

ARTICLE

# Miranda in the Balkans: decadent despotism, consulship, and the making of a south-eastern revolutionary in the Age of Revolution\*

Simeon Simeonov

Department of History, Brown University, Box N, 79 Brown Street, Providence, RI 02912, USA

E-mail: [simeon\\_simeonov@brown.edu](mailto:simeon_simeonov@brown.edu)

## Abstract

In 1786 Francisco de Miranda, the revolutionary ‘Precursor’ of Latin American independence, toured the Ottoman empire. Focused on the Atlantic dimensions of Miranda’s activism, historians have marginalized his experiences in the Balkans. This article argues that Miranda’s Balkan explorations represented a major inflection point in his revolutionary career. By expanding his experience with consular networks, the Balkans allowed him to develop new revolutionary strategies for channelling his discontent with imperial rule. Rather than resorting to print, consulates enabled Miranda to build secret coalitions in his increasingly public confrontation with what he called imperial ‘despotism’, a type of imperial rule featuring burdensome impositions, limitations on freedom of movement, and ethnic or religious discrimination. By excavating the first Latin American revolutionary encounter with the Balkans and stressing the common forms of anti-imperial mobilization, the article charts a more expansive and inclusive ‘south-eastern’ framework for rethinking the global Age of Revolution.

**Keywords:** Age of Revolution; Balkans; consuls; despotism; Francisco de Miranda; imperialism

On 2 April 1786, Francisco de Miranda (figure 1), a Venezuelan Creole celebrated as the ‘Precursor’ of Latin American independence, entered the port of Ragusa (today Dubrovnik, Croatia) after a rough voyage along the Adriatic coast. Miranda’s transatlantic odyssey had begun five years earlier, when he was banished from Spanish America for participating in a Jamaican–Cuban smuggling cartel at the height of the American War of Independence. The Venezuelan Creole chose to turn his political exile into an opportunity for extensive travels in North America and Europe, where he sought to enlist support for his deepening confrontation with Spain.<sup>1</sup> After traversing the newly emancipated United States in late 1783 and 1784, where he met several US revolutionary war heroes, Miranda spent the next year touring the Dutch Republic, various German principalities, Austria, and Italy. Over the course of 1786, he travelled to different parts of the Ottoman empire before boarding a ship to Kherson at the mouth of the Dnieper river on his way to the Russian capital of Saint Petersburg.

With his arrival in Ragusa, Miranda became one of the first Creoles (descendants of Europeans born in the Americas) to ever visit the Balkan peninsula. Usually considered peripheral to his

---

\*I would like to thank co-editor Heidi Tworek and the three anonymous peer reviewers of the *Journal of Global History*, Professors Seth Rockman and Holly Case, and Peter Jakob Olsen-Harbach for providing generous and constructive feedback on this article.

<sup>1</sup>Francisco de Miranda, *Archivo del general Miranda*, vol. 2: *Viajes. Diarios, 1785–1787* (Caracas: Editorial Suramérica, 1929), 108–9.



**Figure 1.** Francisco de Miranda, c. 1788. Source: Francisco de Miranda, *Archivo del general Miranda*, vol. 2: *Viajes. Diarios, 1785–1787* (Caracas: Editorial Suramérica, 1929).

subsequent revolutionary activity, this trip to the Balkans, Anatolia, and Novorossiia has not received careful attention from Western historians. In their emphasis on Miranda's participation in three major Atlantic revolutionary theatres (the United States, France, and Venezuela), biographers choose either to neglect Miranda's Balkan episode or to sandwich it between ostensibly more important travels to North America, western Europe, and Russia.<sup>2</sup> Concomitantly, Miranda's Balkan encounters are absent from analyses of his gradual evolution as a Creole revolutionary from the 1780s to the early 1800s.<sup>3</sup> Most Atlantic-centred biographies depict him as a secular revolutionary with a fully formed anti-imperial agenda at the outbreak of the American Revolution. In this interpretation, Miranda's later explorations of south-eastern Europe do not represent particularly meaningful political contributions to his revolutionary career; they are merely waystations on a journey from one Atlantic revolutionary battlefield – North America in the early 1780s – to another – France in the early 1790s, where Miranda led the unsuccessful siege of Maastricht in the French revolutionary campaign of 1792–93. Nor do Miranda's Balkan crossings inform the interpretation of his final revolutionary activities, his unsuccessful attempt to emancipate Venezuela with the help of British and North American liaisons in 1806, his failed project to do so in 1808, and his participation in the First Republic of Venezuela in 1811–12, for which he acquired the epithet of the 'Precursor' of Latin American independence.

Resisting the tendency to read Miranda as an exclusively 'Atlantic' agent, this article explores his political interactions in south-eastern Europe to argue that his Balkan trip played a formative role in his emergence as a revolutionary. This example also pushes back against a recurrent tendency of Atlantic historiography to marginalize revolutionary developments in south-eastern Europe.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>For authoritative biographies of Miranda that deploy an Atlantic focus, see William Spence Robertson, *The Life of Miranda*, 2 vols. (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1969); Karen Racine, *Francisco de Miranda: A Transatlantic Life in the Age of Revolution* (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 2003). See also Jeremy Adelman, 'An Age of Imperial Revolutions', *American Historical Review* 113, no. 2 (2008): 319–40.

<sup>3</sup>On Creole revolutionaries, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn (London: Verso, 1983); Joshua Simon, *The Ideology of Creole Revolution: Imperialism and Independence in American and Latin American Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>4</sup>Examples include Robert Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760–1800*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959); Peter Onuf and Eliga Gould, eds., *Empire and Nation*:

Foregrounding Miranda's Balkan encounters in 1786 alters our perception of his emergence as a revolutionary agent in three important ways. First, it was during his trip to the Balkans that Miranda articulated his most vehement criticism of 'imperial despotism' as a set of oppressive policies which imposed heavy taxation on local populations, limited the movement of locals and foreigners, and institutionalized a system of ethnic and/or religious discrimination.<sup>5</sup> Though he voiced his first critique of imperial despotism during the American Revolution, he did not specify what he meant by this concept, nor did he elaborate on its importance within his revolutionary ideology. While his North American interlocutors implicated Miranda in a ploy to overthrow Spanish 'despotism' in the Americas, the Creole left no evidence of his intentions to do so, either in his personal diary or in his epistolary correspondence. In fact, during a secret interaction with the French consul-general in Philadelphia, Miranda seemed to suggest various strategies for *preventing* a colonial insurgency, in a careful move to appease his antagonists.

Not until visiting the Balkans and interacting with a set of local and foreign agents did Miranda leave unequivocal first-hand evidence of formulating a sustained programmatic critique of imperial despotism, a critique which informed his ultimate break with Spain in 1787–88 and, in important ways, prefigured his subsequent revolutionary activism. Echoing widespread grievances of Balkan notables and foreign consuls, his condemnation of the heavy Ottoman tax impositions and of how Ottoman authorities treated non-Muslims adumbrated programmatic points he articulated in his later opposition to Spanish 'despotism' and imperial decadence in the Americas, notably during his failed 1806 expedition to Venezuela.<sup>6</sup> Unlike other Creole revolutionaries deploying the discourse of despotism in their anti-imperial struggles, Miranda's critique of despotic rule stemmed to a significant degree from his actual experiences with Ottoman and Russian authorities in the late 1780s.<sup>7</sup> During his Balkan trip, Miranda encountered various autochthonous and religious models for resisting Ottoman rule, which formed intriguing antecedents to his later plans to introduce indigenous political elements in an emancipated Venezuelan republic.

This article's second intervention is to regard Miranda's resistance to the notion of imperial despotism not as a fixed ideological commitment but as an evolving process significantly shaped by his consular and diplomatic communications. Before his trip to the Balkans, Miranda avoided leaving evidence of his critique of Spanish imperialism, possibly for fear of being surveilled or apprehended by Spanish diplomats, or in the hope of remedying his relationship with Spain. Only after reaching south-eastern Europe, a region where Spain lacked consular or diplomatic representatives, did he incontrovertibly express his programmatic resistance to the set of imperial practices he called 'despotism'.

Miranda's political activities in the Balkans defied the traditional image of an Atlantic revolutionary, a Habermasian agent utilizing the power of print to incite revolutionary action.<sup>8</sup>

---

*The American Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Wim Klooster, *Revolutions in the Atlantic World: A Comparative History*, 2nd edn (New York: New York University Press, 2018); Jonathan Israel, *The Expanding Blaze: How the American Revolution Ignited the World, 1775–1848* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), esp. 495–511; Janet Polasky, *Revolutions without Borders: The Call to Liberty in the Atlantic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Jorge Luengo and Pol Dalmau, 'Writing Spanish History in the Global Age: Connections and Entanglements in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Global History* 13, no. 3 (2018): 425–45.

<sup>5</sup>On despotism in Western constructions of 'the Orient', see Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); Božidar Jezernik, *Wild Europe: The Balkans in the Gaze of Western Travelers* (London: Saqi, 2004).

<sup>6</sup>See Racine, *Francisco de Miranda*, 143–50.

<sup>7</sup>On Creole revolutionaries, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 49–68; Simon, *Ideology of Creole Revolution*; Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 217–365; Jane G. Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>8</sup>See Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1962). For an integrated discussion of print alongside other modes of communication in the Age of Revolution see Robert Darnton, 'An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris', *American Historical Review* 105, no. 1 (2000): 1–35.

Miranda's interactions in this region were politically significant – for both the Creole and his interlocutors – not because he disseminated political pamphlets, newspapers, and broadsheets but for the very opposite reason: his highly personalized, indeed institutionalized, use of secrecy in consular communications. Miranda strategically used secrecy, especially with the widespread European consular staff across the Ottoman Balkans, to mediate critique of imperial impositions, discriminating quarantines, and arbitrary discrimination against foreigners or local Christians.

