Greek deprived of the possibility of heroism precisely because he is degraded by servitude, a moral degeneration which he struggles to escape. When Byron was asked if he had written the tale, he replied he would have given two of his poems to have done so. It was soon revealed to be the work of the

remarkable Anglo-Dutch banker Thomas Hope, a wealthy aesthete who had lived for several years in the Ottoman lands.

But it was not only Byron who was envious: Shelley, Delacroix and Prince Metternich all devoured Hope's story. What made it so unusual was its portrayal of the Greeks in their contemporary Ottoman environment. The truth is that even more than today Europeans at that time lived in the past where the Greeks were concerned, and travellers to the region took with them not a modern guidebook (there were none), but a fake ancient one, a bizarre eighteenth-century travelogue that purported to describe the journeyings of a young Scythian in the fourth century BC. The *Travels of the Young Anacharsis in Greece*, unlike *Anastasius*, has nothing to say about the dragomans, janissaries, imams and pashas whom any real voyager was likely to encounter in some form. Early nineteenth-century maps, even the most precise, lived in the past in a similar way, using the classical place names and mostly guessing at the layout of the mountainous interior that lay behind the region's neatly drawn coastlines. As the 'Citoyen Grec', author of the pioneering 1826 *Résumé Géographique de la Grèce et de la Turquie d'Europe*, noted: 'Of all the parts of Europe, it is Greece whose geography is the least known.'[12]

Over the centuries, commerce and the Church had extended the Greek language and the reach of Orthodoxy far beyond the lands familiar to readers of the ancient classics. The 'Citoyen Grec' states that Greece 'must be considered, like Spain and Italy, as a great peninsula', and goes on to delineate an astonishingly large region stretching from Bosnia, the Danubian lands and the Black Sea in the north to Cape Matapan in the south: it is, in fact, the territory that later generations would call the Balkans. At the same time, an attentive reader may note a 'little Greece' hidden inside his book as well, occupying a much smaller area around the city states of classical antiquity. It was at the very northern limits of the vast Balkan 'Greece', next to Russia, that the insurrection broke out first in February 1821, yet it was pledged to bring 'freedom to the classical soil of Greece', and after the fighting fizzled out in the north it continued in those regions one thousand miles to the south which eventually became the heartland of the new independent state.[13]

As this suggests, Greece's geographical extent was surprisingly indeterminate even in the minds of the Greeks themselves who did not in fact launch their uprising with very specific territorial demands in mind. They lived in a largely pre-national era, one shaped by the example of empire

and inspired by the promise of redemption and deliverance rather than land and boundaries. The peoples of the peninsula included not only Greeks but also Serbs and Albanians, Bosnians and Romanians, an assortment of Orthodox, Catholics, Muslims and Jews. To call this enormous area Greece was less to pay homage to the past than to lay a kind of claim to an imagined future in which the Muslim Ottomans had been replaced by a new Christian domain. Could all these disparate peoples ever form part of Greece? Some Enlightenment radicals imagined that they could – even the Muslims. In 1797 the revolutionary Greek intellectual, Rhigas Velestinlis, had appealed to all the empire's inhabitants – 'Bulgarians and Albanians, Armenians and *Romioi*, blacks and whites' – to fight for freedom under the sign of the cross. He defined the people 'descended from the Greeks' as the inhabitants of 'Rumeli, Asia Minor, the Mediterranean islands, Vlacho-Moldavia' and all those who suffered under the 'unbearable tyranny' of the Ottoman despotism – 'all, I say, Christians and Turks, without any distinction of religion (since all are made in God's image)'.

Once the fighting broke out in 1821, however, the magnificently ecumenical horizons of Enlightenment republicanism vanished and faith became an existential dividing line. Indeed, one reason why the Greek war of independence reached levels of violence unseen in the other revolts in southern Europe was that it assumed at the outset the character of a religious clash. The educated Greeks who studied abroad and dreamed of Enlightenment might refer to their struggle in the terminology of a 'revolution', but this was an elite vocabulary which reflected the influence of secular European republicanism and it had overlaid a much older and deeply entrenched popular oracular and prophetic tradition: it was this latter vein of Orthodoxy that spoke most directly to the ordinary illiterate villagers who rose up and fought.

For decades if not centuries, Christians under Ottoman rule had understood themselves to be waiting. Their bishops told them it was God's will that they endure the rule of a Muslim Sultan – His punishment for their sins. Patience was a virtue; submission to the Ottomans was divinely enjoined. At some point in an ill-defined future, however, their waiting would come to an end and their yearning for freedom would be answered. What they longed for was the liberation of Constantinople, and through this the triumph of Christ and his true believers. Prophets preached the eventual overthrow of the Sultan, a figure who embodied the twin principles of tyranny and the Antichrist. Widely circulated oracular texts

predicted intervention by the Russian Tsar, or by the allied Christian monarchs of Europe.

This great imagined moment was called the *romeïko* and it had been on the horizon of expectation for as long as people could remember. In the words of a folk song: 'Let the *romeïko* take place, to end the tyranny.' At some point in the decades preceding 1821, the idea of the *romeïko* made the all-important shift from being an event brought about solely by outside intervention to something that might conceivably involve the participation of ordinary Christians themselves. When the uprising began, therefore, it was widely identified with this long-awaited moment of political agency. A colloquial expression among the insurgent peasantry for what was happening in the spring of 1821 was thus that they were 'making the *romeïko*'. They did so in the belief that outside powers had made their decision and were on their side. 'Francia [meaning Europe] supports the *romeïko*', a handbill claimed two days into the uprising. Letters went out to community elders assuring them that 'the kings have decided to make the *romeïko*'.[14]

The *romeïko* conveyed the triumph of Christ and the dream of the resurrection of imperial Byzantium through the overthrow of the Sultan in Constantinople; it had nothing at all to do with the ancient Greece that so entranced Europe. In Paris, the great Enlightenment Greek *savant*, Adamantios Korais, had worked hard to popularize the terms 'Hellene' and 'Greek' (*Graikos*) among the literate classes, to wean Greeks off the Church and bring them back to the values of the ancients. For the word 'Hellene' (*Ellinas*), which is how Greeks today generally refer to themselves, originally denoted the ancient Greeks exclusively. By far the commonest way Greek villagers referred to themselves before 1821 was as *Romioi* – meaning literally 'Romans' but in fact simply Orthodox Christians. In some Orthodox eyes, the Hellenes were not fit ancestors for modern believers because they had been pagans, yet in the eyes of Europe and of Greece's intellectuals, they were the ancestors who mattered the most. Thanks above all to the educated young revolutionaries who drafted the hundreds of decrees, proclamations and instructions that were the output of the wartime provisional governments, 'Hellene' triumphed. As it lost its originally exclusive reference to the distant pagan past and came to refer to their descendants, the modern Greeks, so the uprising itself ceased to be seen as the fulfilment of the *romeïko* and came to be

viewed as the resurrection of an ancient nation. It was the war itself that popularized this new vision of a political community, one based less on a shared allegiance to the Patriarch of the empire and more upon genealogy. 'You Greeks have something grand in your heads,' the all-powerful Pasha of Jannina is said to have said to Christians in his service. 'You no longer baptise your children Ioannis, Petros and Kostas but Leonidas, Themistocles and Aristides! You must be cooking up something.' Thus what started out as the *romeïko* ended up as a struggle for the political independence of the Hellenes.[15]

Using the term 'Greek' may not have been straightforward in the early 1820s, but the term 'Turk' was even more problematic. Common in European parlance and in Greek as well, it was seldom used by Muslims inside the Ottoman Empire. A contemporary narrative of the uprising in the Morea written by an Ottoman official there, Yusuf el-Moravi, does not once mention the term. 'Turk' might denote an Anatolian peasant but certainly not the Georgian ex-slave who was the first commander of the imperial forces in the Morea, Khurshid Pasha, nor the man he defeated, the Albanian Ali Pasha of Jannina. The so-called 'Turks' fighting for the Ottoman armies included Egyptians, Bosnians and many who were not Muslims at all – Zaporozhian Cossack fishermen from the Danube, Catholic warriors from the Albanian highlands, conscripted Christians from Epiros. They even included Greeks.[16] Actually to encounter men from Asia Minor was, for some Greeks, a surprising and noteworthy event. The siege of Patras, wrote one fighter, was the first time that they encountered 'the eastern Turks'. Christians and Muslims from the Peloponnese and Rumeli shared certain terms for these strangers – *chaldoupides*, *doudoumides* and *kaklamanous* – that were unmistakably derogatory and marked them out as foreigners.[17]

