

Crossing the Mediterranean in the Age of Revolutions

The Multiple Mobilities of the 1820s

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INTRODUCTION: PALERMO AS A MEDITERRANEAN REVOLUTIONARY HUB IN 1820

What do the lives of a Cretan naval officer and an Irish general have in common? This chapter takes as a starting point the lives of two individuals, Sir Richard Church and Emmanuele Scordili, both of whom were involved in the revolution in Sicily between 1820 and 1821 but whose destiny after that year took them to different places. Their examples serve in exploring the relationship between military conflict and mobility in the post-Napoleonic period across the Mediterranean, and between revolution and counter-revolution in North Africa, Sicily, Naples, Spain, Portugal, and the Aegean Sea. The chapter therefore looks at the various types of voluntary and involuntary displacements and their different trajectories.

On July 15, 1820, a few days after the victory of the revolution in Naples that led to the introduction of the Cádiz Constitution in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, a popular revolt erupted in Palermo. Taking control of events, the aristocratic leadership of Sicily set up a provisional government alongside the artisan guilds whose members had backed the insurrection. They declared the island's independence from Naples, temporarily recognized the Cádiz Constitution as the charter of the island, and summoned representatives from all the towns of eastern Sicily to an assembly that would decide its future and permanent constitution.¹ These events not only

¹ On these events, see Francesco Renda, *Risorgimento e classi popolari in Sicilia, 1820–1821* (Milan, 1968); Nino Cortese, *La prima rivoluzione separatista siciliana, 1820–1821* (Naples, 1951); Antonino de Francesco, *La Guerra di Sicilia: Il distretto di Caltagirone*

resulted in a military expedition by the Neapolitan constitutional army to crush the rebellion but also triggered a civil war between Palermo and the east Sicilian city of Catania, which sided with Naples against the island's capital. Although these events are accorded scant space in the standard narrative of the Mediterranean region in the 1820s, to say nothing of accounts of the Age of Revolutions, they nevertheless belonged to a much larger wave of popular military rebellions inaugurated by Rafael del Riego's *pronunciamento* in Cádiz in January 1820, which was also followed by similar episodes in Portugal and Naples between July and September that same year, and by the Greek and Piedmontese revolutions in spring of 1821.² As a matter of fact, the popular tumults in Sicily had been marked by rallying cries in support of these Spanish events and the Cádiz Constitution. As the lives of Church and Scordili suggest, in 1820 Sicily was not only an island at odds with Naples but was also a Mediterranean hub connecting one revolutionary event to the other. While for centuries the island had been a favored destination and point of departure for migrants and travelers, the post-Napoleonic era marked a new and intensified phase in the pattern of migration and displacement. The Sicilian revolution was therefore connected with those of Naples, Greece, and the Iberian Peninsula.

A growing body of literature has brought a more nuanced understanding of the motivations and directions of the flows of sympathizers and volunteers drawn to the Mediterranean revolutions. This work has unveiled the multiplicity of motives underpinning internationalism, as well as the existence of exchanges both within the Mediterranean and outside of Europe.³ However, one aspect of this phenomenon still remains central in existing explanatory frameworks: the idea that Western European philhellenic volunteers driven by romanticism and revolutionary internationalism

nella rivoluzione del 1820–21 (Catania, 1992); and Giuseppe Barone, *Città in Guerra, Sicilia 1820–1821* (Bari, 2022).

² Richard Stites, *The Four Horsemen: Riding to Liberty in Post-Napoleonic Europe* (Oxford, 2014); Maurizio Isabella, *Southern Europe in the Age of Revolutions* (Princeton, NJ, 2023).

³ Anna Karakatsouli, «Μαχητές της Ελευθερίας» και 1821: Η Ελληνική Επανάσταση στη διεθνή της διάσταση [*Freedom Fighters and 1821: A Transnational Approach to the Greek War of Independence*] (Athens, 2016); Juan Luis Simal, *Emigrados: España y el exilio internacional 1814–1834* (Madrid, 2013); Gilles Pécout, "International Volunteers and the Risorgimento," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 14 (2009): 413–26; "Philhellenism in Italy: Political Friendship and the Italian Volunteers in the Mediterranean in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 9 (2004): 405–27; Maurizio Isabella and Konstantina Zanou, eds., *Mediterranean Diasporas: Ideas and Politics in the Long 19th Century* (London, 2016); Maurizio Isabella, *Risorgimento in Exile: Italian Emigrés in the Post-Napoleonic Era* (Oxford, 2009).

comprised the majority of those who moved across the Mediterranean toward Greece after 1821. The implicit or explicit assumption of these narratives is that these revolutionaries were liberals driven by support for constitutions and national emancipation.⁴ By taking a “peripheral,” decentered viewpoint on this period’s displacements, this chapter shows that from the perspective of Palermo, philhellenism was not simply a novel movement committed to constitutional, liberal, and national values. If we consider our two examples, in the case of Sir Richard Church, his position was also associated with the defense of imperial interests in an age of imperial rivalry and expansion, while Emmanuele Scordili was motivated by preexisting Mediterranean professional traditions and identities. Hence, the lives of these two men broaden our understanding of the causes of displacement in the Age of Revolutions and offer insights regarding the ways in which these displacements provided opportunities to renegotiate identities. More generally, these case studies point to the very different ways in which one could join a revolution and become a revolutionary, emphasizing the plurality of motivations involved. In other words, the case studies also show how people became revolutionaries and why. Finally, these men’s biographies suggest that the category of revolutionary volunteer overlapped with, and was entangled with, those of mercenary and refugee and retained strong elements of continuity with preexisting forms of mobility across the Mediterranean.