As Miranda lacked the linguistic capacity to communicate with local populations or the Ottoman authorities, European consuls and local notables acted as his intermediaries, influencing his travel arrangements and informing his ideas. According to his diary, almost every contact or interaction he had in the Balkans occurred in the presence, with the mediation, or under the protection of European consuls, foreign officials with particularly wide-ranging privileges at the Ottoman Porte.<sup>9</sup> Owing to their hybrid nature as quasi-diplomatic officials, civil servants, and foreign spies, consuls (the representatives of merchants and citizens of one state in other nations) played a complex role throughout Miranda's trans-Atlantic exile. While his journeys in North America and western Europe confronted the Creole with hostile consuls surveilling his actions, his trip across the Ottoman empire exposed him to a different consular institution which derived its authority from ancient popular memory and a religiously informed emancipatory agenda. With their spread across the Ottoman empire in the late eighteenth century, foreign consulates had begun to act as protectors of local Christian populations as well as their own national merchants, enabling European centres to extend their imperial reach.

In the Balkans, consular institutions became crucial political vectors in Miranda's travels. Consuls guided and protected Miranda on his way into, out of, and across imperial spaces, and helped shape his political vocabulary and public perception as a revolutionary.<sup>10</sup> The Balkan consuls' highly politicized interactions with Miranda demonstrate that the common emphasis on print and 'legacies' of revolutionary movements in North America and western Europe fails to account for what made his south-eastern explorations significant. Instead, by interrogating Miranda's Balkan encounters through a consular lens from the *trans*-Atlantic south-east, the article uncovers the neglected importance of common institutional forces that helped internationalize incipient projects for revolutionizing the Balkans and Latin America in the first decades of the Age of Revolution.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup>On consuls' political prominence in the Ottoman empire, see Holly Case, 'The Quiet Revolution', in *The Balkans as Europe*, ed. Timothy Snyder and Katherine Younger (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2018), 110–38; Ulrike Freitag, 'Helpless Representatives of the Great Powers? Western Consuls in Jeddah, 1830s to 1914', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40, no. 3 (2012): 357–81.

<sup>10</sup>On consulship and empire, see Case, 'Quiet Revolution'; Nancy Shoemaker, 'The Extraterritorial United States to 1860', *Diplomatic History* 42, no. 1 (2018): 36–54; Jörg Ulbert and Gérard Le Bouëdec, eds., *La fonction consulaire à l'époque moderne. L'affirmation d'une institution économique et politique (1500–1800)* (Rennes: Presses universitaires, 2006); Dzavid Dzanic, 'The Civilizing Sea: The Ideological Origins of the French Mediterranean Empire, 1789–1870' (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2016); Ronald Angelo Johnson, *Diplomacy in Black and White: John Adams, Toussaint Louverture, and Their Atlantic World Alliance* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2014).

<sup>11</sup>My critical conceptualization of *trans*-Atlantic history is in conversation with David Armitage, 'Three Concepts of Atlantic History', in *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, ed. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 11–27; Peter A. Coclanis, 'Atlantic World or Atlantic/World?', *William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (2006): 725–42; Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann 'Beyond Comparison: *Histoire Croisée* and the Challenge of Reflexivity', *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (2006): 30–50; Eliga H. Gould, 'Entangled Histories, Entangled Worlds: The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery', *American Historical Review* 112, no. 3 (2007): 764–86. On consuls and revolutions in south-eastern Europe, see Lucien Frary, *Russia and the Making of Modern Greek Identity, 1821–1844* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Lucien Frary, 'Russian Consuls and the Greek War of Independence', *Mediterranean Historical Review* 28, no. 1 (2013): 46–65; Case, 'Quiet Revolution'. On consuls and Latin American revolutions, see Ferry de Goey, *Consuls and the Institutions of Global Capitalism, 1783–1914* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2014), 85–91; Simeon Andonov Simeonov, 'The Consular Caribbean: Consuls as Agents of Colonialism and Decolonisation in the Revolutionary Caribbean (1795–1848)', in *Memory, Migration and (De) Colonisation in the Caribbean and Beyond*, ed. Jack Webb, Roderick Westmaas, Maria del Pilar Kaladeen, and William

It is the third major intervention of this article to regard the Balkans not as a space ‘in between’ Miranda’s Atlantic activism and his explorations of the Russian empire, but as an important region whose consuls, officials, and locals informed his resistance against imperial despotism, his growing involvement with the Russian empire, and his ultimate break with Spain. Shedding more light on Miranda’s journey to the Balkans will contextualize his gradual emergence as an anti-imperial agent at what many considered the European periphery, prior to his break with Spain and his direct involvement in revolutionary action in France and South America. Miranda’s emergence as a south-eastern revolutionary helps to place interactions between two regions traditionally conceived of as separate ‘peripheries’ at the heart of a more integrated analysis of the global Age of Revolution.<sup>12</sup> By charting how notions of imperial despotism came to animate revolutionary activism in South America and south-eastern Europe – whether during actual transatlantic crossings, via the circulation of rumours, or with the dissemination of print – historians can begin to account for why these two distant regions simultaneously became the hotbeds of revolutionary movements seeking to topple centuries-old imperial systems in the early nineteenth century.

To examine Miranda’s Balkan explorations as an inflection point in his revolutionary career, the article begins with the prelude to his Balkan explorations, his tour of North America, to show his initial inexperience in negotiating his resistance to imperial ‘despotism’ with foreign consuls. It then examines his trip to the Balkans before showing how that trip enables historians to reconsider the place of the Balkans in Miranda’s biography, as well as in the history of the global Age of Revolution. Drawing on new evidence from Spanish consular archives, the article’s conclusion suggests that Miranda’s landmark 1806 expedition to Venezuela bore striking parallels to his earlier explorations of the Balkans and the United States, even though he failed to fully capitalize on the structural similarities between these distant revolutionary spaces. In sum, situating Miranda’s forgotten Balkan explorations in the context of his revolutionary career reminds historians that the Age of Revolution involved connections not just across the Atlantic, but also into south-eastern Europe and the Ottoman empire. Finally, Miranda’s Balkan journeys remind historians to pay attention to institutions of people, as well as print, as channels of revolutionary change. Consular communications were particularly important (if poorly understood) institutional catalysts for mobilizing revolutionary ferment across the Atlantic divide in an age of revolution.<sup>13</sup>

### The prelude: Miranda’s first consular encounters

To grasp the political stakes of Francisco de Miranda’s encounter with the Balkans, it is instructive to consider the wider political and diplomatic context that brought the Creole to the difficult – and reluctant – decision to embark on his 1786 voyage to Ragusa. As early as 1781–82, Miranda was a military officer fighting on the side of Spain in the US Revolutionary War; yet Spanish authorities charged him with smuggling Jamaican goods and disobeying military orders. After the termination of wartime hostilities, Miranda embarked upon the first part of his decades-long exile from

Tantam (London: University of London Press, 2020), 117–32. For a comparison of the geopolitics of decadent empires, east and west, see Rafe Blaufarb, ‘The Western Question: The Geopolitics of Latin American Independence’, *American Historical Review* 112, no. 3 (2007): 742–63.

<sup>12</sup>On the Age of Revolution as a global phenomenon, see Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789–1848* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962); Armitage and Subramanyam, eds., *Age of Revolutions*. My south-eastern perspective is indebted to Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), and Snyder and Younger, eds., *Balkans as Europe*. For a similar emphasis on rethinking global history from the Euro/Atlantic ‘periphery’, see Torsten dos Santos Arnold, ‘Central Europe and the Portuguese, Spanish and French Atlantic, Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries’, *European Review* 26, no. 3 (2018): 421–9. On revolution ‘from the periphery to the centre’, see Franco Venturi, *The End of the Old Regime in Europe, 1776–1789*, vol. 1, trans. R. Burr Litchfield (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

<sup>13</sup>See Jeremy D. Popkin, *You Are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 9, 309–26; Frary, *Russia and the Making of Modern Greek Identity*.

Spanish America, which saw him touring the recently emancipated United States in 1783–84 in an attempt to enlist allies or find intermediaries in his confrontation with Spain.

While scholars relying on later accounts by US revolutionary leaders have come to regard Miranda's North American explorations as the first act in the career of a fully formed Atlantic revolutionary, Miranda's diary, epistolary correspondence, and later writings challenge such an interpretation.<sup>14</sup> Though his North American interlocutors implicated him in multiple plots to overthrow Spanish 'despotism', his diary contains no information about similar proceedings. Only once does it register his attitude toward despotism, in a rather abstract reference to 'the advantages of a free government, in comparison with any other despotism'.<sup>15</sup> Miranda's initial reluctance to refer to despotism in his diary reveals his careful attitude toward the Spanish empire because mediation with the Spanish authorities did not yet seem out of reach.

