

BOOK REVIEWS

Dopo la Serenissima. Balbettare la nazione nell'Adriatico, 1800–1850

by Konstantina Zanou, translation by Silvia Rosa, preface by Eric Dursteler, Rome, Società Dalmata di Storia Patria, La Musa Talia, 2021, 343 pp., €25.00 (paperback), ISBN 9791280384027

Simonetta Soldani

University of Florence

Email: simonetta.soldani@unifi.it

This outstanding piece of research once again demonstrates that, with the necessary methodological awareness, a focus on outlying and border areas can help leave behind cemented stereotypes and conformisms. By casting light on what would seem to be marginal situations and dynamics, it can add to and even alter the interpretation of the general historical framework.

Zanou's careful, detailed investigation, based on an extensive bibliography and a vast spectrum of printed and handwritten primary sources found in the archives and libraries of various European countries, achieves both goals.

The lens is pointed at the traumatic events in the Ionian islands and on the Dalmatian coast, a traditionally multi-ethnic and multicultural area, in the half century between Napoleon's demolition of the Republic of Venice (1797) and the Crimean War (1853–6). Marked by the crisis of the Ottoman Empire and the growing British rule in the Mediterranean, it was also a period of overwhelming success for various kinds of liberalism and nationalism, and of tensions triggered by the advancement of the 'natural' and superior nation-state ideology. This is precisely what was happening in the Greek area and all over Europe.

The book – devised by the author as a 'historical drama in four acts' (p. 47), opened by a *Prelude* and rounded off by an *Epilogue* – specifies right from the start its intention to read the events of the transformation of the south-eastern Adriatic from a 'Venetian lake' to a 'battlefield between old and new imperial powers' (Napoleonic, Russian, British and Habsburgian) and 'emerging nationalisms and nation-states' (p. 21) using biographies and writings from the group of intellectuals and persons of Veneto-Italian language and culture. For the main part also active in politics, these people were driven by the tempestuous times they lived in to play a particularly important role, while reinventing themselves and remoulding their identity as well as their political, cultural and ideological opinions.

There is good reason that the book hinges around the widespread difficulty of these politicians and intellectuals to express a single national idea and language, in line with the new semantic and political significance that the word/concept was gaining. This difficulty is clearly conveyed in both the original (*Transnational Patriotism in the Mediterranean, 1800–1850: Stammering the Nation*, published in 2018 by Oxford University Press) and the Italian title by the expression 'Stammering the Nation' and the emphasis on the

widespread ‘Transnational Patriotism’ of these ‘no-man’s lands’. The story of the three great ‘national poets’ who originated from Zante occupies part one of the volume, under the title *One Island, Three (Trans)national Poets*, in which Zanou reconstructs the ‘messy fluidity’ (p. 29) of the lives of Ugo Foscolo, Andreas Kalvos and Dionysios Solomos. While sharing much greater confidence with the Italian language than with the (incipient) Greek language and a more or less solidly transnational patriotism, their destinies would nevertheless differ radically: the first taken up into the Italian ‘star system’, the other two into the Greek.

Their biographies, which reflect ‘three stages of the transition from the common Venetian imperial Adriatic space to the fragmented, modern, multinational, and multi-state setting of the region’ (p. 49), transmit the difficulty faced across the board by their generation, as they had to choose one among what they felt to be their many defining loyalties and belongings. It is a very stimulating topic that – thanks to the present-day ex-pat phenomenon – has recently made an appearance in research too, alongside the ‘invention’ of distinctly nineteenth-century features of the concept of exile. One such example is the studies of Maurizio Isabella, unsurprisingly a several-time research partner of Zanou.¹

Almost as if to counterbalance the biographical emphasis in part one, part two – which nevertheless hinges around the crucial figure of Giovanni Capodistria, native of Corfu and governor of the newborn Greek state from 1827 until his assassination in 1831 – illustrates the area’s characteristic *Imperial Nationalism between Religion and Revolution*, recalling the influences and legacies of the different imperial interests (Venetian, Habsburgian, Ottoman and Russian) that converged in the area. In particular, unprecedented prominence is given to the role acquired by Russia and the Orthodox Church commencing from the years of the so-called ‘Septinsular Republic’ (1800–7), when the seven Ionian islands were placed under Russian protection. Further emphasis is placed on the highly conservative liberalism that inspired more than a few of the *Diasporic Lives across Empires and Nations* dealt with herein.