SIR RICHARD CHURCH: BRIDGING EMPIRE, COUNTER- REVOLUTION, AND REVOLUTION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

The Sicilian revolution against Naples succeeded because of the insurrection of the population of its capital, Palermo. On July 15, 1820, the arrival into Palermo of news about the Neapolitan revolution had coincided with its most important religious festival, dedicated to its patron, Santa Rosalia. The entire city took part in the public celebrations, which culminated in a procession of a statue of the saint along the main thoroughfare, the so-called Cassero, and across the rest of the city. Refusing to declare himself in favor of the independence of the island, General Richard Church, chief of the

⁴ Roderick Beaton, *Byron’s War: Romantic Rebellion, Greek Revolution* (Cambridge, 2013); Frederick Rosen, *Bentham, Byron and Greece: Constitutionalism, Nationalism, and Early Liberal Political Thought* (Oxford, 1992); David Roessel, *In Byron’s Shadow: Modern Greece in the English and American Imagination* (Oxford, 2001); Douglas Dakin, *British and American Philhellenes during the Greek War of Independence 1821–1833* (Thessaloniki, 1955).

Neapolitan army in Palermo, was sitting in an open landau along with some other Neapolitan officers when he was attacked by the crowds and barely escaped with his life. The following day, the crowds, with the support of the city guilds, seized control of the castle, along with its armory, and drove the Neapolitan army out of the city.⁵ Church immediately fled for Naples, where he was arrested and charged with having triggered the revolt of Palermo.

Central to the narrative of events in both Sicily and Naples was the fact that the general himself had torn off the pro-independence yellow cockade from a Palermitan citizen, a public insult that escalated the revolt. This anecdote served the purposes of those Sicilian patriots who wanted to justify the insurrection by describing Church as a symbol of Neapolitan oppression on the island. The fact that Church was a foreigner also played an important role in these narratives. His presence in Palermo brought back unpleasant memories about British rule over the island during the Napoleonic Wars, when he had been a member of the foreign occupying army.⁶

Hence, although Church had just arrived in Palermo to assume his new responsibilities, his connection with Sicily and the Mediterranean was not new. To understand his presence in Palermo, we must go back to the Napoleonic period and to the expansion of the Napoleonic empire in the Mediterranean and across southern Europe. While the occupation of Sicily would prove to be temporary (1806–15), Britain acquired Malta in 1800, and Corfu and the rest of the Ionian Islands in 1815. Portugal was not directly annexed but the presence there of the British army, poised to fight the French in the Iberian Peninsula, continued for some years after 1815. This military and colonial expansion brought with it a wave of army officers, soldiers, and mercenaries, as well as imperial agents, merchants, diplomats, and administrators to the Mediterranean. It also gave rise to a lively debate about the role of the Mediterranean in the British Empire. In the context of the Napoleonic Wars, British agents described the Mediterranean as a maritime empire built in defense of freedom against the French Empire, which they held to be based on despotism

⁵ On these events, see Niccolò Palmieri, *Saggio storico e politico sulla costituzione del Regno di Sicilia infino al 1816 con un'appendice sulla rivoluzione del 1820*, Michele Amari, ed. (1847; Palermo, 1972), 326–31. The general's own account is in Richard Church, *Relazione dei fatti accaduti al tenente generale Riccardo Church in Palermo la notte del 15 luglio 1820* (Naples, 1820).

⁶ On the origins and enduring fortune of this legend see Antonino de Francesco, "Church e il nastro giallo. L'immagine del 1820 in Sicilia nella storiografia del XIX secolo," *Rivista di Studi Napoleonici* 28 (1991): 23–90.

and conquest. Inspired by the writings of Edmund Burke, advocates of the British Empire in the sea defined it as a community of free polities based on free trade and relative autonomy. A few such advocates passionately believed in the need for Britain to export its constitution to the Mediterranean islands. This idea was first put into practice in Corsica between 1794 and 1796, but its most important application took place in Sicily, where a constitution inspired by British institutions was introduced in 1812 under the aegis of Sir William Bentinck. However, the perceived failure of this constitutional experiment in Sicily (whose aristocracy resisted the reform of feudalism advocated by the British) led to the prevalence of an alternative imperial model. This form of imperial rule, otherwise known as “proconsular despotism,” was based on the belief that neither local elites nor ordinary people were suited to self-rule or representative government. Before granting rights, the imperial government first had to civilize and reform the populace through good administration and through order. Hence, no form of autonomy was granted to the populations of Malta and the Ionian Islands when they became British after 1817.⁷

The son of a Quaker merchant from Cork, Richard Church had run away from “school and quakerdom” to join the army at the age of sixteen. In 1801, at age seventeen, he was sent to fight the French in Egypt.⁸ In the following years, up until his posting to Palermo in the spring of 1820, Church moved across the Mediterranean fighting for the British Empire against the Napoleonic armies and brigands alike, and training native troops. In 1805, he participated in the military occupation of Sicily. It was after taking part in the Battle of Maida against the French in Calabria that he was appointed officer of a battalion of Corsican rangers and fought brigandage in that region. But it was only once stationed on the Ionian Islands, during the British occupation from 1809 to 1812, that Church would perfect his skills in the training and leading of Mediterranean fighters.⁹ Here, he created a regiment of volunteers coming from the Greek lands of the Ottoman Empire. Called the

⁷ C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780–1830* (London and New York, 1989). On debates about the British empire in the Mediterranean see Giuseppe Grieco, “The British Empire and the Two Sicilies: Constitutions and International Law in the Revolutionary Mediterranean, ca. 1800–60,” PhD diss., Queen Mary University of London, 2021. On proconsular despotism in the contemporary Cape Colony, see Kirsten McKenzie’s chapter in this volume.

⁸ E. M. Church, *Sir Richard Church in Italy and Greece* (Edinburgh, 1895), 1.

⁹ Stanley Lane Poole, *Sir Richard Church* (London, 1890), 24–30.

Duke of York Greek Light Infantry, it was used in 1810 to conquer the island of Lefkada, then controlled by the French. Church became hugely popular among the members of his regiment, which included some of the future military leaders of the Greek revolution, such as Theodoros Kolokotronis, and many former brigands (*klephts*) expelled from the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰ Church's experience in these years left him with the belief that it was possible to impose military discipline and thereby civilize southern populations, but unlike Bentinck or other British administrators, he never believed in the usefulness of exporting constitutions and rights to this region.