Perhaps the best evidence for Miranda's initial ambivalence to publicly profess his antipathy toward Spanish imperial rule comes from his exchange with the French consul-general in Philadelphia, François Barbé-Marbois. Given France's alliance with Spain and the United States during the American Revolution, Miranda's attempt to enlist Barbé-Marbois as his intermediary testifies to the Creole's early interest in utilizing diplomatic and consular networks to further his political ambitions.<sup>16</sup> Unlike the public office of a diplomat, the office of the consul – a modern surveillance agent operating at a non-diplomatic level – provided the perfect avenue for an exile seeking to enlist potential allies in a loosely defined political project. The lack of diplomatic precedents for foreign representatives in the recently emancipated United States allowed Miranda to subvert diplomatic protocol by corresponding with the powerful consul without the knowledge of the French minister. In contrast to the French ambassador, Anne-César de la Luzerne, 'a man of enlightenment, generosity, and mild manners, but weak and without an ability for his office', Miranda described Consul Barbé-Marbois as a powerful information-broker and 'the mentor who manages everything'.<sup>17</sup>

Lacking any experience in consular affairs, Miranda attempted to use this unclear diplomatic hierarchy to his own advantage during a private meeting with Barbé-Marbois. According to Barbé-Marbois's memoirs, published more than four decades after their encounter, Miranda presented an extensive account of his fallout with Spain during their rendezvous in Philadelphia: 'Our American kingdoms will soon experience a revolution similar to the one which you have witnessed here', the Creole predicted. 'A wise and prudent government might moderate its violence or delay its effects. But such warnings only offend ministers. They have a great aversion for all wisdom except their own, and they always make those advisers, who are too well informed for them, feel their anger.' This was Miranda's suggestive nod to the consul-general to work together without the involvement of Luzerne, keeping their correspondence secret. Far from plotting an insurrection, Barbé-Marbois believed that Miranda wished to enlist his support in mediating with recalcitrant Spanish officials whose discriminatory policies risked stirring indigenous discontent. 'I have told them that the rising of the Mexican Indians in 1778 was a warning of the highest importance', Miranda reportedly told the consul. 'I have spoken of admitting foreigners into

<sup>14</sup>See Racine, *Francisco de Miranda*, 58–64.

<sup>15</sup>Francisco de Miranda, *Archivo del general Miranda*, vol. 1: *Viajes. Diarios, 1750–1785* (Caracas: Editorial Suramérica, 1929), 223.

<sup>16</sup>After the French Bourbons ascended to the Spanish throne in the early eighteenth century, the two monarchies and their diplomatic and consular services cooperated closely. The Franco-Spanish Treaty of Aranjuez (1779) and these countries' joint participation in the US Revolutionary War marked a high point in their close relationship. For more on these states' diplomatic relations with the early American republic, see Samuel Flagg Bemis, *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1957), 215–56.

<sup>17</sup>Miranda, *Archivo*, 1:226. On Barbé-Marbois's poor reputation, see G. S. Rowe and Alexander W. Knott, 'The Longchamps Affair (1784–86), the Law of Nations, and the Shaping of Early American Foreign Policy', *Diplomatic History* 10, no. 3 (1986): 199–220; Bemis, *Diplomacy of the American Revolution*, 220.

all our colonies. From the manner in which this proposal was received, I have thought it prudent to fly, as if I had been guilty of a crime.<sup>18</sup>

Miranda wished to circumvent the French minister, whose official diplomatic character would inevitably expose the Creole's intentions to hostile Spanish officials. Certainly, he used the interview with the consul not just to test the reach and scope of foreign consular networks but also to articulate his nascent discontent with Spanish rule. At this early point in his exile, Miranda was already learning how to present different political projects to different interlocutors; he was still far from the committed revolutionary who fought French and Spanish monarchists in the 1790s and 1800s. Instead of preparing a revolution in Spanish America, as Miranda's US interlocutors interpreted his words and actions, Barbé-Marbois depicted the Creole as actively trying to *prevent* an impending indigenous insurgency by introducing imperial reforms such as legalizing the immigration of foreigners. In his later reflections on the subject, Barbé-Marbois in fact sympathized with Miranda's opposition to the Spanish diplomatic corps, stressing the need for reforming the Spanish system of 'absolute despotism' to avoid 'a general insurrection of the aborigines, and even of the colonists'.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the seeming ideological agreement between the consul and the exile, Barbé-Marbois could not prevent this information from circulating to the French minister, ultimately compromising the Creole. Appalled by Barbé-Marbois's inability to keep their conversation secret, Miranda described his adversary as an 'idiot' whose 'talents and abilities were completely underwhelming'. His changing attitude toward Barbé-Marbois was understandable for, as he explained in his diary, the consul's 'thousand gossips and political plots' made Miranda's stay in the United States unfeasible. The French consul's surveillance threatened to expose or exaggerate Miranda's plans to overthrow Spanish American rule. Barbé-Marbois's 'plots and snarls' jeopardized Miranda's further explorations in North America, precipitating the Creole's decision to board a ship to England.<sup>20</sup>

In the hope of enlisting the French consul as an intermediary in his confrontation with Spanish authorities, Miranda exposed his apprehensions about the Spanish colonial system to foreign surveillance and public dissemination. His misjudgement in his first consular encounter cost him dearly: it would be two decades before he could return to the continent to prepare his 1806 expedition to emancipate Venezuela. Even though Miranda's first consular encounter failed, however, this diplomatic debacle provided his first insights into how consular services worked.

After his interaction with Barbé-Marbois, Miranda would not only increase his understanding of how diplomatic and consular networks functioned, but also use them to further his travel arrangements, social acquaintances, and political goals. Immediately after his arrival in Britain, he enlisted the assistance of a US diplomat, who helped him evade the surveillance of his Bourbon antagonists.<sup>21</sup> Owing to the extensive Bourbon consular and diplomatic networks across western Europe, Miranda was unable to fully escape the scrutiny of his adversaries as he boarded a ship to the Dutch Republic, whereafter he travelled to Prussia, Westphalia, Saxony, and Austria before spending several months in the Apennines. As long as he remained in these countries, he could not be certain whether foreign consuls could obtain an order for his apprehension. Nowhere was this threat greater than in the Italian peninsula, a haven for exiled Spanish American Jesuits holding a grudge against Madrid, and also a region featuring an especially dense Spanish consular network.<sup>22</sup> Remaining vigilant about a hostile consular intervention, Miranda nonetheless noted

<sup>18</sup>François de Barbé-Marbois, *History of Louisiana* (Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 1830), 149–50.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>Miranda, *Archivo*, 1:226, 238–9. See also William S. Robertson, 'Francisco de Miranda and the Revolutionizing of Spanish America', *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* 1 (1907): 189–539, esp. 248–52.

<sup>21</sup>See Peter P. Hill, 'An Expedition to Liberate Venezuela Sails from New York, 1806', *Historian* 78, no. 4 (2016): 671–89; Racine, *Francisco de Miranda*, 72–7; Miranda, *Archivo*, 1:353.

<sup>22</sup>According to *Guía de forasteros* (Madrid: Imprenta Nacional, 1792), Spain had close to seventy consulates and vice-consulates across the Apennine peninsula, Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica.

the receipt of a list of exiled Jesuits in his diary containing, among others, the name of the Peruvian Creole Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán, whose private *Letter to the Spanish Americans* Miranda would print and disseminate in his failed expedition to Venezuela in 1806.<sup>23</sup>

In contrast to his sojourns in the United States and western Europe, Miranda's next destination, the Balkans, provided a region in which the Creole exile did not have to fear the constant surveillance of the Spanish consular staff, and where he could witness consulship's potential to channel local discontent against imperial rule. While preparing for his journey in the port of Barletta, near the birthplace of modern consular institutions, Miranda recorded reading some recent works on the Balkans, akin to many learned travellers at the time.<sup>24</sup> The biased French works influenced him: shortly after reading François de Tott's book on oriental tyrannies, he wrote of how the 'despotism [of the Apulian governor] has never ceased to maltreat and oppress this poor people'.<sup>25</sup> This was among Miranda's earliest references to despotism in his diaries following the aforementioned conversation in Philadelphia and a remark he had made about the Venetian government as 'a *despotism* disguised in a *Wig and black robe*'.<sup>26</sup> Even though despotism had only tangentially surfaced in his diary during his American trip, the concept began to permeate his writings as he prepared to visit the Balkans, the door to the Orient that fascinated many Western readers in the Age of Revolution (see figure 2).

### Miranda's Balkan connection: oriental despotism and the articulation of anti-imperial critique

Because Miranda did not know any of the local languages spoken in these westernmost reaches of the Ottoman empire, he depended almost entirely on foreign consuls' services. In Ragusa, the Russian vice-consul showed him the town's major historic sites and satisfied his penchant for ancient history. Several days later, Miranda befriended Christopher Basich, the Ragusan consul to Morea (the Peloponnese), who took him on a trip to Zante (Zakynthos) and Patras on the Peloponnesian peninsula (figure 3). There, he met the resident Dutch and Russian consuls, Giorgio Paul and Christophoros Comnenos, 'a merchant . . . of Greek origin, and who has served a long time in Russia, a man of instruction, travelling and the world'.<sup>27</sup>

While northern and western European consuls had resided in Greece for several centuries, the predominance of Russian consuls in this region was a new development.<sup>28</sup> Through the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (today Kaynardzha, Bulgaria) in 1774, the Russian empire acquired the right to appoint its consuls throughout the Ottoman domains.<sup>29</sup> Russian officials quickly appointed

<sup>23</sup>Racine, *Francisco de Miranda*, 79–80. See Humberto R. Núñez Faraco, 'Between Political Emancipation and Creole Hegemony: Viscardo's Letter to the Spanish Americans (c. 1791)', *History of European Ideas* 44, no. 1 (2018): 49–59.

<sup>24</sup>Miranda, *Archivo*, 2:12, 107, mentions reading Pierre-Augustin Guys, *Voyage littéraire de la Grèce, ou Lettres sur les grecs, anciens et modernes, avec un parallèle de leurs mœurs* (Paris: Veuve Duchesne, 1783), and François de Tott, *Mémoires du Baron de Tott sur les Turcs et les Tartares*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1784). The town of Trani, several miles to the north of Barletta, was the birthplace of 'Western' maritime law. See Paul Oldfield, *City and Community in Norman Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 247; Jean-Marie Pardessus, *Collection de lois maritimes*, vol. 5 (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1839), 215–53.