Perhaps the most important thing to realize about the war of 1821 is that it was not really a two-way Greco-Turkish struggle at all: if one thing was perfectly obvious at the time, it was the exceptionally large and often decisive role played in the conflict by the Albanians, both Christian and Muslim. 'I like the Albanians much,' Byron had written in the winter of 1809 on a visit to their most prominent provincial ruler, Ali Pasha. 'Some tribes are Christians, but their religion makes little difference in their manner or conduct; they are esteemed the best troops in the Turkish service.' Byron had identified the two key features of the Albanians in this story – the relative unimportance of faith in determining their

allegiances; and their reputation as fighters. Their language was spoken over a swathe of mountainous territory from Montenegro down into the Peloponnese by Catholics, Orthodox Christians and Muslims alike, and it gave many so-called 'Greeks' and 'Turks' a common means of communication as well as a sense of solidarity reinforced by their shared experience of Ali Pasha's decades in power. After Ali was killed in 1822, some Albanians chose to serve the Sultan and others went with the Greeks. Ottoman armies in the Balkans relied on Albanian units, both Christian and Muslim, and the Porte (the central government of the Ottoman Empire) fretted endlessly about their reliability. 'They are such people that for five or ten *gurush* they can kill their own mothers and fathers,' one Ottoman official reported. 'It is impossible to expect service and loyalty from them.'[18] On the Greek side, there were the Christian Albanian Souliot bands, hardened mountain fighters based around clan leaders who gradually became integrated into the national war effort. There were also the Albanian-speaking seamen of Hydra and Spetses who provided not only the core of the Greek fleet but also leading members of the Greek government – including one wartime president – who occasionally used Albanian among themselves to prevent others on their own side from reading their correspondence.[19]

In this pre-national world, language barriers were low and no one, a handful of intellectuals aside, worried about linguistic purity. A maritime folk, the Greeks spoke a language rich in words from Arabic, Spanish, Albanian, Turkish and Slavic. At sea the strongest influence was Italian: they sailed the *gallotta*, *saccoleva* or the larger *briki* or *polacca* on which they might carry a *passangieris* or two along with their *karikon* (cargo), or they might go on the *kourso* (piracy) or fit out a dreaded *burloto* (fireship). On land, they relied on Turkish words like *ordi* (encampment), *loufes* (a soldier's wage), *tophanas* (arsenal), *toufeki* (rifle) or *tambouri* (entrenchment), which reflected the Ottoman martial tradition, with the occasional Italian term – *resalto* (assault), *incontro* (opportunity) or the *munitziones* (munitions) needed for an *ekspeditzion* – as a reminder of Venice's long hold over the region. In the hills of the Peloponnese in 1821, one found an astonishing assortment of titles borne by high-ranking fighters on the Greek side alone – *Izpravnik* (Russian-Romanian), *beïzade* (Turco-Persian), *Milord* (English) and *Prince* (French).[20]

The entire spectrum of Orthodox society within the Ottoman world was drawn into the fighting: princely families from Constantinople,

deeply enmeshed in imperial court politics; provincial notables, martial bishops and revolutionary priests; polished young men dreaming of Rousseau and rough, semi-literate chieftains like Theodoros Kolokotronis, the charismatic brigand whose homespun skill with words, arms and politicking smoothed his rise to become commander of the Greek armed forces in the Peloponnese. What is noteworthy is that none dominated either sociologically or individually. Indeed, after the revolution began contemporaries were struck by its failure to throw up a unifying personality – a Washington or a Napoleon. Leading figures flit across the stage for a minute and then vanish, while others suddenly emerge from obscurity. The man who led the initial uprising, Alexandros Ypsilantis, never set foot in the lands that eventually became independent Greece; the country's first monarch, Prince Otto of Bavaria, was six years old when the fighting began and arrived in his new kingdom at the age of seventeen after it was over. Kolokotronis and Karaïskakis – the two fighters most familiar to Greeks today – both played important roles, but the former followed his most remarkable exploits against the Turks by fomenting civil war while the latter actually worked with the Turks before going to war against them. Neither could be compared to Washington, who led his side's armies throughout their independence struggle and then became head of state.[21]

The landscapes against which the struggle played itself out were no less varied than the cast of characters. Athens became the new national capital in 1834 but nothing of much consequence happened in that small and rather unimportant Ottoman town until late in the war. The Peloponnese was the centre of action for much of the time, and the heartland of the insurgency, but critical conflicts also took place in the Danubian Principalities, the mountains of Epiros, central Greece and the Aegean. The densely populated Ionian islands remained under quasi-colonial British rule throughout, a vital source of goods, manpower, intelligence and money; Egypt was both the home of a rapidly growing Greek community and a key Ottoman ally. This was thus not so much a single war as a set of interconnected regional struggles where local topography, traditions and power structures deeply affected events and only gradually converged. This book is structured accordingly, moving from the mountains and the islands to encompass the perspective from Vienna and Odessa, Marseille, Constantinople, London, Alexandria, St Petersburg and Paris – that variegated post-Napoleonic Europe which came to

matter as much as, and sometimes a lot more than, anything that was going on in the heartlands of the Ottoman Empire.

By 1828 it was evident that the Greeks had wrested some kind of independence from the Sultan. But exactly what the nature of that triumph was and when it was achieved would be argued over for decades. Servitude to the Sultan and Islam ended. What the Sultan had regarded as an absurdity – a Greek state – had emerged. The insurgency won the Greeks new political rights and religious freedoms. Yet it is surely telling that, while there is no real argument about when the rising began, historians do not agree on when it ended: some finish the story when Count Ioannis Capodistrias established his presidency in 1828 and secured European recognition; others opt for the establishment of the Bavarian monarchy and the arrival of the first king, Otto, in 1833. The fighter and historian George Finlay concluded that the rising ended with the revolution of 1843, which forced upon the monarchy one of the most democratic constitutions in Europe. The disagreement points to something important: for Greece the realization of independence was not instantaneous and lasted for years if not decades. Freedom from Ottoman rule was one thing; securing national sovereignty was something quite different and took much longer to achieve. Indeed, in some ways the struggle continues to this day.

I started working on this book a decade ago, in the midst of a global debt crisis that saw Greece's economy placed under international surveillance. At that time it seemed as if the price for Greece's remaining in the Eurozone might well be the loss of its independence. Was Europe living through the end of the sovereign nation state? What indeed was independence really and what had it meant for a country like Greece? Such questions pushed me to go back to the era when both Greece and Europe's embrace of the nation state began. The desire for freedom was age-old in 1821, but the aspiration to exercise freedom through a national government ruling in the name of its people was new. I wanted to understand how this aspiration had emerged, and in particular how national emancipation came, from the very start, to be bound up with capitalism in the form of foreign loans, international indebtedness and financial speculation.

Twenty-first-century Greece was already impoverished by austerity when it was faced with another challenge: the refugee crisis. In 2013,

3,485 refugees were granted asylum there; the number rose to over 46,000 in 2016, and over 80,000 three years later. Having lived through the *katastrofi* of 1922 – when hundreds of thousands had been forced to flee Asia Minor – as well as the vast internal displacements of the civil war of the late 1940s, the Greeks were as familiar as any in Europe with what it means to lose your home and make a new life elsewhere. A century before the *katastrofi*, Greece itself had emerged from a conflict that had uprooted perhaps one-quarter of the entire population of the Peloponnese alone. The tragic aftermath of the siege of Mesolonghi when thousands of Greek women and children had been sold into slavery galvanized the sympathies of Europe. It was such upheavals as much as any victories that not only accompanied the end of Ottoman rule but – by throwing people out of their older, more settled ways of life – created a new kind of political community around the resources and policies of a centralized national state.