After 1815 and the permanent acquisition of the Ionian Islands, the British consolidated their presence in the Mediterranean and revived debates about their imperial role there. From his experience, Church was also convinced that these islands' self-government under a British protectorate could better serve the commercial and geopolitical interests of the British Empire in the Eastern Mediterranean than direct colonial rule. He elaborated on this vision in a memorandum drafted for the British representative at the Congress of Vienna, the Duke of Wellington, in 1815, when the future of the Ionian Islands was to be decided. In this memorandum, Church argued that the islands and the continental dependencies traditionally associated with them deserved to enjoy self-government under British protection, and that under these circumstances, the Ionian Islands could become the arbiters of the Christian territories of Morea, Rumeli, the Archipelago, and Alexandria. Britain would thus win the sympathy of their populations and increase its influence in the region without unnecessary expense.¹¹

After the restoration, Church's activities in the Mediterranean continued to be driven by a determination to civilize local populations with military discipline, without encouraging aspirations for freedom and self-government. Church went on to sell his skills in the service of the King of the Two Sicilies, Ferdinando II, who in 1816 had repealed the Sicilian constitution. Church had now decided to work for the dynasty he had previously defended during the British occupation of the island. At the same time, he did not disregard the interests of Britain in the area. In the new political context set by the consolidation of a British colonial

¹⁰ British Library, London (hereafter BL), Church Papers, Add MSS36543, fos. 23–24, letter to Church, July 24, 1812.

¹¹ BL, Add MSS36543, fos. 142–146, Richard Church, report on the Ionian Islands, to the Duke of Wellington, December 1814.

presence in the Adriatic, the recruitment of Greek fighters became pivotal to the imperial contest for Mediterranean influence. By recruiting Greek mercenaries who had previously fought for the British, Church was also trying to stem efforts by Russian agents to attract Greek officers into Russian service.¹² He also served the Bourbon king by using these Greek mercenaries to fight against brigandage in Puglia in 1817. Here, brigandage was associated with the proliferation of secret societies belonging to the world of the *Carboneria*, organizations that had both criminal objectives (murdering enemies, burning harvests) and broader political aims (inciting popular revolts to introduce the constitution, or even establishing a republic). Church succeeded in curtailing the phenomenon and in reestablishing law and order in the region.¹³

The anger leveled at the general in Palermo on July 15, 1820, was therefore fueled not only by popular resentment toward the British military occupation of the island between 1806 and 1815, but also by the memory of Church's role in repressing the *Carboneria* in Puglia. Members of the *Carboneria* had played an important role in fomenting the popular insurrection in the capital of Sicily. As subsequent events show, Church's loyalty to the monarchy took precedence over that to the constitution. Discharged from prison after a few months in 1821, the general headed to the Congress of Laibach, where he consulted with Ferdinando II, who had given his approval for an Austrian military intervention, and subsequently joined the Austrian invasion that ended the constitutional experiment in 1821. He remained in the king's service as an officer until 1826. However, in 1827, in an abrupt new turn in his career, after some hesitations, Church agreed to assume command of the Greek Revolutionary Army, on condition that the Greek factions settle their differences.

At first glance, Church's decision to leave Naples and fight for Greek independence looks like the beginning of a radically new phase in his career. Not only did it offer him the chance for an exceptional promotion, transforming him into the chief of a national army but, more surprisingly, it also turned the former defender of the political status quo and enemy of insubordination, insurrection, and revolutionary principles into a revolutionary. In Greece, Church found himself at the center of a dense network of philhellenes fighting for the emancipation of the Greek nation. He not only had to negotiate between competing national

¹² BL, Add MSS41828, fos. 114–120, Church to William A'Court, July 24, 1818.

¹³ Jacob L. S. Bartholdy, *Memoirs of the Secret Societies of the South of Italy, Particularly the Carbonari* (London, 1821); E. M. Church, *Sir Richard Church*, 139–42.

groups but also had to navigate the tricky politics of the Greek factions. In fact, he played a crucial role in pacifying them and in forging a consensus around the election of Ioannis Kapodistrias as the new Governor of Greece.¹⁴ After meeting with success in the task of pacifying the Greek factions, he assumed his new role as leader of the army, only to suffer a bitter defeat outside Athens in a battle that led to the capitulation of the Acropolis in May 1827. Church devoted the following two years to the reconquest of Western Greece, but the deterioration of his relationship with Kapodistrias led to his dismissal in 1829. Nonetheless, he went back to serve the Greek army in the following decades and was appointed general and senator of the kingdom. When he died in 1873, Church was celebrated as a national hero.

However, if one looks at the nature of his commitment to the Greek cause, what is striking is the continuity in his language and motivations across time. When informing Francis I, King of the Two Sicilies about his decision to go to Greece, he wrote that what motivated him was the hope that he might “limit the disaster of the Turks’ exterminating war against a Christian population.”¹⁵ This was the language employed by European philhellenes at the time.

Yet the European philhellenes who flocked to Greece to fight the Ottomans disagreed on the nature and objectives of their commitment to the war of liberation. Some wanted freedom of the press and constitutional liberties to be introduced immediately following the war. For an important group of British philhellenes involved in the London Greek Committee, the priority of the war was not the introduction of constitutional guarantees into Greece, but rather the gradual elevation of the Greeks to a higher standard of civilization, according to the principles they had applied when working in the Asian dependencies of the British Empire.¹⁶ Church, however, was not interested in advancing a liberal agenda in Greece. Once in Greece, he continued to pursue the civilizing project he had championed as a professional fighter across the Mediterranean, without embracing the principles of constitutionalism along with those of national emancipation. This is why most European and British philhellenes criticized him as a professional with no idealism

¹⁴ Dakin, *British and American Philhellenes*, 144–46.

¹⁵ Church to Francis I, January 1, 1827, in Ruggero Moscati, “La questione Greca e il governo Napoletano,” *Rassegna Storica del Risorgimento* 20 (1933): 21–49, and especially 39–41.