<sup>25</sup>Miranda, *Archivo*, 2:107.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:223.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:113.

<sup>28</sup>On the history of Ragusan consulship, see Harriet Bjelovučić, *The Ragusan Republic: Victim of Napoleon and Its Own Conservatism* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 67, 70; Ilija Mitić, *Konzulati i konzularna služba starog Dubrovnika (Consulates and Consular Service of Old Dubrovnik)* (Dubrovnik: Historijski institut Jugoslavenske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti, 1973); Gordana Venier, 'Konzuli i konzularna služba Dubrovnika (komune) i Dubrovačke Republike u balkanskom zaleđu (XII.–XV. st.)' ('Consuls and Consular Service of Dubrovnik (Commune) and the Republic of Dubrovnik in the Balkan Hinterland (12th–15th Centuries)'), *Zagrebačka Pravna Revija (Zagreb Legal Review)* 4, no. 3 (2015): 275–306.

<sup>29</sup>See Case, 'Quiet Revolution'; Thomas W. Gallant, *Modern Greece: From the War of Independence to the Present* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 19.



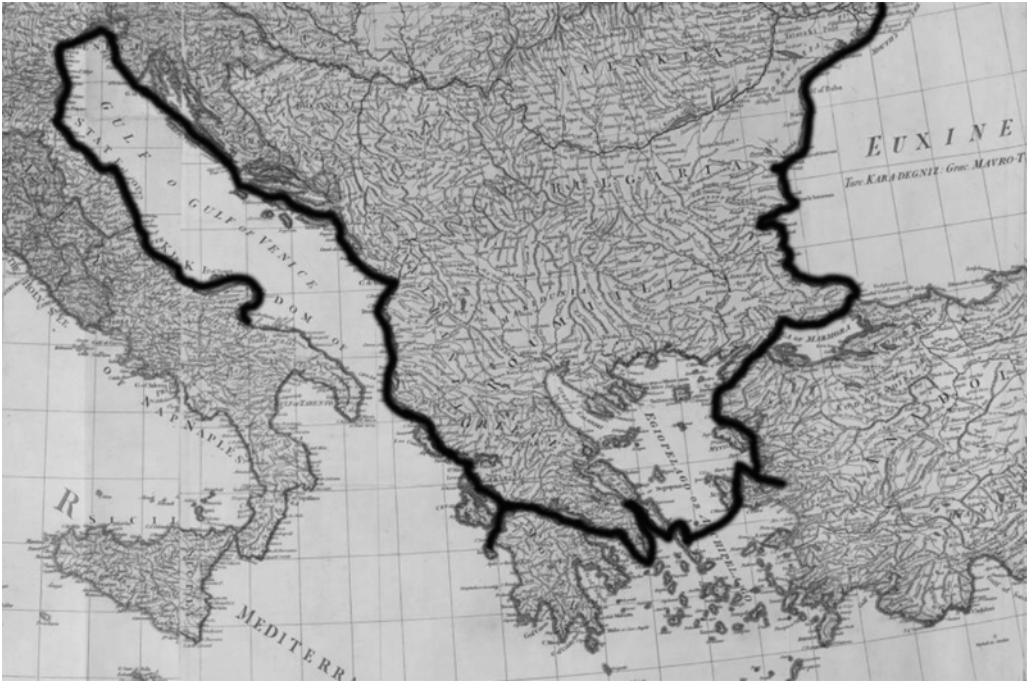


Figure 2. Miranda's trip to south-east Europe. Source: William Faden, *Map of the Mediterranean Sea with the Adjacent Regions and Seas in Europe, Asia and Africa* (1785).



Figure 3. Morea (Peloponnese) with Patras, Zakinthos (Zante), Corinth, and Athens. Source: Faden, *Map of the Mediterranean Sea*.

consuls to the Balkans as well as various islands in the Mediterranean and the Adriatic.<sup>30</sup> As the first Orthodox consuls in the Ottoman empire, these imperial agents used Russia's naval and military might, as well its religious affiliation with Balkan Christians, to acquire the role of multinational protectors of Orthodox Christianity at the Porte.<sup>31</sup> Unlike other imperial powers, Russia emphasized its religious links to Balkan Christians over national affiliation, thereby co-opting local people to act as its consular agents. Over the next century, these multi-ethnic Orthodox consulates under Russian tutelage would come to play a crucial role in the successive independence struggles of Serbia, Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria against the Ottoman empire.<sup>32</sup>

As a result of these Russian innovations of consulship, Miranda encountered a different political constellation from that in western Europe. Although he failed to fully grasp these local political intricacies, his diaries did register Russia's increasingly dominant consular presence in the Balkans. In fact, the very trajectory of his trip from Ragusa through Greece and the Aegean to Anatolia and thence to Novorossiia shows how an expanding modern Russian consular network was already shaping foreign perspectives on south-east Europe. The Balkans became the first region that brought Miranda into the orbit of the Russian empire, which would later come to play an important role in his final break with Spain.

From acquainting the Creole with local notables to mediating with the Ottoman authorities and accompanying him on his trips to ancient monuments, consuls acted as Miranda's protectors against the dispositions of Ottoman officials. Rather than being confined to the world of high diplomacy, consuls' middling position enabled them to introduce Miranda to local elites, who represented a curious amalgam of French, British, and local Christian merchants. Linked by marriage and interest, these commercial elites recruited Miranda in their struggle against political authorities such as the Venetian nobles who held a loosening control over local politics in Ragusa and the adjacent Ionian islands.<sup>33</sup>

The resistance of these mercantile circles to foreign dominion clearly resonated with the expelled Creole. After leaving Dubrovnik, Miranda reported that the local Ottoman authorities at Zakynthos would not let a new consul disembark 'as he came from Ragusa', prompting the consul to seek refuge in the house of a Venetian noble. Navigating a complex relationship with the Porte, the consuls of the maritime republic used their affiliations with Venice to exert pressure on the Ottoman authorities. The same port authorities in Zakynthos who denied the Ragusan consul entry into the town, and who quarantined Miranda 'as if infected with the plague', apparently allowed the sailors of quarantined ships to 'go on land to do their business', eliciting Miranda's comment: 'You can see what a burlesque this health board is!' He concluded:

But this should come as no surprise to those who know that this State is governed by miserable, vicious, and vain Venetians who leave the Senate [the local municipal body] so as not to die from hunger, bringing with them all the vices, which they compound to those of the already extremely corrupt State; I have never seen more presumptuous and vain devils than the Jews of the board of health here, when they sit *pro tribunale* on that miserable bank.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup>On Russian consuls in Ragusa, see Bjelovučić, *Ragusan Republic*, 78–84. On the role of Russian consuls in the Greek War of Independence, see Frary, *Russia and the Making of Modern Greek Identity*.

<sup>31</sup>Frary, *Russia and the Making of Modern Greek Identity*, 93–166.

<sup>32</sup>On the Romanian principalities, see William Wilkinson, *An Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia* (London: Longman, 1820), 180–4; on Bulgaria, see Dimităr Dišev, 'Biala kost, cherna kost: bulgarinüt Naiden Gerov – ruskiät konsul' ('White Bone, Black Bone: Bulgarian Naiden Gerov – the Russian Consul'), *Plamük (Flame)* 59, no. 1 (2016): 163–78; on Greece, see Gallant, *Modern Greece*, 21–3; on Serbia, see Case, 'Quiet Revolution', 110–13.

<sup>33</sup>On the long legacy of these encounters, see Benjamin Arbel, 'The Ionian Islands and Venice's Trading System during the Sixteenth Century', *Proceedings of the Sixth Pan-Ionian Conference*, vol. 1 (Athens: Kentro Meleton Ioniou, 2001), 147–60.

<sup>34</sup>Miranda, *Archivo*, 2:112. On Spanish American anti-Semitism, see Mordechai Arbell, *The Jewish Nation of the Caribbean: The Spanish-Portuguese Jewish Settlements in the Caribbean and the Guianas* (Jerusalem: Gefen, 2002), 159. In early modern Ragusa, Jews had come to enjoy a privilege of bearing titles, such as that of consul, previously exclusively held by Christians.

Regarding the health boards as corrupt foreign bodies instituted to oppress local merchants, Miranda employed the religiously and ethnically charged language of anti-Semitism to accentuate his critique of these ‘despotic’ establishments. In his first observations from the region, he had already linked his critique of imperial impositions with a discriminating attitude toward an ethnic and religious minority, despite the fact that Jewish populations suffered strong quarantine regulations, and often became the scapegoats for epidemic outbreaks among the Christian population.