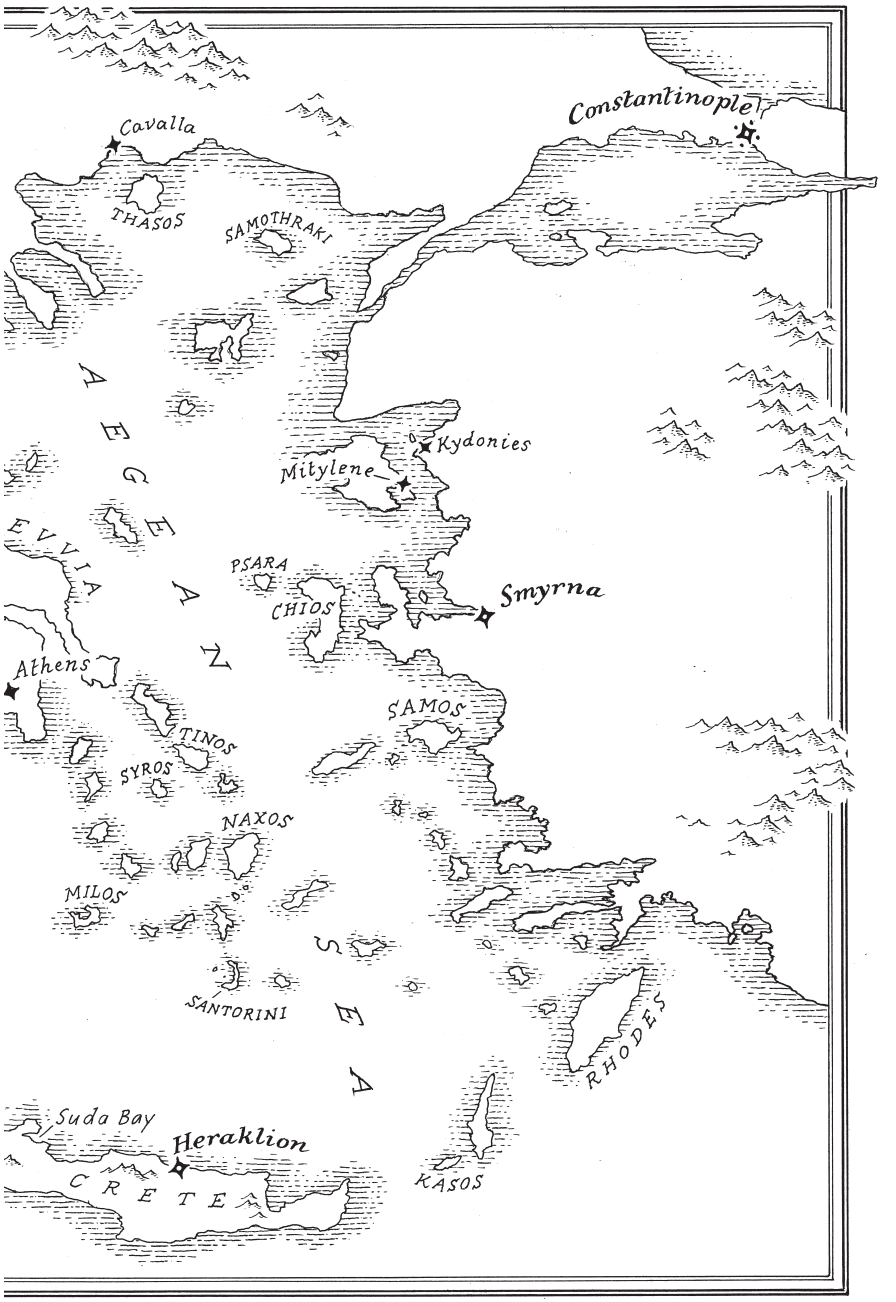
The wider role and responsibilities of the historian in telling this story were brought home when the Greek prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis established a committee to oversee the impending bicentennial of the revolution, and shape its commemoration. A government spokesman talked about using the celebrations to help restore pride in the country, encouraging Greeks to reconnect with their national identity.[22] When I first read about this initiative in the papers, I confess I remembered how a century earlier, in 1921, a Central Committee for the Centennial of the Greek Revolution had met and come up with any number of ideas before being overtaken by the Asia Minor disaster and completely forgotten.[23] More worryingly, conservatives in France in particular had been banging on for years about the need for a new national narrative that would restore pride in the country and its past, and in the French case this had turned into a kind of right-wing rationale for exclusion and excision. Historians mostly see themselves as a profession dedicated to dispelling nationalist myths, not propping them up. So when I was asked to join the committee, my initial reaction was to hesitate. But then I thought again: was it unreasonable – given the divisions that had opened up in Greece as a result of the years of austerity – to try to figure out what might bring people together in an understanding of the past that was inclusionary not exclusionary? Was that not better than acquiescing in the kind of political polarization that had torn Greece apart in the past?

If this invitation thus made me reassess my stance towards the subject,

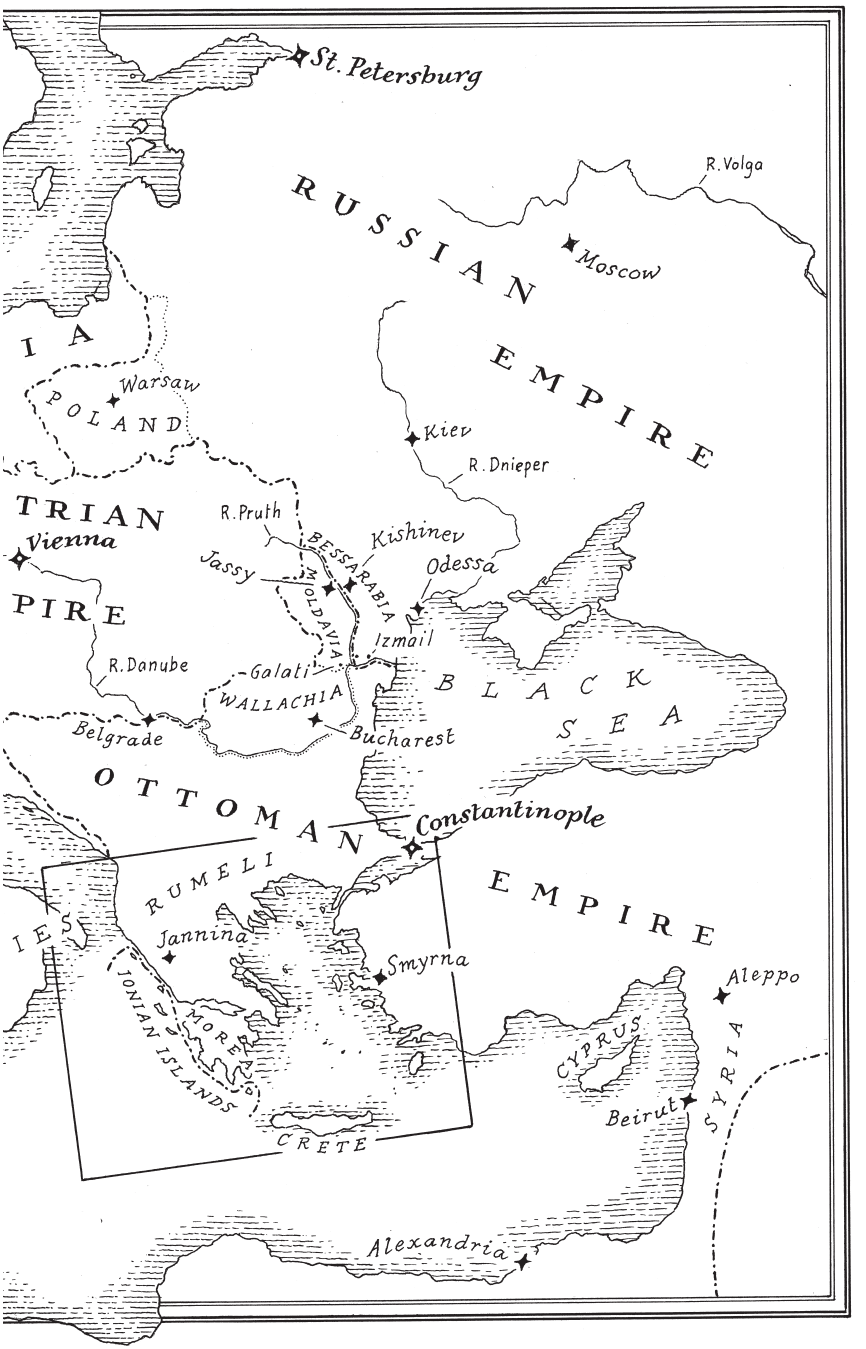
what I really wanted to say about it became evident only during the coronavirus pandemic. Living in Manhattan at an epicentre of the catastrophe, I followed Greece's response in those first months, which formed such a contrast with that of the United States. The two governments could scarcely have taken more different approaches. But the real differences lay deeper. There is nothing like a public health emergency to illuminate the degree of a people's trust in their state. The pandemic revealed the USA to be a starkly divided country whose attitude to government is in profound crisis. In Greece on the other hand, the state was able to enforce one of the most pervasive lockdowns in Europe because people trusted it and were willing to go along. Greek society turned out to be capable of enduring things that American society could not; it was remarkably resilient – as indeed arguably it had been throughout all the immense challenges of the past decade.