¹⁶ Rosen, *Bentham, Byron and Greece*.

or specific ideological motivations. It is, therefore, not surprising that Church would not have seen any contradiction or shift in ideological allegiances between fighting secret societies in Puglia, attempting to crush (although unsuccessfully) the Sicilian insurrection, and assuming a prominent role in the Greek revolution. As his narrative of the war of liberation makes plain, his priorities as a military leader had been to reorganize the army according to modern European standards (he complained that his troops, when taken too far from home, would desert and return to their villages of origin). He also wanted to “civilize” the war and make it less ferocious by using financial rewards to convince his troops to spare the lives of their Turkish prisoners. In Greece, he was confronted again, as earlier in his Mediterranean career, with the problem of brigandage, a phenomenon that, in the context of the revolution, shifted between support for the anti-Ottoman rebellion to warfare against any and every authority, including that of Greek military leaders.¹⁷

Finally, his commitment to the emancipation of Greece did not contradict his status as a former British imperial officer but was, in fact, encouraged by it. The Greek revolution represented a novel chapter in the history of European interference into Ottoman affairs, during which the British and Russian Empires and the French government tried to influence the conduct and outcome of the war and compete with the other European powers not only through diplomatic channels but also by way of the volunteers coming from their countries. While the widespread perception among Greeks and foreigners in Greece that Church was a British agent may be incorrect, this perception helped him to play an important role in pacifying Greek factions and in forging a consensus around the appointment of Kapodistrias as president in 1827. In the previous three years, Greek factions had organized themselves into so-called Russian, French, and English parties, whose members sought to advance their own interests with the support of the different European powers and philhellenes. It is significant that Church himself opted for the candidature of Kapodistrias only after consultation with the British cabinet and the newly appointed governor of the Ionian Islands, Stratford Canning, cousin of George Canning.¹⁸ Therefore, it would be appropriate to see his activities, along with those of other prominent British military men involved in the anti-Ottoman conflict, such as Admiral Thomas

¹⁷ Richard Church, *Narrative by Sir R. Church of the war in Greece during his tenure of the command, 1827–1829*. British Library, Add MSS36565, fos. 58–60, 364–65, 414.

¹⁸ Dakin, *British and American Philhellenes*, 146–47.

John Cochrane or Commodore Sir Gawen William Rowan Hamilton, as evidence of the expansion of the ties and networks of informal empire that, through the Greek insurrection, served to advance British influence into Ottoman lands in competition with other European powers.¹⁹ Nor was his support for the creation of a Greek state in contradiction with the liberal imperialist vision of the Mediterranean he had put forward at the Congress of Vienna in 1815.

The different motivations and political stances dividing philhellenes in Greece could also be found among those British imperial officers who, after fighting in the Napoleonic Wars, remained entangled in the political and military affairs of other southern European countries after 1815. Some of them closely identified with the cause of liberalism in southern Europe and were thus convinced that Britain had a duty to support freedom and civil rights abroad. Some British officers who participated as volunteers in the war against Napoleon in Spain ended up supporting the constitution during the *trienio liberal*, and a few of them became passionately committed to the defense of revolutions across the Mediterranean. Sir Robert Wilson, a man who combined military experience across Europe with political radicalism, was undoubtedly the most famous among them. Having fought the French in Egypt, Portugal (where he commanded the Loyal Lusitanian Legion of local volunteers), and Russia, he was elected to the House of Commons in 1818 and soon rallied to all the revolutions of the South, criticizing foreign interventions to crush them, condemning the Alien Bill, and advocating for the right of political refugees to seek asylum in Britain. In 1823, he planned to gather 10,000 volunteers to rescue the Spanish constitutional government in the face of the French invasion. He ultimately succeeded in leading a much smaller number in the temporary defense of Cádiz against the French army. While he was temporarily considered for the position of Chief of the Greek Revolutionary Army, a position eventually offered to Richard Church, Wilson continued to lend his organizational support to international conspiracies involving exiled constitutionalists.²⁰

¹⁹ Gregory A. Barton, *Informal Empire and the Rise of One World Culture* (London, 2014), 17.

²⁰ On Wilson's career, see Michael Glover, *A Very Slippery Fellow: The Life of Sir Robert Wilson, 1777–1849* (New York, 1978); Christiana Brennecke, "Internacionalismo liberal, romanticismo y sed de aventuras. La oposición inglesa y la causa de España en los años veinte del s. XIX," in *Según Congrés Recerques. Enfrontaments civils: postguerres i reconstruccions*, 2 vols. (Lleida, Spain, 2002) 1: 459–74.

For other British fighters, however, it would be hard to detect an ideological coherence between the various phases of their professional military careers, or a direct relationship between their defense of southern populations against Napoleon and subsequent liberal tendencies. What seemed to mark the careers of the former British volunteers in the Peninsular Wars was a constant search for the professional opportunities offered by mercenary fighting. Most of them were prepared to continue in the service of Fernando VII after 1814, when the monarch abolished the constitution and turned his back on liberalism; and while some supported the revolution in 1820, others went on to fight for the emancipation of the Spanish colonies against Fernando.²¹ They were first and foremost mercenaries, not freedom fighters. Others, however, thought that it was in the best interests of the British Empire to defend the political status quo in southern Europe and the Mediterranean and thereby stem the influence of Austria, Russia, and France in this region by preventing revolutions and constitutional reforms. It was in Portugal, in particular, a de facto British protectorate, that this policy was implemented. Occupied by the British army during the Napoleonic Wars, it remained a British satellite state after 1815. Lord William Beresford, like Church, Irish by origin, was the head of the Portuguese army between 1809 and 1820, first as Wellington's deputy during the Peninsular Wars, and later as *Marechal general* of all Portuguese troops, who remained dominated by British officers until 1820. As head of the Portuguese army, his political influence was tempered only by the board of governors who ruled over Portugal in the absence of the Brazil-based monarch. At the same time, Beresford was in constant touch with British diplomats and with Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh, the secretary of state for foreign affairs, back home. In 1817, when Church had defeated brigandage and secret society activities in Puglia, Beresford repressed secret society activities and the conspiracy led by Gomes Freire de Andrade that aimed to introduce a constitution and free Portugal from the British presence. The dismissals of Beresford in Portugal and Church in Sicily represented one of the first revolutionary acts in each country. A Tory at heart, Beresford, like Church, had no sympathy for constitutions.²² Church, therefore, shared with many other British fighters an extraordinary ability to

²¹ Graciela Iglesias Rogers, *British Liberators in the Age of Napoleon: Volunteering under the Spanish Flag in the Peninsular War* (London and New York, 2013), 151–65.