Miranda’s criticism of the Venetian elites in Ionia and Dalmatia, including his anti-Semitic comment, marks both a departure from the more xenophilic attitude in his conversation with Barbé-Marbois, and an antecedent to his later attacks on the privileges enjoyed by peninsular Spaniards in the Americas.<sup>35</sup> Even though Miranda still considered himself a Spanish subject,<sup>36</sup> his resentment against imperial impositions, especially taxation and ethnic or religious discrimination, increased the further he travelled into the eastern parts of Europe. In Ragusa, he observed that

this republic pays to the *Great Signor* 28,000 coins, which tribute, if considered as an equivalent to the privileges it enjoys in the Turkish ports, is more of a commercial stipulation than anything else. The amount of its mercantile voyages does not even reach 200 and with all this they live comfortably and luxuriously amid these rocks. Here, the advantages of a republican government, however bad it may be, can be seen.<sup>37</sup>

In Patras, too, Miranda observed the ‘decadence of that city’, whose Turkish governor and Greek *primados* ‘distributed among the peoples of their nation the respective quota of the payment of contributions frequently imposed to the Town (Pueblo) by the Court in Constantinople’. He reported a similar decline in Corinth, a town that had witnessed a major ‘revolution in 1770’ following the arrival of a Russian admiral. Within a decade, Ottoman mismanagement and suppression of local autonomy had decimated the population and its economy.<sup>38</sup>

As a Spanish American Creole who had faced Spain’s imposing colonial regulations known as the Bourbon reforms – a set of policies that aimed to extract greater taxes and exert stronger metropolitan control over Creoles – Miranda empathized with local merchants and consuls chafing under Ottoman regulations and discriminatory imperial policies. His encounter with the Ottoman Balkans reinforced his resentment of heavy taxes levied by an imperial sovereign, while his trip to the vibrant maritime republic of Ragusa strengthened his belief in the superiority of republican institutions over a monarchy. The burdensome Ottoman tax impositions provoked Miranda’s criticism of foreign imperial rule and crystallized his defence of republican self-government, a conviction which would gradually culminate in his support of Spanish American republicanism. While he had made similar observations in the United States, he had not related them to the presence of a foreign imperial overlord, as the United States had just won their independence from Britain. In the Balkans, the imperial presence of the ‘decadent’ Ottomans alongside the practice of

---

See Daniel Jütte, ‘The Jewish Consuls in the Mediterranean and the Holy Roman Empire during the Early Modern Period: A Study in Economic and Diplomatic Networks (1500–1800)’, in *Cosmopolitan Networks in Commerce and Society 1660–1914*, ed. Andreas Gestrich and Margrit Schulte Beerbühl (London: German Historical Institute, 2011), 154.

<sup>35</sup>Barbé-Marbois’s reference (*History of Louisiana*, 149–50) to Miranda’s advocacy of immigration to Spanish America suggests the latter’s initially xenophilic attitudes. Contrast this remark with Miranda’s language throughout his Balkan trips or with the tone of Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán’s *Letter to the Spanish Americans*, which Miranda translated, published, and disseminated during his 1806 expedition to Venezuela (published in English as *Letter to the Spanish Americans*, 2nd edn (London: Longman et al., 1810)). Viscardo y Guzmán’s letter castigated the despotism of Spanish restrictions on travel and commerce, as well as the tendency of Spanish policies to privilege foreigners at the expense of local populations.

<sup>36</sup>Perhaps one of the best indicators of this was his use of the services of a Spanish vice-consul in London in 1785. See Racine, *Francisco de Miranda*, 69–73.

<sup>37</sup>Miranda, *Archivo*, 2:110.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:113–14.

local self-governance linked Miranda's critique of imperial impositions and regulations with his emphasis on the superiority of republican institutions.

The Creole also critiqued Ottoman authorities' double standard when treating Muslim and Orthodox populations. While most of his biographers have pointed to Miranda's secular outlook as a static component of his revolutionary activism, his explorations of the Balkans suggest otherwise.<sup>39</sup> Religion, too, shaped his gradually evolving language of anti-imperial critique, and not necessarily just as a foil for his secular ideology. Certainly, Miranda found plenty of occasions – especially in the Balkans – to criticize religion as an agent of 'imperial despotism', as a force actively oppressing local populations. In the town of Corinth, for example, he complained of 'a Crazy Turk who makes noise all day in the street with a Tambourine'. The local authorities, he continued, 'let these people do whatever they want because of their religion, and if someone wants to do to them even the most negligible [thing], they would suffer badly'. On his way from Corinth to Athens, Miranda boarded a Greek barge with 'various poor people', but it was one mendicant Turk travelling with his family that 'really annoyed' him and his companions. '[T] his rascal, however, (only due to being Turkish) purported to fully command the voyage', triggering Miranda's condemnation of inherited privilege and ethnic discrimination.<sup>40</sup> In the company of local Orthodox notables and foreign consuls, Miranda came to share their resentment at how religion trumped ethnic and class distinctions in the Ottoman empire.

Miranda's diary suggests that, rather than being a merely secular observer of how religion informed political choices and opportunities in the Balkans, the Creole actively interacted and identified with the set of Christian consuls acting as his protectors. While Christian consuls' distancing from Muslims precipitated Miranda's increasingly hostile attitudes toward non-Christians, their active participation in Orthodox communal life helped involve him more directly with local religious politics. One of the consuls' most strikingly political appearances in Miranda's diary had nothing to do with their mediation with Ottoman authorities but in fact took place during a wedding procession in the Peloponnesian town of Patras:

The day before the Betrothal, the bride went to the local bathhouse with a great company of women to wash her well, then a great cavalcade to drive the groom (who lives 24 miles from here) to the City and throughout, music in the house of the bride; until the day of the Betrothal when all the Consuls and persons of distinction were invited to attend to the performance.<sup>41</sup>

Unlike the Americas, where the memory of consulship had been absent from political discourse prior to the American Revolution, the distinguished part that consuls played in the Patras wedding procession shows that these officials had already become established components of the local community.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the consciously political act of assembling the *corps consulaire* in one place and for a specific occasion elided the significant differences between the various imperial powers, projecting their combined authority as an important legitimating element in the protection of Christian populations in a region marked by religious tension and inter-imperial rivalry.<sup>43</sup>

A highlight of Miranda's trip to the Balkans, the Patras wedding ceremony featuring consuls at the heart of the local community was a distinct sociopolitical phenomenon. In their role as protectors of the local Christian community, consuls acted as potent agents who transformed local sociability into political action and articulated a form of autonomy that explicitly excluded the

<sup>39</sup>On Miranda's enduring secularism, see Racine, *Francisco de Miranda*, 9, 113, 232.

<sup>40</sup>Miranda, *Archivo*, 2:121–2.

<sup>41</sup>See Miranda's diary entries for 16 and 17 May 1786 in Miranda, *Archivo*, vol. 2.

<sup>42</sup>See also Christian Windler, 'Pluralité des rôles des consuls et production de l'information', in *Les consuls en Méditerranée. Agents d'information*, ed. Silvia Marzagalli (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2015), 345–52.

<sup>43</sup>On the role of religion in this inter-imperial rivalry, see Frary, *Russia and the Making of Modern Greek Identity*.

imperial state. This, in turn, made their anti-despotic rhetoric even more palatable to Miranda, whose diary illustrated his growing immersion in consular networks and their institutional imaginaries. Having introduced Miranda to the everyday dynamics of Balkan sociability, consuls and local mercantile elites continued to guide the traveller through the sea- and landscapes of the Peloponnese and the adjacent islands. In the following days, the resident Dutch consul and a handful of local Greek merchants accompanied Miranda on a trip to Athens. The Creole marvelled at the ancient Greek ruins as a French merchant began ‘speaking a lot about antiquity, giving way to the imagination on all of the most interesting events in Greek history’. Overlooking the ruins of Themistocles and Kimon from the French consular house, it was easy for Miranda to experience a transcendent link between the past and the present, a link strategically politicized by Balkan Christians in their incipient revolutionary projects. In a period when Balkan Christian elites began to express great interest in reviving the ancient polities they had once established, the presence of foreign consuls provided them with the means to (re-)write their own history.<sup>44</sup>

If anything, Miranda’s experiences with the French consulate in Athens and the wedding procession in Patras suggest that the dynamics of consular agency defy current explanations of anti-imperial political mobilization, which tend to underplay the importance of inter-imperial diplomatic and consular networks compared to the emergence of national print culture and the dissemination of new Western political ideas to global peripheries. Yet, as Miranda experienced at first hand, the power of the consulate in pre-revolutionary Ragusa and Morea lay not in its novelty but precisely in its evocation of an imagined past. Consuls claimed the consular institution as one ‘forever’ present in local life to contest the power of a foreign imperial elite that dominated Peloponnesian politics. Balkan merchants had, for seemingly immemorial time, organized themselves along familial links with ‘consuls’ presiding as corporate heads.<sup>45</sup> As members of the collective political body, consuls challenged the nature of the foreign political power ruling Peloponnesians and Ragusans from afar, in a mode of critique echoing Miranda’s indignation at Spanish discrimination against Creoles. In the company of these foreign and native consuls as well as their mercantile partners, local Christians began wondering why Ragusa, a thriving maritime republic, had become the retirement home for venal Venetian nobles, and why the Peloponnese, the site of ancient Greek greatness, had become the hospital for ailing foreigners and corrupt imperial officials. Sharpened by the presence of foreign consuls amid autochthonous Balkan communities, these questions on the nature of political authority permeated the writings of the visiting Creole. Far from complying with Atlantic modes of governance, these local forms of political mobilization showcased the ancient roots of autochthonous politics, a political element that Miranda had not expanded upon in his previous explorations. His first comprehensive plan for a new South American government, composed in 1790, featured similar autochthonous elements (an Inca ruler and cacique deputies) at the heart of a republican government blending ancient and modern institutions.<sup>46</sup>

During Miranda’s Balkan tour, the consuls’ protection constantly distanced and alienated him from the Muslim population, fuelling his critique of imperial despotism. During his subsequent journeys to the Aegean, Anatolia, and Constantinople, Miranda became increasingly critical of their religious biases, as he distanced himself from the Balkan consulates.<sup>47</sup> If the Creole initially regarded consular protection as a mitigation of imperial excesses, he also came to appreciate that consulship itself entailed a higher inter-ethnic distancing across the empire. On 19 July 1786, as

<sup>44</sup>See Miranda’s diary entry for 17 June 1786 in Miranda, *Archivo*, vol. 2. Case, ‘Quiet Revolution’, 114, observes that ‘much of the history of the young nation-states in southeastern Europe for the nineteenth century was either written by consuls or based on consular reports’.

<sup>45</sup>Traian Stoianovich, ‘The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant’, *Journal of Economic History* 20, no. 2 (1960): 234–313, esp. 296.