As in fact it had been two centuries earlier. I started to see that the revolution of 1821 had succeeded because beyond the epic and oft-celebrated moments of individual bravery and self-sacrifice, it was fundamentally a story of social endurance in the face of systemic upheaval. It was not so much their victories that gave the Greeks independence as it was their refusal to accept defeat. This was because what we call a war was in fact an insurgency in which all the weaker side could really do was to hold out and hope. The promised assistance from Russia never materialized, yet the struggle went on for year after year. The strength of the ordinary villagers and islanders – who faced not only the incursions of Turkish and Egyptian armies, but constant plundering and pillaging by their own armed countrymen – was the vital element. To go beyond the heroes is important, then, not to suggest that they had feet of clay, but to give a fuller picture of the forces that the uprising set in motion and which propelled it forward. The wartime commander Makriyannis puts it best, at the conclusion of his memoirs:

> Do you know when a man should say 'I'? When he has fought alone, and either created or destroyed, then he may say 'I'. But when many people have fought and created, then let them say 'we'.[24]



EUROPE and
the OTTOMAN EMPIRE
after 1815



PART I

In the Great Morning of the World

In the Great Morning of the World
The Spirit of God with might unfurled
The flag of Freedom over chaos,
And all its banded Anarchs fled . . .

Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Hellas: A Lyrical Drama* (1821), lines 46–9[1]

1
Out of Russia

In my opinion, the French revolution and Napoleon opened the eyes of the world. Before that the nations did not recognise themselves, and people thought kings were gods on earth and said whatever they did was good. For that reason, it is harder to rule a people today.

Theodoros Kolokotronis, *Apomnimonevmata*, 49

3 403α3α η9ωγηα3α23 (The decision has been taken!)

Anthimos Gazis, 22 February 1821[1]

It all started with the defeat of Napoleon. In 1814, after more than two decades of war across Europe, the French emperor was sent into exile on Elba while the victors celebrated and prepared to convene the peace congress in Vienna that would settle the fate of the continent. Tsar Alexander I, ruler of Russia and commander of Europe's largest army, was staying in his mother-in-law's castle at Bruchsal en route to the Austrian capital when, at the end of a day filled with formal presentations and heavy meals, he enjoyed a quiet tête-à-tête with one of his wife's maids of honour. 'Since you treat me with such kindness, Sire, I owe you my profession of faith,' Roxandra Stourdza told him. 'In the depth of my soul, I am a republican, I detest courts and have never attached the slightest importance to those distinctions of rank and birth that give me the chills and bore me to death. But please don't betray my secret here or I could pay dearly.' 'No, no,' the Tsar replied with a smile. 'Have no fear. And to return frankness with frankness . . . *I think absolutely as you do*.'[2]

The men he was about to meet in Vienna would have been horrified at the thought that the Tsar of Russia was a closet republican. The presiding genius of the Congress, Prince Metternich of Austria, saw the threat of subversion everywhere, and regarded monarchy as the chief defence against it. Castlereagh, the British Foreign Secretary, took legitimism so far that he refused to sign the treaty ending the war on the grounds that Napoleon was a usurper. Between them these two men were determined to impose a conservative order upon a continent convulsed by the French Revolution. Neither of them had much time for talk of the rights of peoples or nations. Defending the erasure of the centuries-old republic of Genoa from the map of Europe against the evident wishes of its inhabitants, Castlereagh pronounced that 'the prejudices of a people' could only be taken into account if 'greater objects did not stand in their way'.[3]

In reality, the Tsar was no republican either. At Vienna he and his fellow monarchs returned ousted Bourbon monarchs to their thrones, put the Catholic Belgians under the Dutch king, abolished the ancient republic of Venice and dashed hopes that Poland might be resurrected as an independent state. At the same time, he wanted a settlement that would uphold the 'sacred rights of humanity', and unlike Metternich he sought to be liked rather than feared. 'That boy is a mass of contradictions,' his grandmother, Catherine the Great, is said to have remarked. Having come to the throne in the midst of the Napoleonic Wars, Alexander insisted that defeating the French required a higher moral purpose. He fought for constitutional rule in the Ionian Islands and Sardinia, he recognized the Spanish constitution in 1812, and he favoured imposing one on the Bourbons in France. His sensitive soul thrilled with the idea that he was destined to bring peace to Europe and he listened to Germany's leading mystics who told him that he was a kind of Messiah, and that his defeat of the Antichrist Bonaparte would lead the continent under Russian guidance to a spiritual rebirth. This conviction crystallized in his extraordinary scheme for Christian monarchs to band together in a Holy Alliance.[4]

At Vienna the Tsar felt in need of a soulmate, someone who understood his own blend of piety and Enlightened rationalism, a man who would help him, as he saw it, fight for constitutionalism and stand up to Metternich and his more reactionary instincts. He had been impressed by a brilliant young Greek-born diplomat in his entourage, and so he

ordered him to join the negotiations: it was thus that the thirty-eight-year-old Ioannis Capodistrias entered the limelight at the Congress, becoming deeply involved in crafting the post-Napoleonic future for Europe (and – years later – the first president of independent Greece). 'Two factions are opposing each other all over the world,' Metternich said, 'the Capodistrias and the Metternichs.'[5] The two men were agreed that the coalition of states which had won the war should guarantee the coming peace. But they differed on the nature of that peace and the principles that would help it endure: Metternich believed the radical forces unleashed by the French across Europe must be vigorously combatted and suppressed; Capodistrias felt they should be understood. 'This war has not been fought by sovereigns but by nations,' he told an interlocutor shortly after his arrival in Vienna. 'Since Napoleon has been tumbled from power, one has forgotten the interest of nations and been concerned solely with the interest of princes.'[6]

One reason for Capodistrias's sensitivity to the power of nationalism was that he hailed from the Ionian Islands, where a largely Greek-speaking population had been ruled by the Venetians for centuries before enjoying a brief period of self-rule under joint Russian-Ottoman occupation. Founded in 1800, during the Napoleonic Wars, the so-called Septinsular Republic was effectively the first independent Greek state in modern times, only nominally subservient to the Ottoman Sultan. Capodistrias's father, a member of the Corfiot aristocracy, had helped craft its constitution before the son took over the task of making it work, a task which brought him into contact with a range of Greek patriots including bishops, scholars, merchants and armed fighters who had fled the Ottoman mainland for the safety of the islands. After the French dissolved the Septinsular Republic, Capodistrias left his native island of Corfu and entered Russian service, but he retained his contacts with these men and shared their dreams of freedom. When the Tsar summoned him to Vienna in 1814, Capodistrias openly wondered whether his ties to the Greeks might not be problematic. 'I respect your feelings for your fatherland and for Greece,' Alexander reassured him. 'And it is because I know how you feel that I wish to have you close by. Nothing could be more appropriate nor more useful than that the Greeks have you near me as their advocate.'[7]

Russo-Ottoman antagonism had been building up for more than half a century. Even during their common struggle against the French, the two empires had gone to war, barely patching things up on the eve of

Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812. The last thing the other powers wanted after Napoleon's defeat was more discord, and Metternich and Castlereagh sought to get Sultan Mahmud II to join them in Vienna at the Congress so that his differences with Russia could be settled peacefully. But the Sultan refused – remaining adamantly opposed to any European intervention, however well intended, in his own internal affairs for the next decade and more. His refusal meant that the Great Powers could not bring the Ottoman lands within the territorial guarantee they planned to provide for the European political settlement; the next best solution, from the British and Austrian viewpoint, was to ensure no official discussion of the Ottoman Empire in Vienna at all.[8]