²² Malyn Dudley Dunn Newitt and Martin Robson, eds., *Lord Beresford e a Intervenção Britânica em Portugal 1807–1820* (Lisbon, 2004).

seize the opportunities offered by the rapidly changing political circumstances of his life, without being committed to a specific political agenda. Church's commitment to protecting the interests of the British Empire, civilizing the Mediterranean populations through military discipline and war, and exercising a hostile attitude toward constitutional freedoms was perhaps the only ideological constant of his remarkable career, one that bridged the Age of Revolutions from the Napoleonic Wars to the creation of the new – illiberal – Greek monarchy in the 1830s and beyond.

EMMANUELE SCORDILI: THE GREEK DIASPORA AND
ITS MULTIPLE RESPONSES TO THE REVOLUTIONS

The economic depression that affected Sicily in the post-Napoleonic period was a crucial factor in the island's insurrection. Thus, the citizens of Palermo hoped that the new provisional government would not only guarantee their autonomy and introduce a constitution but also improve their material circumstances. As soon as it was established, the provisional revolutionary authority of the city was flooded with hundreds of petitions by individuals seeking employment. Among them, one request stands out because of the professional background of the applicant: The former Greek officer, Emmanuele Scordili, born on the Ottoman island of Crete, sought to work for the Sicilian revolutionary army as an interpreter. To affirm his credentials, Scordili noted in the petition that "since the age of 20 he had worked for the Russian Imperial fleet, and was later enrolled in the Albanian regiment of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies as a second lieutenant." Since 1812, when the regiment had been disbanded, Scordili had received a pension, but the revolution had brought an end to its regular payment. In exchange for a salary, Scordili offered his services to the new government as an interpreter. His knowledge of "the oriental languages, and especially [the] Muscovite and Turkish ones," would prove useful, "since the Sicilian nation would now need to establish commercial relations with the oriental nations." To lend more credibility to his commitment, Scordili added that "the Greeks and Sicilians have been, and still are, one single nation; moreover my residence in Sicily for almost 20 years has made me a veritable Sicilian."²³

Submitted on August 13, 1820, this request was rejected by the provisional government, and we have no evidence as to what became of Scordili after the end of the Sicilian revolution. Scordili belonged to a professional

²³ Archivio di Stato di Palermo, 5032, f. 85, Real segreteria incartamenti.

category of Ottoman Christian mercenaries who fought for the Christian monarchs, a group that had existed since the sixteenth century, when the Neapolitan kings had started to employ Christians from Ottoman lands, and from Albania and Epirus in particular. The Reggimento Albanese Real Macedone, founded in 1736, was further strengthened at the time of the wars against the French, when a new Battaglione di Cacciatori Albanesi was established between 1797 and 1798. Scordili belonged to this battalion. His service to the Russian fleet was not unusual either. Since Catherine the Great's wars against the Ottomans, which were waged between 1769–74 and 1787–91, the Imperial Russian Army, too, had organized Greek regiments and sailors and had also hired Greek corsair ships in the Mediterranean.²⁴

The Napoleonic Wars offered new opportunities for these Ottoman Christian fighters. All empires, including the British, required local mercenaries to fight in the Mediterranean. Scordili's biography was therefore entangled with that of Richard Church, who had created new Greek regiments in the Ionian Islands and thus participated in the same military events. When the Albanian regiments were disbanded in 1812, some of their members were hired by the Neapolitan consular service in the Levant. Others, like Church, immediately went on to join other foreign armies.²⁵ Like Scordili, many Greeks offered their linguistic skills to different empires in the Levant. Their services were welcome at a time when European consular services gladly took advantage of their unique knowledge to advance their commercial and diplomatic interests.²⁶

Nevertheless, the two men's biographies differed in one substantial way. While Church helps us understand the complex nature of European philhellenism, Scordili invites us to reflect on the impact of the Greek War of Independence on those whose status thereby shifted from Christian Ottoman to Greek national. Although both Church and Scordili moved between and across different empires and states, Scordili's life was anchored in the polycentric world of the Mediterranean Greek diaspora and can only be understood in that context. Scordili was not just a mercenary who belonged to a venerable professional tradition; he was also a member of one of the very many Greek communities that thrived on the

²⁴ Nicholas Charles Pappas, *Greeks in Russian Military Service in the Late 18th Century and Early 19th Century* (Thessaloniki, 1991).

²⁵ Attanasio Lehasca, *Cenno storico dei servigi militari prestati nel Regno delle Due Sicilie dai Greci, Epiroti, Albanesi e Macedoni in epoche diverse* (Corfú, 1843), 55–56.

²⁶ Theophilous C. Prousis, *British Consular Reports from the Ottoman Levant in an Age of Upheaval, 1815–1830* (Istanbul, 2008), 17–21.

shores of the Mediterranean, from Messina to Marseilles, from Leghorn to Naples, from Taranto and the Salento in Puglia to Venice and Trieste in the Habsburg Empire. Their permanently settled populations were cyclically revitalized by the arrival of new individuals like him, and their members remained in contact with their Ottoman Christian communities of origin thanks to commercial and family ties.²⁷ Thus, Scordili's petition invites us to explore how the transition to a revolutionary context not only affected mobilities but also offered new possibilities for the renegotiation of cultural and political affiliations among the members of the Greek diaspora. What did it mean to be Greek, and how did the Greek revolution change this? How did the revolution affect preexisting patterns of mobility between Greek communities inside and outside the Ottoman Empire?