<sup>46</sup>See Robertson, ‘Francisco de Miranda and the Revolutionizing of Spanish America’, 272–4.

<sup>47</sup>For more on the subject see Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, esp. 76–85.

Miranda passed the island of Mykonos, he contrasted the Ottomans' discriminatory attitudes toward western Europeans with their equitable treatment of people of colour: 'it is worth noting the equality with which this nation admits and treats blacks, at the same time they despise and cannot suffer the Franks!'<sup>48</sup> During his sojourn in Constantinople following his departure from Greece, Miranda complained that 'Nobody wanted to get close to me tonight, because I had been aboard the Turkish War Ships and this is the reason why many travelling here return without seeing the interior of Constantinople, nor deal with the Turks.' He continued, 'There are even people, to my knowledge, that have lived for more than fourteen years here and have never set foot in Constantinople.'<sup>49</sup> Tasked with overseeing naval quarantines, equipped with corporate immunities at the Porte, and invested in the imperial protection of their subjects in the Ottoman empire, the European officials with whom Miranda interacted distanced themselves from the South American as they likely feared he might be carrying a contagious disease contracted during his interactions on board the Turkish vessels.<sup>50</sup>

Nowhere was this peculiar distancing between European officials and local Muslims more prominent than in the Ottoman capital. Miranda wrote:

I was surprised at the beginning to see the little or no knowledge of the City that the people and in particular the Dragomans [diplomatic secretaries] have, who are the universal guides . . . from which it follows that almost all the travellers . . . take a *Dragoman* as a *Mentor*, believing they know the *Government* or the *Nation*, as if one could give what one doesn't have.<sup>51</sup>

Accustomed to consuls' wide-ranging privileges in the Ottoman empire, Miranda was struck at just how different and distant the behaviour of European dragomans in Constantinople seemed by comparison.<sup>52</sup> Stationed in the imperial capital, the European officials represented an altogether peculiar group to Miranda, whose previous interactions with consuls in the Balkans had suggested a more intimate, if far from unproblematic, involvement of consuls in inter-confessional and inter-imperial affairs.

Rather than marking a radical break in his political exile, Miranda's subsequent trip to Russia built on his previous experiences in the Balkans. A Russian consular passport from Constantinople enabled him to navigate the highly delicate Russian–Ottoman borderlands, while a consular letter of introduction shortened his quarantine at the Russian port of Kherson and enabled him to expand his network of acquaintances in the new imperial periphery of Novorossiia.<sup>53</sup> Relying on information from his foreign acquaintances, Miranda deplored the relocation of Tatars, Greeks, and Armenians from this region as examples of 'oriental despotism'.<sup>54</sup> During his stay at Kherson, Miranda also found an unlikely ally in his opposition to imperial despotism in the Orthodox archbishop Eugenios Voulgaris, a progenitor of the Greek struggle for independence from the Ottoman empire.<sup>55</sup> Despite his great aversion to religious authority, the

<sup>48</sup>Miranda, *Archivo*, 2:138.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:186.

<sup>50</sup>This distancing, as suggested by the examples cited in notes 36 and 42, was multifaceted.

<sup>51</sup>Miranda, *Archivo*, 2:186. On consuls and dragomans in the Ottoman empire, see Case, 'Quiet Revolution', 116.

<sup>52</sup>Case, 'Quiet Revolution', 116–18.

<sup>53</sup>See Miranda, *Archivo*, 2:v, 186, 195, 199, 200–5.

<sup>54</sup>Examples include *ibid.*, 2:210 (forced relocation of more than 330,000 Crimean Tatars), 216 (forced relocation of 65,000 Greek and Armenian families), 323 (prohibition on using imperial roads), 359 (conversation with an Orthodox bishop about 'the Despotism of the Country'). Overall, Miranda's experiences in Novorossiia mirrored his impression of the Balkans as a peripheral region subjected to the worst excesses of imperial despotism. It is important to note that he derived much of his political information about this region from the Austrian and Polish consuls in Kherson.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:200, 202, 203, 206, 211. See also Miguel Castillo Didier, 'Eugenio Vúlgaris y la ilustración griega' (Ph.D. diss., Universidad de Chile, 2019), 186–7, 207, 210.

Creole described Voulgaris as a man of ‘most amicable character’ whose ‘neat and venerable tonsure . . . and beard gave his bust a perfect Greek air’. In Voulgaris’s image, Miranda ‘thought to have seen the exact original marble that the illustrious ancient artists have given us of that same nation’. Though Miranda did not expand on the nature of their relationship, he did note his reception of two of Voulgaris’s writings (*Abregé cronologique des Peuples qui ont habité les bords de la Mer Noire* and *Réflexions sur l’état critique actuel de la puissance ottomane*), which argued for foreign support of Greek independence from the Ottomans. He also praised Voulgaris’s *Réflexions sur l’état critique actuel de la puissance ottomane* (1774) as a work ‘written with much taste and knowledge’.<sup>56</sup>

Having become the main theme of Miranda’s interactions in the Ottoman empire, imperial despotism also informed his exploration of Russia as he travelled from Kherson to Kiev on his way to Saint Petersburg. When he reached the Russian imperial capital, he deployed his aversion to oriental despotism in order to convince the resident Spanish officials that he was not communicating any revolutionary ideas to the Russian court. Amid rumours that the Creole was about to use Russian diplomatic support to reach Spanish America by way of the Bering Strait and revolutionize the continent, his attempt to distance himself from Russia failed to convince his Spanish adversaries. Nevertheless, even after Miranda failed to appease Spain, he still used the services of the Russian consular and diplomatic services in northern Europe, skilfully evading the expansive Spanish consular reach across the region.<sup>57</sup> Reflecting on his entire south-eastern journey from Ragusa to Constantinople, and thence to Saint Petersburg and Paris, Miranda later confessed that the Russian consular and diplomatic protection he had come to enjoy during his travels had been the only reason why he returned to western Europe alive and well.<sup>58</sup>

But in the high summer of 1786, as he was taking a last look at the Sea of Marmara at the intersection of the Balkans and Anatolia, Miranda could not predict the outcome of his growing involvement with Russian consuls, or grasp the wider significance of his journey to south-east Europe. From the imposing tower of Leander overlooking the town of Scutari (Üsküdar), he beheld the surrounding ‘Castles they call Hissar, where [the Ottoman authorities] usually decapitate the Victims of Despotism, whose execution they announce by a cannon shot amid the silence of the night’, powerfully invoking the discourse of oriental despotism as the capstone of his preceding encounters.<sup>59</sup> Twenty years later, as he prepared to embark upon a much-anticipated revolutionary expedition to his homeland, Miranda chose an ominous name for the flagship that aimed to end Spanish despotism in the Americas: *Leander*.<sup>60</sup>

## Reconsidering south-east Europe in the Age of Revolution

Occurring three years before the French Revolution, Miranda’s remarks on affairs in the Balkans complicate both contemporary analyses of his emergence as a revolutionary leader and broader Northern and Western conceptual frameworks governing historical interpretations of the Age of

<sup>56</sup>Miranda, *Archivo*, 2:200, 206.

<sup>57</sup>Joseph O. Baylen and Dorothy Woodward, ‘Francisco de Miranda in Russia’, *Americas* 6, no. 4 (1950): 431–49; Russell H. Bartley, *Imperial Russia and the Struggle for Latin American Independence, 1808–1828* (Austin: Institute of Latin American Studies, University of Texas, 1978), 21–3.

<sup>58</sup>Racine, *Francisco de Miranda*, 97–104.

<sup>59</sup>Miranda, *Archivo*, 2:162.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*; Hill, ‘Expedition to Liberate Venezuela’; Robertson, ‘Francisco de Miranda and the Revolutionizing of Spanish America’, 366. For a similar reading of revolutionary naming practices, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (New York: Beacon Press, 1995). As an avid reader of the classics, Miranda was familiar with the story of Leander of Abydos, who managed to persuade Hero, a priestess of Aphrodite living on the opposite (European) side of the Hellespont, to have a love affair with him. To guide Leander’s nocturnal crossings of the strait, Hero lit a lamp on top of a tower. One fateful night, the winds blew out Hero’s light and tossed Leander in the sea until he drowned. Upon seeing his body, Hero threw herself over the edge of the tower to her death. Miranda was so taken by this myth that he later named his first-born son after the male protagonist.

Revolution. Several significant aspects of his Balkan trip do not fit current accounts of revolutionary activism around 1800. In his numerous encounters with Ragusan, Ionian, and Peloponnesian elites, some of whom would later play important roles in the Greek and Serbian wars of independence, Miranda made scant references to ‘print culture’, the supposed universal catalyst of revolutionary thought and action.<sup>61</sup> His experiences demonstrate the shortcomings of a Habermasian approach which imbued broadsheets, pamphlets, or newspapers with an agential power to effect revolutionary change, but missed persistent interpersonal modes of mobilizing revolutionary energies.<sup>62</sup> Miranda’s interactions with local elites revolved around letter writing and oral communication rather than published books. In mediating between distant consulates, the Creole acted as a conscious political agent who directly influenced imperial communications rather than passively consuming print materials that shaped his revolutionary worldview. If we take the example of the precursor of Latin American independence, we can conclude that US, British, or French print materials hardly influenced any of Miranda’s interactions in south-east Europe. When these powers became occasionally significant for the Creole, it was not as ideological progenitors but rather as the strategic resources through which he could articulate his growing critique of imperial systems.