Metternich did his best to keep the subject off limits. His police blocked the emissaries of subject peoples of the Ottoman Balkans from coming to Vienna. They also attempted to suppress a pamphlet by a German professor which called for Europe's armies to drive the Turks out of Europe. But the Austrians could not prevent a good deal of talk of Christian solidarity with the Serbs, the Greeks and others. Reports of 'scenes of carnage' in Ottoman Serbia were reaching the capital. As for the Greeks, their supporters were in Vienna in force, seeing the Congress as a chance to bring their plight to the attention of Europe. There were salons and memoranda and speeches. Exiled archbishops pleaded for Russian assistance. Richard Church, a British army officer who had trained Greek fighters in the Ionian Islands, told anyone who would listen about the 'free men' ready to 'defend their liberty against the Turks'. Russians in the imperial delegation sympathized. Their empire had been expanding southwards at Ottoman expense for decades and they were happy to use Orthodox solidarity as a reason to continue: their army had seen off Napoleon and was not likely to be checked by the Sultan's. Austrian secret police reported that the Russians were speaking like 'Masters of the Universe': 'They inflame the Greeks again and make them hope for their resurrection . . . The Greeks abandon themselves to these ideas . . . Several leading figures speak of the liberation of Epiros, Morea and a Greek fatherland which Russia will ensure is reborn.'[9]

The truth of the matter was that, whatever the Greeks dreamed the Tsar would do for them, their liberation came a long way down his list of priorities. In Vienna, Alexander's overriding priority was to hold together the wartime coalition that had defeated Napoleon. He understood that none of his partners shared the Russian receptiveness to the

cause of the fellow Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman lands and his basic view therefore was that the peace congress was not the right place to help the Greeks. When Capodistrias begged him to consider bringing the Ionian Islands back under Russian protection, the Tsar refused: British troops had taken them over and he had no wish to antagonize allies. The only support he was willing to give was on a much smaller scale. Alexander patronized a new learned society – the Friends of the Muses – that Capodistrias established for the cultural improvement of the Greeks, and the Tsar attended Sunday service in a Greek Orthodox church in Vienna that was used by Christian worshippers from the Ottoman lands. When his presence there was applauded, however, Alexander became upset that what he had intended as a private gesture of support had been misinterpreted.

In Vienna, diplomacy and social display were intertwined as never before. 'Doubtless, at no time of the world's history had more grave and complex interests been discussed amidst so many fêtes,' remembered one of those present. 'A kingdom was cut into bits or enlarged at a ball: an indemnity was granted in the course of a dinner; a constitution was planned during a hunt.' It was in this glamorous milieu that Capodistrias and the Tsar set up their Greek cultural society. Yet for the Greeks what did all the courtly glitz, the gossip and chatter really matter when Metternich was to be heard bluntly saying that he recognized no such thing as a Greek nation, only Ottoman subjects? The Tsar was not willing to jeopardize the coalition to counter him because his fear of revolution trumped his sense of Christian solidarity. It dawned upon the Greeks of the Ottoman Empire that they could not look to Europe's leaders for liberation and it was at this point that a group of them, hundreds of miles away from the Habsburg capital, decided to take matters into their own hands.[10]

'"Athena Gallery" is a modern shopping center in the heart of Odessa,' a Ukrainian tourist website informs visitors to the Black Sea port. 'On seven floors there are more than 200 shops, services and restaurants. The shopping center is located in the heart of the city, close to Deribasovskaya Street with a convenient access to the center, underground parking and excellent transport interchange at any time of the day or night.' The mall's name, its well-preserved neoclassical facade (now dwarfed by a multistorey glass addition) and its address on Hrets' ka – Greek Square – indicate

that this is where the original Greek market was built at the start of the nineteenth century, when the town was in its infancy, a product of the Russian Empire's push south to the Black Sea. A far cry from the splendours of imperial Vienna and a tenth its size, Odessa, less than three decades old in 1820, was a settlement based on the coming and going of goods. The Greek market was in its commercial centre, amid importers' stores where carts transported dried fruits, olive oil, walnuts and tobacco, salted fish, carob, incense and wine the short distance to and from the port.

In a tree-lined street in the shadow of the mall, a row of three modest early nineteenth-century town houses survives to this day. The middle one has the layout commonly found in the neighbourhood – a ground-floor shop, an entrance to the inner courtyard to unload goods, and residential rooms upstairs with a balcony overlooking the street. It was here, at number 18 Krasni Perulok, then owned by a prosperous Greek merchant, that 'some Greeks of very obscure class' banded together at the end of 1814 to found a fraternal society of their own. Humbler than its illustrious Vienna equivalent, their Filiki Etaireia (Friendly Society) would turn out to be the catalyst for Europe's first successful national revolution, ultimately forcing kings and diplomats to change their entire approach to the management of the European peace.[11]

They were just three men at the start: a commercial clerk, a former student and an artisan, whose lives until then had been nothing but stops and starts. Emmanouil Xanthos was a merchant's factor from the island of Patmos, who had been travelling in the Balkans when he joined the freemasons and was inspired to found a similar organization in Odessa to bring Greeks together to work for the overthrow of Ottoman tyranny. Athanasios Tsakalof, the son of a fur trader based in Moscow, had studied in Paris and joined a Greek cultural society there before coming to Russia for work. Nikolaos Skoufas was a hat-maker. The three of them may not have been rich but they were literate, well-travelled and politically engaged. When they met in late 1814, they were upset about the Congress of Vienna. They knew about the German professor calling for a European war against the Ottomans and they were outraged that Metternich had not only tried to suppress that pamphlet but had also had the effrontery to deny the Greeks were 'to be found in the catalogue of nations'. Faced with the prospect that Europe would henceforth oppose revolution of any kind, Xanthos, Tsakalof and Skoufas agreed to try to

'gather the select and brave men of the race so that they could work, by themselves, to gain that which they vainly hoped to receive, over so many years, from the philanthropy of Christian kings'. To work for their own liberation: that was the vital decision.[12]

That these three men met in Odessa was scarcely an accident. Thanks to the 1774 treaty of Kutchuk-Kainardji, the Russian Empire had acquired a recognition of its interest in the treatments of Orthodox populations of the Ottoman lands. Moreover, Catherine the Great, Tsar Alexander I's strong-willed grandmother, had been obsessed with the Greeks. She had named a new summer palace after Alexander the Great's birthplace to inspire her elder grandson. She dreamed of his younger brother sitting on the throne in Constantinople; she built a replica of its great Byzantine church, Ayia Sofia, on the grounds of her estate at Tsarskoe Selo, and she also provided support for the Greeks under Ottoman rule as well: it is as though, ancient or modern, to Catherine the Greeks were one. 'The empress discoursed with me the other day on the ancient Greeks; of their alacrity and the superiority of their genius, and the same character being still extant in the modern ones,' wrote the English ambassador in 1779.[13] Once Russia conquered the Crimea, that entire region was wrested from Ottoman rule. Establishing a vast new southern province of New Russia – an area larger than France – the government welcomed settlers, among them many families from the Greek islands, with free land, subsidies and tax exemptions. A small Tatar village on the Black Sea became the new settlement of Odessa, whose population grew tenfold in three decades. By the late 1820s it numbered over 30,000 and was expanding quickly. It was a place, wrote the young Alexander Pushkin, where 'everything breathes Europe'. A city of foreigners, on its way to becoming the third largest city of the empire, Odessa was an astounding commercial success and the Greek community was at its heart.[14]

Capodistrias had excelled in the imperial service but he was by no means alone: the governor of Bessarabia was a fellow Greek, for example, and so was the chief of police in St Petersburg. 'Christian Orthodox, Greek by birth, faithful subject and – I dare say – devoted servant of the Emperor': these words summed up their overlapping allegiances. Members of Greek princely families who had fled Ottoman rule and found refuge in the Tsar's service included the Tsarina's aforementioned maid of honour, Roxandra Stourdza, granddaughter of a former imperial Dragoman and *hospodar* (governor) of Moldavia; her brother, Alexander, a

diplomat who served as Capodistrias's secretary; and a dashing young aide to the Tsar, Prince Alexander Ypsilantis, who had lost his right arm fighting the French at Dresden. When the Tsar prayed in the Greek church in Vienna – a church founded by Stourdza's family – they were all in attendance, Capodistrias and Ypsilantis sitting with the Greeks, their noble faces displaying a melancholy, recalled Stourdza, 'that seemed to foretell the misfortunes and future destiny of Greece'.[15]