For centuries, the members of these communities had organized themselves in self-governing associations called *fratie*, or *universitas*, or *confraternità*, which were linked to churches belonging to the Greek Oriental Rite and appointed their own priests. These communities defined themselves as *nazione greca*, and their members as *nazionali*.²⁸ In spite of this definition, which referred to their religious and linguistic affiliation, members' identities were often fluid in terms of religion and culture, as well as legal status. With the exception of those Greeks living in Venice, who had their religious rights guaranteed and could safely practice their Orthodox faith, the *confraternità* in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, as members of the Oriental Church loyal to the papacy, were subject, at least in theory, to the authority of the Catholic Church.²⁹ Legally, and depending on their actual origins, the Greeks defined themselves as Ottoman, Habsburg, or Venetian, and belonged to separate churches (for instance in Naples, where Ottoman and Venetian Greeks had separate churches). These definitions, however, were always negotiable. For instance, during the Napoleonic period in Venice, a number of *nazionali*

²⁷ Olga Katsiardi-Hering, "Greek Merchant Colonies in Central and South-Eastern Europe in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-Centuries," in Victor Zakharov, Gelina Harlaftis, and Olga Katsiardi-Hering, eds., *Merchant Colonies in the Early Modern Period* (London, 2012), 127–80.

²⁸ Olga Katsiardi-Hering, "Diaspora and Self-Representation: The Case Study of Greek People's Identity, Fifteenth-Nineteenth Centuries," in Cinzia Ferrini, ed., *Human Diversity in Context* (Trieste, 2020), 239–65.

²⁹ Jannis Korinthios, *I Greci di Napoli del Meridione d'Italia dal XV al XX secolo* (Naples, 2012); Angela Falcetta, *Ortodossi nel Mediterraneo cattolico. Frontiere, reti comunità nel Regno di Napoli (1700–1821)* (Rome, 2016), 52–62.

decided to become Ottoman in order to avoid the taxation imposed on Venetian citizens.³⁰

Scordili's own use of the terms *nazione Greca* and *nazione Siciliana* demonstrated strong elements of continuity with the idiom that the Greek diaspora had employed for centuries, and with eighteenth-century understandings of the *nazione Siciliana* as a state. While many petitions sent by individuals or communities to the Neapolitan provisional government in the same period contained references to the Cádiz Constitution and to its definition of the *nazione* as a sovereign community of people, such references were absent from Scordili's appeal. His cosmopolitan claim that the Sicilians and the Greeks were a single nation could well have been voiced a full century before. However, the language of other members of the Christian Ottoman diaspora was starting to shift in new directions, reflecting more explicitly the new values of the Age of Revolutions. On the Spanish island of Mallorca, only three months before Scordili petitioned the Sicilian government, two Greek expatriates spoke at an assembly of the Patriotic Society of the town of Palma de Mallorca, an association set up immediately after Riego's *pronunciamento* and the declaration of the Cádiz Constitution in 1820. In the face of the hostility shown by some of its members to the presence of foreigners, the two merchants made an impassioned case for their right to join the Patriotic Association, while at the same time offering to resign, should they be called to do so. Having lived in Mallorca, from where they had been engaged in trade between the Ottoman Empire and Spain, for ten years, Nicholas Francopulo and Yanni Papadopulo claimed to be friends of all Spaniards. The two Greek merchants observed that their participation in the *Sociedad Patriótica Mallorquina* – one of the many similar institutions that sprang up across Spain and southern Europe during the 1820s – would not be incompatible with the organization's national aspirations, since they were both committed to the values of the revolution and to the defense of the constitutional order. For the two of them, in fact, constitutional Spain, a country that had defeated tyranny and the persecution of the Holy Inquisition, was best placed to provide guidance and leadership to Greece in its own aspirations for freedom against an oppressive government.³¹

³⁰ Mathieu Grenet, "Grecs de nation", sujets Ottomans: Expérience diasporique entre-deux indentaires, v.1770–v.1830," in Jocelyne Dakhlia and Wolfgang Kaiser, eds., *Les Musulmans dans l'histoire de l'Europe*, 2 vols. (Paris, 2013), 2: 311–44.

³¹ *Sociedad Patriótica Mallorquina*, May 25, 1820. On patriotic societies in the Spanish revolution, and the one in Mallorca in particular, see Alberto Gil Novales, *Las Sociedades Patrióticas (1820–1823)*, 2 vols. (Madrid, 1975), 1: 289–300, 304–7.

The eruption of the Greek revolution in the spring of 1821, immediately after the Austrian invasion ended the Neapolitan constitutional regime, had a profound impact on the Greek diaspora, stirring new patriotic sentiments and creating new movements across the Mediterranean. Movements from and into the Greek diasporic communities before the revolution were determined both by commercial routes and by enduring links with their members' place of origin inside the Ottoman Empire. But the war moved populations to new destinations, both near and distant. Thousands of Greek ex-combatants from the Russian, British, and Neapolitan armies arrived in the territories of the Ottoman Empire as volunteers, often having obtained financial support from their confraternities.³² But Greek volunteers from the diaspora and from the shores of the Mediterranean also included people without any previous experience as fighters. On the eve of the Greek revolution, Trieste, the main port of the Habsburg Empire, was home to a large Greek community, or *parikia*, of around 1,500 individuals. The community's existence had been formalized in 1751, when an Orthodox Church was inaugurated. The city, an important commercial and information hub between the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, had played an important role in the early history of Greek patriotism. Between 1797 and 1798, Rigas Fereos, who had developed the earliest plans to "liberate" Greece from the Ottomans on the basis of the principles of the French Revolution, established a small circle of supporters among the Greek merchants of Trieste. His famous poem, "Thourios," was well known in the city and sung by a number of supporters.³³ The year 1821, however, marked a new turning point as Greek patriotism became a more socially significant movement. On receiving news about events in the Principalities and the Peloponnese, a number of local volunteers, mostly from humble social backgrounds, left for Greece on passports granted by the city's Russian and Ottoman consuls. In addition, Trieste was used by Greek students from European universities as a point of departure to Greece. This flow had been encouraged by the Ypsilantis brothers, Alexander and Dimitrios, who arrived in the city to raise funds and organize these groups of fighters. Financial support for the revolution was provided by a number of wealthy city merchants, who offered substantial sums for military purposes.³⁴ A greater

³² Moscati, "La questione Greca," 24.