Equally prominent, and equally absent from current historical accounts of Miranda as a revolutionary agent, was the strategic role of consular infrastructures which dramatically influenced his ability to travel, gain new political allies (or enemies), and form his ideas of republicanism, religion, empire, and revolution. Judging by his private correspondence and extensive diary notes, the multinational consular corps in the Balkans mediated his numerous encounters with an imperial rule undergirded by religious excess, burdensome tax impositions, and arbitrary power. Although Miranda missed some of the underlying dynamics behind the consular interactions he witnessed across south-east Europe, he did experience consulship as an institution enabling individuals to act beyond the reach of (their) imperial overlords. Certainly, he realized that the public support of local anti-imperial aspirations was not what distinguished a good consul. Revolutionary publicity was perhaps a winning strategy in the Americas, where the reach of European metropolises was always an ocean away, but it was a much more dangerous proposition in the Balkans, where contiguity to the metropole meant the possibility of swift and potentially devastating repercussions for the local populace. It was much safer to use the institutional infrastructure of a rival empire against an imperial overlord than to waste precious lives and resources in a doomed anti-imperial uprising.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup>On the importance of political mobilization in Patras and Corinth to the Greek war of independence, see David Brewer, *The Greek War of Independence: The Struggle for Freedom from Ottoman Oppression and the Birth of the Modern Greek Nation* (New York: Overlook Press, 2001), 1–7, 70–8.

<sup>62</sup>See Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*. A particularly good example of this Habermasian approach is found in Adelman, ‘Age of Imperial Revolutions’, 319–20, who introduces Miranda’s 1806 Venezuelan expedition with the Creole’s use of Viscardo y Guzmán’s *Letter to the Spanish Americans*, failing to discuss the pamphlet’s diplomatic and consular provenance.

<sup>63</sup>More recently, Dišev, ‘Biala kost, cherna kost’, has used the history of Naiden Gerov, a mid-nineteenth-century Bulgarian revolutionary, to illustrate the intricate power play involved in being a native consul in the Ottoman Balkans and deploying imperial rivalries for the purpose of national liberation. In the wake of the Crimean War (1853–56), Gerov, a Bulgarian native who completed his education in the Russian empire, received the appointment of Russian vice-consul in Plovdiv. Dišev writes: ‘Gerov’s mother, upon his assumption of the office exuded maternal pride, telling him that “he is now the most notable Bulgarian”, but his heart would not let him tell her that “I am going to be the most ordinary clerk at the Russian ministry of foreign affairs”.’ Contrasting Gerov’s consular work with that of other prominent revolutionaries, Dišev reconstructs Gerov’s awareness of the international stakes of anti-imperial struggle: ‘What nation in Europe has liberated itself without foreign aid? Italians used French help in driving out Austria.’ Serbians, Greeks, and Romanians likewise became independent during the Russo-Turkish wars. ‘Contemplating the situation from this perspective’, Dišev continues, ‘Gerov had reached the conclusion that Bulgarian freedom could only come from abroad.’ Gerov’s correspondence is indicative of his careful use of secrets and his continuous efforts to mediate between Balkan Christians and Ottoman authorities. See Naiden Gerov to Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Saint Petersburg, March 1856, F/22/1/528, and Gerov to E. P. Kovalevski, Plovdiv, 16 January 1857, F/22/5/132–5, Bulgarian National Library Archives, Sofia.



Miranda's diaries only hinted at how Balkan consulates were remaking a distant periphery into a major centre for negotiating the parameters of imperial sovereignty and national identity in the last decades of the eighteenth century. At a time when western European and North American elites were considering rendering consulship a secular appendage to the nation-state, Russian officials and Balkan Christian elites became particularly invested in emphasizing the institution's religious underpinnings, its intimate relationship to the historical formation of the modern state, and its implicit potency to embody national memory and transcend secular time. Impressed by the omnipresence and seeming omnipotence of these consuls among Balkan Christians, Miranda naturally followed the consular trail that linked his travels across south-east Europe and beckoned him to the Russian–Ottoman borderlands. Consulates acted as vital nodes in Miranda's journey into, and out of, the south-east, mediating almost every action and informing the development of his critique of imperial despotism, a major aspect of his later revolutionary activism.

Rather than being a set of marginal acquaintances in the making of an Atlantic revolutionary, the consular networks across south-east Europe played a crucial role in ensuring Miranda's subsistence and facilitating his communications, travels, ideological commitments, and political career. Like other Creoles, Miranda did not initially cast his struggle as an anti-colonial confrontation with the metropole, and in fact continued to date his break with the Spanish empire much later than his English, US, Russian, or French co-conspirators did.<sup>64</sup> Having experienced the far-reaching power of consulates as modern surveillance agencies, he became adept in using these institutions to obtain passports, expand his network of acquaintances, and enlist their protection against potential imperial excesses.<sup>65</sup> In the company of foreign consuls and men like the Greek cleric Voulgaris, the Creole relied on oral interactions and epistolary correspondence to communicate discontent with imperial rule. Given the lingering strength of old, seemingly decadent empires, it was much safer to exploit their imperial rivalries from the outside and use consular immunity and secrecy to propagate anti-imperial sentiment.<sup>66</sup>

In addition, Miranda's experiences with foreign consular networks in the United States and south-east Europe taught him how to create secret networks to advance his anti-imperial propaganda. After the initial diplomatic blunders with the Jamaican smuggling cartel and the French consul-general in the United States, he used his growing diplomatic connections to evade Spanish surveillance and navigate what he came to perceive as a despotic imperial regime whose decadent symptoms resembled those of the Spanish empire itself.<sup>67</sup> In the 1790s, Miranda built on these experiences by erecting a secret network which combined the features of a colonial cartel, a

<sup>64</sup>See Miranda to Viscount Castlereagh, London, 10 January 1808, in Francisco de Miranda, *Archivo del general Miranda*, vol. 21: *Negociaciones* (Caracas: Editorial Suramérica, 1950), 18–27. Miranda wrote: 'The Emancipation of South America has been a subject first proposed by me, and received by the English Ministers, as far back as the year 1790, under the Promise of granting them Independence, on the same conditions that France and Spain stipulated with the English Colonies in North America.' In the same letter, he also denounced 'the exaggerated doctrines propagated at that Period by the anarchical party in France'. He was referring to a 1792 overture by the French Girondins, who had asked Miranda to replace his arch-enemy Barbé-Marbois as governor of Saint-Domingue in the hope of 'mak[ing] a revolution in Spain itself and in Spanish America'. Influenced by rumours of Miranda's alleged conspiracy to overthrow Spanish American rule, a leading French official attached high aspirations to his revolutionary activism, writing: 'The success of that last revolution, depends on one man; you know him, you esteem him, you love him – it is Miranda' (Jean-Pierre Brissot to Dumouriez, Paris, 28 November 1792, in Francisco de Miranda, *Archivo del general Miranda*, vol. 13: *Revolución francesa* (Caracas: Editorial Suramérica, 1932), 25). The fact that Miranda deliberately distanced himself from both revolutionary projects at a particularly auspicious time, when he stood to gain from renewed British support of his plans, indicates that his negotiation of revolution was much more intricate and elusive than current historiography suggests.

<sup>65</sup>On consulates as surveillance agencies, see Windler, 'Pluralité des rôles', 345–52.

<sup>66</sup>Consuls offer a particularly interesting example of what Joshua Simon has aptly called 'anti-imperial imperialism', a concept that emphasizes the profound imperial legacies of emancipatory struggles in the Americas (Simon, *Ideology of Creole Revolution*, 14–15, 30–47; see also Simeonov, 'Consular Caribbean'). These legacies were even more palpable in south-eastern Europe, where a Roman imperial past manifested itself in monumental ruins, ideological claims to imperial heritage, and political mobilizations of shared memories of empire.

<sup>67</sup>Blaufarb, 'Western Question'.

Masonic lodge, and a consular system. This organization had its parallels in the early nineteenth-century Balkan revolutionary movements and served as the vehicle through which the Creole sought to undermine Spanish rule in the Americas.

Far from being a tangential episode in the Age of Revolution, Miranda's trip to the Balkans thus formed a significant chapter in the political and diplomatic career of the progenitor of Latin American independence. The Balkans gave a concrete shape and dimension to the kind of 'decadent' and 'despotic' imperial rule that Miranda made it his mission to overthrow from 1790 onward. During his Balkan explorations, he became increasingly drawn to the idea of travelling further across the Ottoman empire and acquainting himself with its 'despotic' Russian rival to the north. Miranda's growing network of Russian consuls and diplomats strained his relationship with Spanish officials, who suspected his complicity in Russian plans to revolutionize Spanish America via the Pacific Northwest. By the coming of the French Revolution, Miranda's trip across eastern Europe had made him not only one of the most notorious exiled Creoles but also the figurehead for revolutionizing Spanish America.<sup>68</sup>

The Balkans were not just Miranda's gate to Russia, but a peculiar space where consular networks operated quite differently from both the North Atlantic powers and Russia itself, which was trying to standardize and 'Europeanize' its state agencies.<sup>69</sup> Throughout his explorations of south-east Europe, Miranda witnessed how these foreign consular networks carved out an independent political space for locals and foreigners to negotiate their relationship with the Ottoman empire. Against the imperial officials engaged in collecting taxes, imposing quarantines, or discriminating against religious or ethnic groups, the presence of consuls itself suggested the viability of an internal anti-imperial critique which acted as an everyday catalyst for local political mobilization. This was certainly a valuable impression for someone negotiating a comprehensive critique of imperial rule.