Even in the philhellenic movement, the author insists, there was a moderate and counter-revolutionary line of thought, springing from an era when empires and nations were not yet mutually exclusive entities. It was the same thinking of several fighters from the long war which, beginning in Wallachia in 1821, would transform ‘a motley assortment of Ottoman subjects, peasants, brigands, clerics, and notables into Greek soldiers and potential citizens’, while also creating in the Ionian diaspora ‘a new national consciousness which was constructed around absence, exile, and estrangement’ (p. 188).

And it is around this same topic of estrangement, of feeling at all times and in all places ‘out of place’ and ‘in exile’, that part three revolves (*Memoirs of Lives Suspended between Patrias*). The memoirs and autobiographical writings of minor figures put into real terms how complicated it was to cast off the mentality and clothes of a ‘multilayered’ existence (p. 201) and the ingrained sense of belonging to a ‘common space’, whether wavering between feeling Greek ‘as a person’ and Italian ‘as a man of letters’ like the writer from Corfu Mario Pieri, or seeking to bring out the continuity between the Graeco-Byzantine past and the present, shifting the barycentre of ‘Greekness’ very much to the east, like Andrea Papadopoulou Vretto, author of the first bibliographic catalogue of all the Greek books published after the fall of Constantinople.

Living in a Dying World (the title of the introduction to part four) and trying to adapt one’s culture and mentality to the uncertain novelties appearing on the horizon was not easy. Many of the characters found in these pages, educated in Italy and shot towards a ‘bicultural existence’ and ‘multiple patriotisms’ (pp. 227, 259), concentrated on research and activities to rediscover the Byzantine and Greek-Orthodox heritage, folk poetry and

local history. By organising archives and themed catalogues, schools and libraries, periodicals and publishing series, they confirmed that they could belong to two nationalities at the same time: ‘Greek by nationhood’ and ‘Italian by language and by choice’ (p. 267). This was also true for Andrea Mustoxidi, Vincenzo Monti’s Corfiot language assistant for the Italian translation of the *Iliad*, who was very active in the philhellenic movement. It was the same Mustoxidi who, after years of experience in the Russian diplomatic corps, would be called by Capodistria to take part in building that ‘Greek patria’ hitherto known and dear to him almost only through its literary projections.

These figures and environments were those first quashed by the phase following the birth of the independent Greek state (nevertheless under British tutelage). In reaction to the multiple identities borne by a large part of its potential ruling class, the new Greek state ended up on the road to an increasingly divisive nationalism whose aim was to erase the legitimacy of the various ‘paths to the nation’, which had led to the state’s birth and were also a major feature in the diaspora.

The case of Mustoxidi was emblematic. He ended up tarred by decidedly xenophobic brush owing to his championing of the war against the Italian language and Russophile and anti-Catholic nationalism, which fostered the already grave divide between those who felt ‘western’ and those who instead felt ‘eastern’. These dynamics have not been relegated to history but continue to be dramatically present, driving Konstantina Zanou – a Cypriot, and hence well aware of the problem – to remind us once more, at the end of the volume, of how much destructive and hurtful debris is strewn along the way to the affirmation of nationalist ideologies and nation-states.

Translated by Karen E. Whittle
info@whittletranslations.com

Note

1. See Isabella, M. and K. Zanou, eds. *Mediterranean Diasporas: Politics and Ideas in the Long 19th Century*. London-New Delhi-New York-Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2016.

doi:10.1017/mit.2022.47

A Monastery for the Ibex: Conservation, State, and Conflict on the Gran Paradiso, 1919–1949

by Wilko Graf von Hardenberg, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021, xii + 252 pp., \$50.00 (hardback), ISBN 9780822946359

Damiano Benvegnù

Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, USA
 Email: damiano.benvegnu@dartmouth.edu

According to the Official List of Protected Natural Areas (*Elenco ufficiale delle aree protette*, EUAP), Italy is home to 25 national parks, one of which, in Sardinia, was institutionally