Lower down the social scale but no less wealthy or powerful in Russian society were the Greek merchants who spearheaded the expansion of imperial power into the south, many of them self-made men who were dominant in the grain trade that fuelled Odessa's growth. A Greek hero of Russia's 1769 war with the Ottomans, the sea captain Ioannis Varvakis made a fortune exporting caviar from the Caspian Sea and later spent it bankrolling the Greek cause: it was in the monastery that Varvakis built at Taganrog that the funeral service for Tsar Alexander would be held after his untimely death there in 1825. Greeks from all kinds of backgrounds came to Russia to find riches and even when they did not, they found something else: a new political consciousness. One village boy from the Peloponnese was packed off to Bessarabian Kishinev by his worried parents at the age of fifteen to enter a trading house and keep out of trouble. When he returned home seven years later, he looked like a European: he was speaking Russian and wearing European dress and scouting out the state of Ottoman fortifications for the Etaireia. Later he became one of the foremost chroniclers of the Greek uprising.[16]

Being in Russia thus helped to foster a sense of Greek national allegiance. As often happens with emigrants from peasant societies, it was in their new home that they ceased to talk solely about their native village or island as their 'fatherland' and heard the term used instead to describe a community uniting all those who spoke the same language and worshipped in the same church. Regional pride was strong but so increasingly was something closer to a modern sense of national belonging. In Odessa there were Greek neighbourhoods with their own schools, churches, benevolent societies and theatre; the first modern Greek drama, *The Death of Demosthenes*, was staged in 1818, followed by a ballet, *The Souliots at Jannina*. This newly expansive sense of identity coursed through a commercial network that connected the Greeks of southern Russia not only with the Danubian Principalities and the Ottoman

Aegean, but with trading houses established across Europe and Asia. According to an English traveller writing from Odessa in 1821: 'The Greeks are very intelligent and artful; they have agents of their own country in all parts to which they trade; they form, as it were, one large family and manage to lay their neighbours under contribution.'[17]

There was from the start a close connection between the world of trade and the workings of the Etaireia. It is not just that many of its members – a majority, in fact – were in commerce, and often victims of its uncertainties. It is also that the business life provided them with useful cover. When the Etaireia sent a man abroad to recruit among Greeks in the Arab lands, for instance, his journeying from Constantinople to Egypt and Cyprus appeared to be a normal commercial voyage. Business provided them with a ready-made secret language. 'Friend', the usual term of solidarity within the Etaireia, was a common way of referring to business associates. One of the leadership wrote about the need to prepare for the coming 'great fair' (*panayiri*: the uprising), and itemized the areas 'supplied with sufficient products to bring to market' when he was really talking about the recruitment of armed men ready to fight. Code names, encrypted messages and jargon were all adapted from the world of commerce to the needs of conspiracy. Armed forces (*stratevmata*) were 'accounts' (*logariasmoi*); war (*polemos*) 'balance sheet' (*bilantzon*); commercial vessels were 'camels' and large ships 'elephants'. The Tsar was 'the Philanthropist' (*Filanthropos*), the family of Napoleon were 'the Blessed' (*Makaritai*), the Patriarch was 'the Most Ancient' (*Palaioteros*) and the Sultan was 'Apathetic' (*Apathis*). Peoples got code names too: the Serbs were 'Failures' (*Apotychontes*), the Italians 'Sweet' (*Glykeis*), the Turks 'Foreign Residents' (*Metoikoi*), the Muslim Albanians 'Relatives by Marriage' (*Sympetheroi*).[18]

Within the Etaireia, whose members recognized one another by secret signs, there was a hierarchical brotherhood, entirely male (women were not permitted to join) and exclusive, in the sense that in theory at least members were not permitted to join other organizations. In its structure it resembled the freemasons; in its liturgy it was heavily impregnated with the atmosphere of the Church and indeed a priest was supposed to supervise the oath of membership. The lowest grade of the so-called *Adelfopoiton* (Fraternized) was for the 'simple and the illiterate'; members of the second grade, the *Systemenon* (Recommended Ones), knew little more than that the goal of the society was 'the

improvement of the fatherland'. Only the *Iereis* (Priests) and *Poimenes* (Shepherds), the third and fourth grades, could recruit others into the movement: they knew that 'the society is formed of genuine Greeks who are lovers of the fatherland and it is named the Filiki Etaireia. Their purpose is the improvement of the nation (*ethnos*) and, if God permits, their liberty.' Yet there was nothing to indicate how this was to be achieved, nor any more precise articulation of the political goal.[19] Membership of the Etaireia's Supreme Authority (*Anotati Archi*) was a closely guarded secret. Lesser ranks were given to understand that it was led by men of great eminence, perhaps even by the Tsar himself. In fact, it was a collective of varying size – generally about eight or nine – of the earliest and most trusted members. But the secret was functional: it allowed all kinds of rumours to flourish about who was backing them, and it gave the entire organization a mystique. As one recalled: 'some believed [the Supreme Authority's] headquarters was in Russia, others in France, England, America and elsewhere'.[20]

The freemasons were the major secret society of late eighteenth-century Europe. But after Napoleon's defeat many new clandestine and conspiratorial organizations arose with avowedly constitutionalist or revolutionary political aims. There was the Italian *Carbonari*, whose name sent shivers down the spines of Bourbon loyalists; there were also numerous long-forgotten shadowy groupings – the *Patrioti Europei*, the *Charbonnerie*, the *Filadelfi*, the *Decisi*, the *Cavalieri Guelfi*, the *Indipendentisti* – not to mention the imaginary ones, like the secret Egyptian sect said to be operating in the Ionian Islands and stirring up mischief. To Chancellor Metternich, and to the secret policemen under him on the lookout for any sign of 'the tumultuous spirit of the century', they all formed part of a vast network aimed at troubling the 'tranquillity of Europe' with 'the fantastic project of national independence'. The Etaireia had no contacts with any of these, despite what Metternich and others later assumed, but it shared with them a revolutionary disposition and dramaturgy, a skill at underground political work and a capacity to alarm the powerful. It was certainly not the largest of them – the Carbonari had probably more than ten times the membership – but the Etaireia was, out of them all, far and away the most successful.[21]

These secret societies were in turn an aspect of a fundamental feature of the politicization of European culture after 1815 – the rise of mass politics through associations and societies of all kinds, most of them

highly visible and perfectly respectable yet engaged in shaping a new force that was ultimately even more threatening to Metternich and the Holy Alliance than underground radicals: public opinion. Alongside abolitionism, it was the cause of Greece that was to reveal for the first time in modern history the transformative international power of public opinion expressed in print and fuelled through associational life.[22]

Not a few of these new societies were driven by the European infatuation with the Greeks, as the examples of Capodistrias's Society of Friends of the Muses suggested. Europe's new archaeological museums, learned societies, antiquarians, philologists and political philosophers all testified to the wide impact of Hellenism. In the Ottoman lands, too, schools disseminated Enlightenment learning among the Greeks of the empire, with remarkable effectiveness. The erudite Dimitrios Galanos, who went out to Dacca and Bombay and became a pioneering scholar of Sanskrit, acquired his philological expertise from nowhere more illustrious than schools in Ottoman Athens, Mesolonghi and Patmos. Anthimos Gazis started out as a poor village boy studying logic, science and philosophy at a school in Ottoman Zagora. In Vienna, where he attended the Congress, he preached in the Greek church, helped run the Greek cultural society founded by Capodistrias and the Tsar, wrote articles and translated learned works before returning to his homeland in Thessaly to teach. Such men contributed to the revival of learning in the Ottoman lands but they also did something more: they popularized the idea that Greece might one day be reborn as a political community.[23]

Between the respectable learned and cultural societies on the one hand and the revolutionaries in the Filiki Etaireia, on the other, the differences ran deeper however than simply an opposition between public and clandestine. Some, like Gazis, bridged the two. But for most there was a real difference of outlook. The cultural societies tended to disseminate the learning of the Enlightenment, and reflected its secularism and its endless absorption with the ancients. The Etaireia was immersed in the world of Orthodoxy and spoke to the literature of prophecy and eschatology that circulated among believers and foretold a coming cosmic struggle with the forces of the Antichrist and the eventual triumph of Christianity over Islam. The two kinds of societies thus differed sharply in their sense of the time that would be needed to bring about real change: the scholars and intellectuals placed their trust in cultural

transformation, and believed it would take years and perhaps decades before the Greeks were ready for freedom. They feared haste and worried at the cost in blood of those 'untimely and irrational enthusiasms' that could bring 'the greatest harm to the fatherland'. The radicals did not worry: all that mattered, to use the metaphor then in vogue, was getting the machine to move: 'The means we have today are enough. The machine, after all, is perfected! Nothing is needed now beyond someone starting it up, and then it will work by itself.' They were confident, in the words of a newspaper of 1820, that 'our age is one of miracles and we must be prepared for any eventuality'.[24] The clash between these two approaches would not end even with the outbreak of the uprising itself.[25]