³³ Olga Katsiardi-Hering, *I Elliniki Parikia tis Tergestis (1751–1830)*, 2 vols. (Athens, 1986), 1: 322–23.

³⁴ Katsiardi-Hering, *I Elliniki Parikia tis Tergestis*, 1: 335–39.

number of volunteers came from the British Ionian Islands. Hundreds of fighters left the islands, Zante and Kefalonia in particular, and joined the conflict in the Peloponnese as early as April 1821. Ionian volunteers had also taken part in Alexander Ypsilantis's expedition in the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, which inaugurated the Greek insurrection.³⁵

New opportunities would, therefore, open up for individuals such as Scordili in 1821. Since his name does not appear in the list of forty veterans who, by 1830, had died and been commemorated at the Orthodox church of Palermo, it is not inconceivable that he was among those who reached the Peloponnese or Rumeli at the outbreak of the rebellion from the port cities of the Mediterranean and the Adriatic.³⁶ At the same time, not all the members of these "Greek nations" were seduced by the call to join the war of national liberation or responded with such enthusiasm to the patriotic feelings evoked by the Greek insurrection. Some of them remained loyal to their traditional affiliations. Since this period coincided with the creation of the Ottoman consular system, a number of diasporic Greeks remained faithful to the Ottoman Empire after the revolution as well. For example, while the deputy consul of the Ottoman Empire in Marseilles became a representative of the new Greek state, the consul, a diasporic Greek, continued to work for the empire and condemned the revolution.³⁷

The revolution produced another novel category of displaced persons, namely refugees. Between 1821 and 1828, displacement caused by revolution, along with ethnic cleansing and war casualties, lowered the population of the affected territories by 185,000, some 50,000 of whom must have been Muslims.³⁸ Southern Crete had joined the insurrection immediately, in 1821. However, counterattacks by the Ottoman army and fleet, culminating in the invasion of the southwestern part of the island by the Turko-Egyptian forces of Hussein Bey in March 1824, caused more than 10,000 Cretans to flee as refugees, with most going to the Peloponnese.³⁹ While such displacement at times encouraged a new sense

³⁵ Sakis Gekas, *Xenocracy: State, Class, and Colonialism in the Ionian Islands, 1815–1864* (New York, 2016); Panayotis Hiotis, *Istoria tou Ioniou Kratous apo systaseos autou mechri enoseos (eti 1816–1864)* (Eptanisos, 1874), 1, 409–11, 426.

³⁶ Matteo Sciambra, "Prime vicende della comunità greco-albanese di Palermo e suoi rapporti con l'oriente bizantino," *Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata* 16 (1962): 102–4; Vittorio Buti, "Albanesi al servizio del regno delle due Sicilie," *La Rassegna Italiana. Politica Letteraria e Artistica*, series 3, 21 (1939): 151–57.

³⁷ Grenet, "Grecs de nation," 341–43.

³⁸ Nikolai Todorov, *The Balkan City, 1400–1900* (Seattle, 1983), 328.

³⁹ George Dalidakis and Peter Trudgill, *Sfakia: A History of the Region in Its Cretan Context* (Heraklion, 2015), 187.

of national belonging, it just as often resulted in violence and intolerance among Greeks. Greek refugees fleeing their province, city, or island were often killed by other Greeks, who treated them as enemies, to the extent that agreements were made in revolutionary assemblies to stop this from happening, and also to render displacements illegal.

Other areas, such as the Ionian Islands, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and the Adriatic coasts of the Habsburg Empire, started to be affected by this flow of refugees from the war in Greece. In the British colony of the Ionian Islands, Governor General Sir Thomas Maitland's immediate reaction to the outbreak of revolution was to decree the strict neutrality of the Ionian Islands, a status that allowed for the protection of refugees from the war but otherwise kept the islands outside the conflict. The very first refugees of the Greek revolution were probably those 7,000 individuals, mostly women and children, who fled to the island of Zante on account of its proximity and safety. They had come from Patras and its surroundings, in the Northern Peloponnese, in the very early stages of the revolt. In Zante, they enjoyed the financial support of wealthy citizens.⁴⁰ The Ionian authorities tried to be impartial and provide shelter to Muslim refugees as well, but their arrival triggered violent reactions among the local populations. On the island of Cerigo, Turks seeking protection were attacked and murdered, and the governor executed five of the culprits in retaliation.⁴¹ A flow of refugees was also threatening to reach the southeastern shores of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, which were slightly farther removed from the conflict than the Ionian Islands. In 1824, the Neapolitan authorities of the Puglia region, facing Albania and Epirus, estimated that 4,000 or so Greek refugees had arrived on their shores, although numbers in later accounts were far more conservative.⁴²

Although these flows of refugees represented an unprecedented phenomenon, their movements followed preexisting links between given localities and the Greek diaspora. Soon, refugees started to cross the Mediterranean Sea not only to reach the Peloponnese or the islands unscathed by the war but also the communities on the Mediterranean and Adriatic shores. By 1824, more than 20,000 refugees had left the

⁴⁰ Hiotis, *Istoria tou Ioniou Kratous*, I, 388.

⁴¹ Willis C. Dixon, *The Colonial Administration of Sir Thomas Maitland* (New York, 1969), 212–13.