## Conclusion

When studying the global Age of Revolution, Miranda's meanderings across south-east Europe present a crucial inflection point in his career as a *trans*-Atlantic revolutionary, most significantly in his deployment of consular and diplomatic connections and in his articulation of anti-imperial critique 'from the south-east'. His Balkan explorations formed part of his first decade in exile, the 1780s, a decade of exploration, of attempts to mediate with Spain, of expanding diplomatic and consular networks, of increasingly public resentment of imperial 'despotism', and of preparation for his revolutionary activism in France and Spanish America.<sup>70</sup> Over the 1790s, as he joined the French revolutionary armies, Miranda continued to rely on diplomatic and consular connections in his confrontation with 'despotic' counter-revolutionary governments, while cultivating an image of a *trans*-Atlantic traveller whose personal familiarity with 'oriental despotism' lent his critique of empire special credibility.<sup>71</sup> The critique of 'oriental despotism' and the strategic

<sup>68</sup>Baylen and Woodward, 'Miranda in Russia'; Robertson, *Life of Miranda*, 90–4.

<sup>69</sup>Tatiana Zonova, 'The Consular Service in Russia: Past Problems, New Challenges', in *Consular Affairs and Diplomacy*, ed. Jan Melissen and Ana Mar Fernández (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 173–98.

<sup>70</sup>Miranda took an active part in the French revolutionary campaign in Valmy in 1792. His proclamations openly cast his participation as a contribution to the fight against despotism, recalling his earlier observations from the United States and the Balkans. See Francisco de Miranda, 'Order of the 29th to the 30th', Antwerp, 3 December 1792, in Francisco de Miranda, *Archivo del general Miranda*, vol. 8: *Revolución francesa* (Caracas: Editorial Suramérica, 1930), 226–7; Francisco de Miranda, 'Proclamation to the Magistrates of the People', Maastricht, 22 February 1793, in *ibid.*, 226–7. Miranda's unsuccessful attempt to capture Maastricht precipitated a contentious relationship with French revolutionary officials.

<sup>71</sup>An influential *Morning Chronicle* article (26 December 1792), edited by Miranda himself, referred to his explorations of 'all the countries of Europe, Russia, and Turkey not excepted', to cast the international traveller as 'too fond of liberty to trust himself in the power of despots and tyrants'. Born 'in a country of slaves', as the article reminded readers, Miranda faced the prospect of apprehension by Spanish officials, a policy that the *Morning Chronicle* claimed to be 'almost as effectual as that in

approach to consulship that Miranda developed during his Balkan tour also informed his revolutionary activism in Latin America, most notably his 1806 expedition to liberate Venezuela.

Miranda's first expedition to emancipate his homeland represented a landmark event in the Age of Revolution, which scholars have hitherto examined in an exclusively Atlantic framework. During this expedition, he distributed print copies of Viscardo y Guzmán's *Letter to the Spanish Americans* – a manuscript Miranda had discovered in Guzmán's archives – which talked extensively about the necessity of overthrowing Spanish despotism in South America, ensuring equal treatment of Creoles, abandoning imperial taxes, and strengthening local governance. Despite Miranda's dissemination of revolutionary print propaganda upon his arrival at the Venezuelan town of Coro, he failed to elicit broad support among the local population. Given widespread illiteracy, the force of religious tradition, and persisting structures of imperial governance, Miranda's approach seemed misplaced in a region so different from North America and England and so much more similar to the political dynamics prevalent across eastern Europe.

Once we look past this dogmatic emphasis on print, however, we can see that Miranda's failure began before he even sailed to South America. As he sought to enlist support for his Venezuelan expedition among New York merchants, smiths, and federal officials, the Spanish consul in New York, Thomas Stoughton, began closely monitoring his activities.<sup>72</sup> Stoughton tracked down the amount of gunpowder, guns, uniforms, saddles, pikes, and cannons supplied to the Creole and the people involved in his plot. By the time that Miranda arrived on the Spanish Main, Stoughton's consular reports had already mobilized imperial counter-insurgency, stripping the *Leander* of its strategic momentum and paving the way to its doom.<sup>73</sup>

Miranda both remembered and forgot his experiences in the Balkans. Under the influence of his English and US peers, he overestimated the revolutionary power of print and underestimated the secret surveilling power of the consul, a power he had witnessed at first hand throughout his North American and eastern European travels.<sup>74</sup> Though he took precautionary measures to shield himself and his co-conspirators from the consul's surveillance, effectively self-quarantining on board the *Leander*, he had no way of knowing that the Spanish consular service could swiftly communicate his plan to the colonial dependencies across the Americas.<sup>75</sup> Miranda had been able to outpace the slow rate of Spanish consular communications in the 1780s, but by the early 1800s the capacity of these consular networks to disseminate information was no match for the ageing Creole. Even with the power of the printing press and fiery revolutionary pamphlets in hand, he failed to outsmart the discerning eyes and gossiping pens of the consuls, who continued to watch over him as he criss-crossed the Atlantic in an age of revolution, warfare, and imperial retrenchment. Unlike the 1780s and 1790s, however, Miranda could not count on foreign consuls to promote his revolutionary conspiracy and protect his freedom of movement, for the Spanish empire, unlike the Ottoman, refused to acknowledge consuls in its subordinated provinces.<sup>76</sup>

A high point in Miranda's revolutionary career, the *Leander* expedition suggested that the limitations that the Creole had first faced during his exile in North America were still firmly in place

---

Turkey, of decapitation'. For more on the article, see Francisco de Miranda, *Archivo del general Miranda*, vol. 6: *Viajes. Cartas a Miranda: 1789 a 1808* (Caracas: Editorial Suramérica, 1930), 235–8.

<sup>72</sup>For more on this subject, see Lindsay Schakenbach, 'Schemers, Dreamers, and a Revolutionary Foreign Policy: New York City in the Era of Second Independence, 1805–1815', *New York History* 94, no. 3–4 (2013), 267–82.

<sup>73</sup>See Thomas Stoughton to Marquis de Casa Irujo, New York, 30 and 31 January, and 2, 12, and 24 February 1806, (10) 026.001/54/7725, Archivo General de la Administración, Alcalá de Henares, Spain.

<sup>74</sup>On at least one occasion prior to Miranda's return, the United States became the site of a consul thwarting a revolutionary insurgency. In 1793–94, the Spanish consul in Charleston provided crucial information on a planned revolution in east Florida, enabling colonial authorities to act accordingly. See Landers, *Atlantic Creoles*, 51. On the Spanish consuls' later counter-revolutionary activities, see Simeon Andonov Simeonov, "'Insurgentes, Self-Styled Patriots': Consuls, Privateers, Slavers, and Mariners in the Making of the Privateering Archipelago', *Journal of Global Slavery* 5, no. 3 (2020, forthcoming).

<sup>75</sup>See Racine, *Francisco de Miranda*, 157–9.

<sup>76</sup>Simeon Andonov Simeonov, "'With what right are they sending a consul': Unauthorized Consulship, U.S. Expansion, and the Transformation of the Spanish American Empire, 1795–1808', *Journal of the Early Republic* 40, no. 1 (2020): 19–44.

twenty years later. Although he seemed to have forgotten some of the lessons of his earliest *trans-Atlantic* experiences, the act of naming his flagship after the eponymous tower in the Bosphorus suggests that this was not exactly the case. The naming of the *Leander* powerfully recalled the legacy of Miranda's Balkan encounters at a turning point of his revolutionary career, just as he was about to undertake the emancipation of Venezuela. The Balkans had taught him how to navigate diplomatic and consular networks in negotiating his commitment to ending 'imperial despotism'. This was a pertinent lesson in Miranda's self-imposed isolation on board the *Leander*, an experience which likely recalled his long quarantines in the Ottoman and Russian empires. In his explorations of south-east Europe, Miranda had also witnessed local elites' mode of critiquing and resisting imperial rule, and, though he did not expand on their significance in 1806, these Balkan critiques of despotism resonated with the materials he had discovered in Viscardo y Guzmán's diplomatic archives and carried with him in print across the Atlantic.

Even as the Venezuelan Creole became increasingly drawn into the world of Atlantic politics, the legacy of the Balkans, a legacy of consular secrecy and practices of imperial 'despotism', continued to beckon. By the 1800s, this legacy seemed of little relevance as Miranda, catering to a Western audience, assumed the public image of an Atlantic revolutionary with a lifelong commitment to defeating Spanish imperialists. However, his diary notes from the 1780s belie this mischaracterization as they reveal a complex figure expressing a variety of attitudes towards imperial rule in the Americas and south-east Europe.

Re-evaluating this evidence, we cannot think about Miranda's trajectory as a revolutionary activist in an exclusively Atlantic frame. The ease with which he inserted himself into Balkan politics and with which he recruited new allies in his struggle against imperial 'despotism' suggests the limits of a western European or Atlantic-centred approach to understanding the trans-regional and global dynamics of the Age of Revolution. If Miranda's explorations show us anything, it is that institutionalized practices of consular secrecy and notions of decadent despotism enabled people from distant regions without pre-existing political, diplomatic, or interpersonal connections to communicate a common type of imperial critique. This revolutionary mobilization, Miranda's diary suggests, was not confined to social elites either; it resonated with local agents in peripheral places with limited access to print materials. Understanding the mechanisms which enabled this critique of imperial despotism to criss-cross the revolutionary Atlantic can open new venues for further research into the political geography of revolutionary ferment. The fact that the major figure of Latin American independence has so far been exclusively read outside the Balkans is both a reminder of the persistence of current paradigms and a first step toward a historical reorganization of the political space of revolution.

Simeon Andonov Simeonov is a PhD candidate at Brown University. His dissertation, entitled 'Empire of Consuls: Consulship, Sovereignty, and Empire in the Revolutionary Atlantic (1778–1848)', explores how Atlantic consuls negotiated an international consensus on citizenship and human rights, how they shaped ideas of national sovereignty, and how they developed new practices of empire- and nation-building in the Age of Revolution. His work blends theorists of state-building with Atlantic histories of slavery and abolition and approaches to 'new' diplomatic history to portray the creation of the modern nation-state as a process shaped as much by 'external' as by 'internal' institutions.