No sooner had the three Greeks set up their secret group in Odessa than Skoufas and Tsakalof left for Moscow while Xanthos took a boat to Constantinople, where he found a job as a merchant clerk. Before going their various ways, they gave each other coded initials. But there was no real programme, nor any plan of organization, and their preliminary recruitment efforts were greeted with disdain: the prosperous Moscow merchants Skoufas approached made it clear they wanted nothing to do with him. In fact, when later Skoufas and Tsakalov returned to Odessa and chose the name Filiki Etaireia (Friendly Society) for their secret organization they had fewer than twenty members, mostly traders, sea captains and sailors who had fallen on hard times. One described himself as 'a bankrupt merchant'. 'The fall in the price of wheat has ruined me,' wrote another. 'As long as commerce is dead, I am ruined,' stated a third. 'The reason I am not at sea is that I owe 10,000 grosia and can't find work to pay my debt off.' By 1817 only forty-two had joined up, many of them jobless; revolution was no nearer.[26]

Things had not progressed far when a smooth-talking dandy from Ithaca, dressed in the uniform of the Ionian National Guard, appeared in Odessa. Making little effort at discretion and claiming noble ancestry and kinship with Capodistrias himself, Nikolaos Galatis talked himself into the Etaireia inner circle, and then headed north to meet the Russian foreign minister. Capodistrias formed an instantly unfavourable impression of the young adventurer. No sooner had Galatis begun to describe the Etaireia and his hope that Capodistrias would lead it than the furious minister cut him short:

> You must be out of your senses, Sir, to dream of such a project. No one could dare communicate such a thing to me in this house, where I have the honour to serve a great and powerful sovereign, except a young man like you, straight from the rocks of Ithaca and carried away by some sort of blind passion . . . The only advice I can give you is . . . to return immediately where you have come from, and to tell those who sent you that unless they want to destroy themselves and their innocent and unhappy nation with them, they must abandon their revolutionary course and continue to live as before under their present governments until Providence decrees otherwise.[27]

Under Capodistrias's orders, the Russian police deported Galatis across the river Pruth into the Ottoman province of Moldavia, where the Russian consul was instructed to keep an eye on him.[28] Over the coming months, Galatis proselytized widely and somewhat indiscriminately in Moldavia and neighbouring Wallachia, bringing many new members into the Etaireia in a fashion that would be vital to its future course. At the same time, he behaved in ways that alarmed the founders. Strutting one day down the main street in the Moldavian capital, Jassy, in a Russian officer's uniform, Galatis accosted the passengers of a carriage that he claimed had bothered him as it drove past. When they protested, he snatched the whip from the hands of the coachman and began to beat them. That his victims were from prominent Moldavian families only angered him the more, and he told them in no uncertain terms that 'they ought to know that those who went on foot were much better than they were'.[29] The anecdote highlights not just Galatis's quick temper and vanity but more importantly the tension generated within the hierarchical world of Ottoman Christianity – with its landed elite, its peasants and its emerging middle classes – by the dawn of an entirely new kind of political association, one premised on radical ideas of self-sacrifice, individual agency and equality in the cause of national rebirth.

When Capodistrias mentioned his meeting with Galatis to the Tsar, it appears to have been the first time either of them had heard about the Etaireia and they worried that it could lead to 'catastrophe' for the Christians under Ottoman rule. Eventually, however, they concluded they could do little and Capodistrias confined himself to writing to prominent Greeks in the Russian lands, warning them off the conspirators.[30] Meanwhile Galatis – 'loose-tongued, restless in his mind and

greedy for money' – was creating confusion. When he came to Constantinople to see the Etaireia leadership, he started making wild demands and threatened to betray them to the Ottoman authorities. These were men who took their oath seriously, and their security too, and after much soul-searching and efforts to get him to change his ways, they sent him off on a mission to the Peloponnese where, entirely unsuspecting, he was eventually shot at close range by one of his companions in a deserted spot near some ruins on the coast. He took fifteen minutes to die, while his assassin sat by him in tears, bemoaning the behaviour that had led Galatis to such an awful end. The Etaireia might have been small but its leaders were passionately committed men. On a commemorative plaque in Galatis's home village on Ithaca are engraved what were supposedly his last words: 'What did I do to you?'[31]

It was in 1818 when the society's base of operations shifted to the Ottoman capital that its operations were suddenly transformed. A newly recruited well-off Constantinople merchant called Panayiotis Sekeris took matters in hand and found himself effectively running the organization. The want of an orderly centralized administration had led to accusations of corruption and chaos. Sekeris entered details of the new recruits and their contributions; he tracked finances; he saw off attempts at extortion and blackmail. It was Sekeris who gave the Etaireia entrée into the wealthy Greek society of the Ottoman capital, recruiting some powerful figures from the Peloponnese in particular, and Sekeris who funded it so extensively that he eventually impoverished himself. When one of the founders, Skoufas, died penniless at the age of thirty-nine, it was Sekeris who paid for the funeral.[32]

The Etaireia's move to the very heart of the Ottoman state was a sign of remarkable confidence, and Sekeris's administrative reforms were backed by an ambitious and extensive recruiting drive. Before his death, Skoufas had suggested appointing so-called 'apostles' to different regions and the obvious candidates – a number of outstanding Greek *kapetans* with military experience – now presented themselves. They were soldiers, veterans of the Napoleonic Wars, who had fought for the Russians in the Ionian Islands and had come to Russia to collect their wages. Capodistrias himself knew them: they had originally come to see him, and he warned them off the Etaireia and urged them to stay in Russia. But they headed south and joined it anyway. To the leadership of the Etaireia they came as a godsend, as 'apostles' – a title with both

Christian and Jacobin associations – and they began to recruit very effectively in the Greek lands.

One powerful figure who joined as a result of their efforts was Petros Mavromihalis, the so-called Bey of the Mani, whose rule over the remote rocky peninsula in the south of the Peloponnese gave the Etaireia a potential base for its future operations. Less powerful but equally important later on was Theodoros Kolokotronis, a well-known former *kleft* (brigand) in exile on Zakynthos since 1806, who would end up returning to the Peloponnese and becoming the revolutionary commander there. The apostle Anagnostaras is reckoned to have recruited nearly fifty men, among them Kolokotronis; the latter in turn recruited perhaps as many as eleven, including several of his numerous godsons. One of them, a young watchmaker from Tripolitsa, claims he recruited twenty more. The numbers may be mythical but it was in this fashion that the Etaireia's influence spread rapidly into the Peloponnese, the Aegean, Epiros and the Ionian Islands, while the northern Balkans, Egypt and Italy were also brought into the net. A polished young Russian diplomat of Greek descent became the apostle for Russia, opening up the upper echelons of Russo-Greek society. Sekeris's register shows that 168 new members joined in 1818, and over 330 the following year. By 1821 most of the wealthy merchants of southern Russia were donating to the cause and there were so many new members that protocols were no longer being observed, central leadership could not track everyone and secrecy was becoming unsustainable. 'I began to bring every Greek into the Filiki Etaireia,' recalled one. 'Within twenty-four hours it was known to all the Greeks in Odessa and they came to my room and I swore in as many as came.'[33]

Perhaps because it was easy to confuse the Friendly Society with the very different Society of Friends of the Muses that Capodistrias had founded in Vienna in 1814 – a confusion that may have been deliberately fostered when the Etaireia's founders chose its name – Russia's foreign minister was widely believed to be the Etaireia's leader. Indeed, the assumption that the Etaireia was backed by the Tsar and the Russian state was largely responsible for its success. Neither Capodistrias nor the Tsar seem to have felt they could do much about these rumours. They were much more concerned about conspiratorial activities within the Russian army and the Tsar for one probably cared little about what the Greeks were doing. Capodistrias, who cared more, was keeping an eye on their activities. One of his aides was an Etairist; and Capodistrias's older

brother on Corfu joined up.[34] Yet although he was on close terms with many members, Capodistrias himself was always extremely careful to keep his distance and to remain faithful to the Tsar, and we have many indications that he advised Greeks to avoid joining the Etaireia and no evidence that he ever encouraged them. When the Etairist founder Xanthos tried to get him to change his mind and accept the leadership, he got nowhere.[35]