⁴² Giuseppe Clemente, "I Greci in Capitanata dalla fine del 1700 al 1830," in Benito Mundi, ed., *70 convegno nazionale sulla preistoria e storia della daunia, San Severo, 1985*, I (San Severo, Italy, 1988).

island of Cyprus. The *nazione Greca* in Venice, for instance, raised money to subsidize the education of refugee children, and to send girls to learn to read and write in the convents of the city.⁴³ A more substantial number of refugees reached Trieste, which received 3,000 migrants in 1821 alone. One-third of them left immediately, another third spent just a few days, and the remaining third settled there. For many, the choice of Venice or Trieste was dictated by preexisting family links. Yet by 1823, the Greek community of Trieste found it difficult to continue looking after refugees, and the community board decided to stop raising funds. As a consequence, by spring 1823, the majority of refugees had left for Alexandria, Odessa, Marseille, and, above all, for the Ionian Islands.⁴⁴ While the flow of refugees elicited patriotic responses and reinforced feelings of belonging to a shared national community, it did not necessarily bring about the adoption by the refugees of one specific national affiliation at the expense of others. As in previous centuries, Ottoman Christians moving across the Mediterranean were willing to renegotiate their cultural identities and affiliations. In the absence of a Greek consular service, and with recognition of the Greek state by foreign powers coming only after 1827, Greek refugees, whenever they could, sought protection from the authorities of other European countries, whether in the form of consular protection or citizenship. Greeks fleeing to North Africa during the revolution, for instance, often acquired Italian, French, or British documents in Alexandria or Tunis.⁴⁵

In addition to refugees and volunteers, the Greek revolution increased the population of a third category of displaced persons: enslaved Christian prisoners. As a result of the war, the slave markets of Smyrna, Constantinople, Alexandria (Egypt), and the Barbary States were suddenly flooded with an exceptionally high number of slaves (45,000 Greeks, mostly women and children, were taken from the island of Chios alone, in the spring of 1822), to the extent that their prices fell dramatically. This form of displacement was not new but rather belonged to a centuries-long tradition of Christian enslavement in the Ottoman world.⁴⁶ What was

⁴³ Konstantia Zanou, "Profughi Ciprioti a Venezia e Trieste dopo il 1821 (nuovi elementi provenienti dalle carte Mustoxidi a Corfù)," in Mattia de Poli, ed., *Giornate per Cipro* (Padua, 2007), 39–62.

⁴⁴ Katsiardi-Hering, *I Elliniki Parikia tis Tergestis*, I: 342–63.

⁴⁵ Julia A. Clancy Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration c. 1800–1900* (Berkeley, CA, 2011), 86, 219.

⁴⁶ Robert C. Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast and Italy, 1500–1800* (New York, 2003). On the mobilities of

new was its sudden intensification, and also the new meaning the philhellenic movement had attributed to it as a marker of Ottoman barbarity. Liberating enslaved Greeks became a humanitarian imperative financed by Russian and Greek merchants and supported by committees that included diplomats, consuls, and donors. Yet while these efforts led to the liberation of some enslaved Christians (for instance, in summer 1827, Russia freed 360 Greek slaves), they also brought to light another unexpected (although likewise long-standing) phenomenon: apostasy. Not only children, but also many adults had converted to Islam, apparently spontaneously. Some of them, when offered the opportunity for ransom, refused and retained their new Muslim faith, satisfied with the opportunities they had found in Ottoman society.⁴⁷ Therefore, rather than simply nationalizing both the Greek Mediterranean diaspora and the populations of the Greek territories, the Age of Revolutions, by giving rise to new forms of voluntary and coerced mobility, prompted a variety of professional, religious, and political renegotiations. Among the surprising and unexpected cultural crossings of this period, there was not only a Cretan member of the *nazione Greca* who applied to become a Sicilian revolutionary and work as an interpreter, there were also the former Ottoman Greek subjects, the so-called *reyes* or *reyedes*, captured and enslaved during the war, who opted to retain their new status and their faith as Muslims.

CONCLUSIONS

The stories explored in this chapter point to the different material conditions, circumstances, and motivations that turned individuals into revolutionaries and led them to cross the Mediterranean; these stories also suggest the different meanings that individuals attributed to such experiences. By so doing, they question the assumption that all fighters joined revolutions in the name of nationalism and constitutionalism. Likewise, they put the phenomenon of military volunteerism into a broader context of older and new mobilities. These biographies confirm the role played by the events of the Napoleonic era and the revolutions of the 1820s in increasing displacement. At the same time, however, they also show that

enslaved people during the Age of Revolutions, see also Jan C. Jansen's and Anna McKay's chapters in this volume.

⁴⁷ Lucien J. Frary, "Slaves of the Sultan. Russian Ransoming of Christian Captives during the Greek Revolution, 1821–1830," in Lucien J. Frary and Mara Kozelsky, eds., *Russian–Ottoman Borderlands: The Eastern Question Reconsidered* (Madison, WI, 2014), 101–30.

the Mediterranean crossings of this period must be understood as continuous with longer-term migratory trends that had connected its seacoasts for centuries. Traditional patterns of migration and Early Modern understandings of migrant communities continued to survive into the 1820s. Support for new principles of nationality, along with commitment to the constitution, may or may not have played a role in determining revolutionary mobilities. As this chapter has suggested, other motivations were at play for migrants (such as Scordili) who belonged to centuries-old “foreign” diaspora communities, but also for army officers (such as Church) who had started a Mediterranean career during the Napoleonic Wars. In the southern and eastern peripheries of Christian Europe, national values may have been subordinate to a vague defense of the values of civilization against barbarism, or to the British Empire’s interest in expanding farther into the region. In an age of increased politicization and multiple wars, the ability to take advantage of new and even competing political causes, and to offer one’s services as a fighter, may well have been as important as a commitment to the ideologies of “modernity.” The biographies of Scordili and Church blur the boundaries between revolution and counter-revolution, between freedom fighter, economic migrant, and mercenary, and between national and imperial aspirations. They show that the political, intellectual, and cultural affiliations created under circumstances of increased mobility did not necessarily follow a linear trajectory moving from the *ancien régime* into the age of liberalism, or from the age of empires to the age of nationalism. Thus, these case studies invite us to blend together material circumstances and personal choices relating to the great ideological and political transformations of the period. The broader context of the subjects’ lives also demonstrates that in an era of increased violence and intolerance, forced migration, not military volunteerism, represented the most common form of mobility in this decade. At the same time, as in previous centuries, crossing the Mediterranean Sea continued to offer possibilities to renegotiate or acquire new and unexpected cultural and political affiliations.