There was, however, another leadership option for the Etairists – a Greek officer of elevated birth who was an aide-de-camp to the Tsar and whose name had already been circulating as a possible alternative. This was the aforementioned Prince Alexander Konstantinovich Ypsilantis, who had been in Vienna with Capodistrias and the Tsar and was well known to them both. A man of action rather than a diplomat, Ypsilantis possessed the ideal resumé – aristocratic, revolutionary and military, he was well respected by his fellow officers in the Russian army. His family were Phanariot nobility – one of those enormously wealthy Greek princely families who had for decades occupied the most senior positions open to Christians in the service of the Sultan. His father had been the Ottoman governor, *hospodar*, in the Danubian Principalities at the end of the eighteenth century before he had been forced to flee into Russia. Alexander was the eldest son, a general in the imperial Hussars, esteemed for his courage and for the fortitude he had shown after losing his right arm fighting the French.[36]

When Xanthos met with the prince in early 1820 and told him how much the Greeks were suffering under Ottoman rule, Ypsilantis asked why, if their ordeal was so great, they were doing so little about it. 'How can the poor Greeks of the Ottoman Empire do anything when they have been abandoned by those who could lead them,' Xanthos shot back. 'All the good families flee to foreign parts and leave their fellow Greeks [*omogeneis*] orphans.' Xanthos gradually led the prince to the main point, revealing to him at a second meeting the existence of the Friendly Society, and offering him the leadership. In fact, Ypsilantis must have known something about the Etaireia as three of his brothers had already joined. The prince accepted the offer and threw himself headlong into the cause. Less than a year elapsed between his decision and the start of the uprising.[37]

Ypsilantis's motives for accepting the leadership of the Etaireia have long been disputed. Some say he was driven by ambition and the desire

for glory. Others note a monetary factor: his family's extensive properties in Moldavia had been expropriated by the Sultan after his father's flight, and they were fighting for compensation. In an apologia written years afterwards, when he was close to death, Ypsilantis denied that he had been swayed by personal considerations. According to him, it had been a question of patriotism: the danger facing the Greek people had been obvious to him and he had felt it was important not to let the Etaireia collapse in recriminations and feuds.

Ypsilantis claimed too that he had been assured of Russia's support, though the evidence scarcely bears him out. He did meet with Capodistrias, and according to Ypsilantis, Capodistrias heartily approved his ideas. But Capodistrias says quite the opposite – that he warned Ypsilantis against 'such foolish projects', which were the work of 'miserable merchants' clerks' who acted like spokesmen for the Greek nation but threatened it with danger. Ypsilantis was refused a meeting with the Tsar although in fact they too did meet, accidentally, in the garden of the imperial country palace. While Ypsilantis claims the Tsar encouraged him and expressed his own deep sympathy for the Greeks, a more trustworthy account tells us that Alexander resisted being drawn into a conversation on the topic. 'You are young and eager, as always, my friend,' the Tsar is said to have told him, 'but you can see that Europe is at peace.'[38] This rings true: the best assessment is that when Ypsilantis assumed the leadership of the Etaireia, he knew – or should have known – he did not have the Tsar's backing. But he was, in the words of a contemporary, 'a man of romantic and unbalanced temperament' who, as events would show, had a highly developed capacity to hear what he wanted. The chief Russian counter-insurgency expert regarded him as 'fundamentally frivolous', while a diplomat who knew Ypsilantis well saw him as 'a noble soul, full of warmth, but deprived of intelligence – one of those mediocre spirits which perversity strains, vanity intoxicates and who believe themselves to be the motors of great initiatives . . .' Subsequent events would reveal the prince to be impetuous, careless and a poor judge of character.[39]

Formally, the collective leadership of the Etaireia had not been abandoned and Ypsilantis was given the code name 'The Good One' (*Kalos*), the initials AR for correspondence, and a new title – the 'General Representative of the Supreme Authority' (*Genikos Epitropos tis Archis*) – which allowed the Etaireia both to keep its collective character and to preserve

the widespread belief that someone even more important was in charge above him. But Ypsilantis had only limited interest in collective decision-making; he was, after all, an aristocrat and an officer. He swiftly made the Etaireia more hierarchical, nepotistic and military, creating a neo-medieval initiation ceremony, knighting his brothers and bringing them into positions of prominence. There was an influx of Phanariot princes. As one observer from that milieu noted: 'After his appointment, members of the better families joined the Etaireia.' A split began to emerge between some of the earlier members, who were risking their lives on a daily basis in Ottoman Constantinople, and a new circle of aides clustered around the prince in Russia. The former were more cautious than the newcomers and also more experienced administrators. Increasingly, however, they felt sidelined as the centre of action in late 1820 moved back from Constantinople to Russia's Black Sea shore.[40]

This turbulence within the Etaireia contributed to the confusion that bedevilled its planning for the uprising. It is naturally hard for historians to figure out how key decisions were taken within a secretive conspiratorial organization, and there are few questions more difficult to answer in the whole saga of 1821 than how and when Ypsilantis decided to embark upon the uprising: the process, a story of stops and starts, remains obscure and contentious. 'Everything was disorderly in Ypsilantis's council,' wrote someone who tried dealing with him. 'No systematic planning, no organization, no foresight, no semblance of efficiency.'[41] Decisions were having to be made too against a fast-moving background in international affairs: a constitutionalist coup in Spain that spread to Naples and later Piedmont; in Epiros, an embryonic Ottoman civil war as the Sultan's generals besieged the powerful Ali Pasha of Jannina; simmmering tensions in Serbia. While raising funds and recruits in Odessa, Ypsilantis had a sense already by September that the Greeks needed to move fast.[42]

Two hundred miles south-west of Odessa, the remote little Bessarabian border town of Ismail was a recent Russian acquisition, located on the edge of the Danube delta, on the Ottoman frontier. Ypsilantis arrived there on 1 October 1820 and stayed for about a week in the house of a Greek merchant in order to meet the Etaireia's leading figures. For many of them, it was their first opportunity to forge a personal bond with their new leader and tell him about their activities. For Ypsilantis this was the moment at which he took command. For the Etaireia it was a turning

point, the moment it made the move from organizational growth to the task of preparing for the uprising itself.

Lacking records, we cannot be sure whether there were meetings on one day or over several, who all the attendees were or what exactly was said. We do know that there were a dozen or more participants, that discussions were led by Ypsilantis, and that they revolved around the date and place of the uprising. The urgent question was how close the Peloponnese – at the centre of the Etaireia's strategic thinking for some time – was to being ready to rise up. Some warned that the Peloponnesian notables were wary, and that weaponry was still in short supply. Others disagreed, saying there would never be an ideal time. The prince sided with them and the outcome of the Ismail meeting was an agreement that the uprising should take place soon. Working on the basis of the so-called 'Great Plan', it was agreed that Ypsilantis would sail down to the Mani to lead the Greeks in the Peloponnese. Agents would coordinate with Ali Pasha in Epiros to tie up Ottoman troops there, synchronize revolts elsewhere in the Balkans and – perhaps most spectacularly – strike terror into Constantinople itself in order to kill the 'beast' in the head rather than 'the tail' or 'the feet'. They talked of setting fire to the Ottoman fleet in order to protect the islands and the Peloponnese from the Sultan's vengeance and in later versions – which kept changing – assassinating the Sultan himself. All this was to be put into effect before the year ended, and instructions immediately went out to Spetses for a boat to be sent to await Ypsilantis at Trieste. Other emissaries armed with proclamations and letters of authorization left to pave the way for his arrival in the Peloponnese and to notify supporters around the Aegean.[43]

One small problem needed immediate resolution, however. The key to the Etaireia's plans was the Mani, the remote, semi-autonomous rocky peninsula in the south of the Peloponnese from where the insurrection would be launched. Its effective ruler in the Ottoman governance system was its bey, Petros Mavromihalis. He was a canny and cautious man who had joined the Etaireia but he had also sent someone to Capodistrias to find out whether the Etaireia's stories of Russian support were true. In St Petersburg, Capodistrias gave Mavromihalis's emissary, a merchant called Kamarinos, a letter confirming that the imperial government did *not* favour an uprising and prized the peace with its Ottoman neighbour.[44] This was a potentially explosive document and