

The intersection of contradictory worlds

The Greek Revolution of 1821 broke out in this complex and chaotic ideological milieu, as is typical of every significant historical turning point. The Revolution itself was a hodgepodge of idealism and cynicism, progressivism and reaction, heroism and compromise. All geographical scales met on the territory of the Revolutionaries. In order to comprehend this complicated phenomenon, we need to resort to anthropological, economic, sociological, and political analyses that take into account many dimensions: at the local level, the rivalry among chieftains; at the regional level, the opposition between mountaineers and mariners; at the imperial level, the Phanariots versus the indigenous populations; at the European level, the antagonism of France, England, and Russia; and last but not least, at the world level, the disruption of the international balance of power caused by modernity. The preoccupation, therefore, of Greek historiography with the question whether the Revolution of 1821 was a struggle for 'national liberation' or a social struggle reduces an event of world scale to the size of Greek petty politics. Such questions are meaningless.

A chance occurrence, the Sea Battle of Navarino (1827), utterly changed the military balance in the Eastern Mediterranean and made the Ottoman Empire vulnerable to the Great Powers. The Ottomans had to accept a turn of events they had never imagined: the creation of an independent state. Until then, the Ottoman Empire had been forced to cede territories to other empires or to grant a greater or lesser degree of autonomy to territorial units that nonetheless remained formally or *de facto* part of the Empire. The creation of Greece was unprecedented. During the negotiations with their counterparts, the representatives of the Sublime Porte not only refused to accept this fact; they could not even understand it, and rightly so (from their point of view). The newly independent state had forthrightly called into question the very essence of the Empire. This new beginning, which stemmed from an exogenous political action, could not be accommodated by imperial logic. Greek independence introduced in the East a tradition that effectively caused the overturning of the Empire.

The contradiction between the two logics became apparent after independence, in the interior of the new state. Its borders were laid out by the Great Powers according to the criteria of historical geography, in complete disregard for anthropogeographic conditions. If one draws an ellipse with its centre at Athens and Sparta, one approximates to the shape of the initial territory of Greece. The precise tracing of the boundaries adhered to physical geography, usually the crests of mountains. But the majority of the population lived by transhumant animal husbandry. The new boundaries excluded them from pastureland, separating families and communities. The populations at first ignored the borders. Whole areas resisted the new territorial logic, maintaining the former conditions of brigandry; except that now the hitherto heroes were called bandits and gang members.

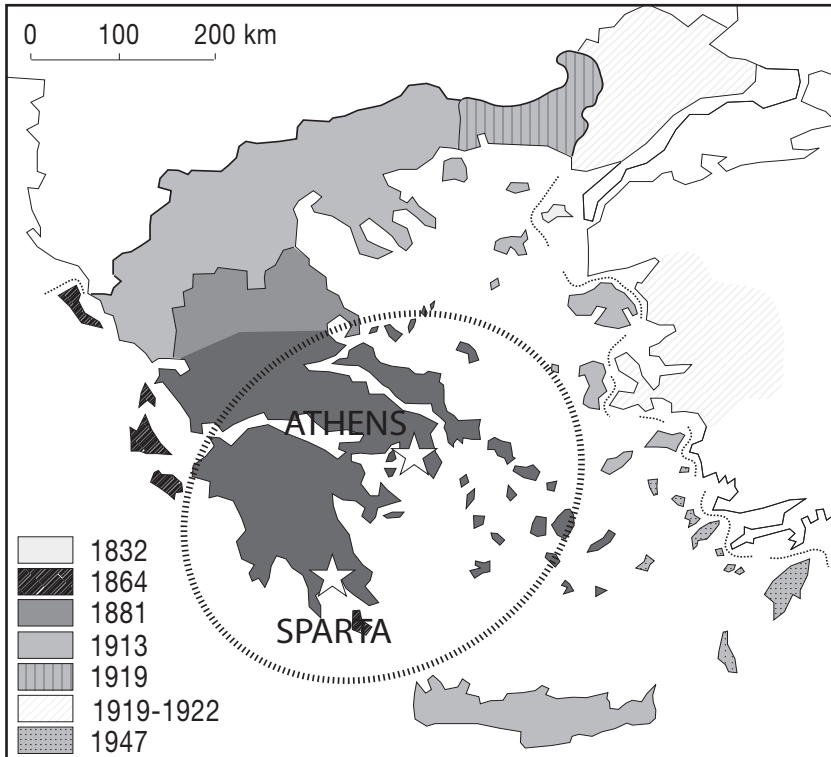
In general, the outline of the new state's territory did violence to the inherited logic of geography. The boundaries that had been

blithely traced on the map but could barely work on the ground artificially wrenched a section from Ottoman territory; this section did not in the least fulfil the prescriptions of a modern territory. The geometric act of laying out the boundaries did not alter territoriality; in other words, it was not enough to transform Ottoman territorial relationships into modern ones. The persistence of brigandry is the clearest proof of the lag between the typical creation of a modern territory and the adjustment of local societies to a new reality. This lag moreover continued into the 20th century. It is no accident that ‘bandits-gang members’ was the term adopted by anti-Communist discourse to describe ideological opponents.

The transition from Ottoman to modern society was as turbulent as the territorial transformation. The coexistence of contradictory expectations and pursuits during the Revolution led to tensions that nearly cancelled its results. The intervention of the Great Powers through the imposition of Bavarian rule averted the danger of disintegration. The Greek state began life under peculiar, semi-colonial circumstances.

The Bavarians acted as engineers. They took over a chaotic situation and contributed to its reconstruction. Society, institutions, and traditions were used as material to build structures which however changed the essence of these building blocks. The Church is a good example. Because the Muslims living until then in the newly Hellenised areas had been exterminated or expelled, almost all of King Otto’s subjects were Orthodox Christians. Consequently they fell under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch—an Ottoman official. The new state could not bear the continuance of such an element of imperial logic. For this reason it established its own Orthodox Church, which for a long time the Patriarch refused to recognise. By violating ecclesiastical canons, i.e. by creating a Church for the requirements of a state, Greece opened the door to subsequent separatist tendencies. It undermined if only unwittingly the great ‘Greek’ Church that the Ottomans had imposed on all their Chris-

THE CONSTRUCTION OF GREEK TERRITORY



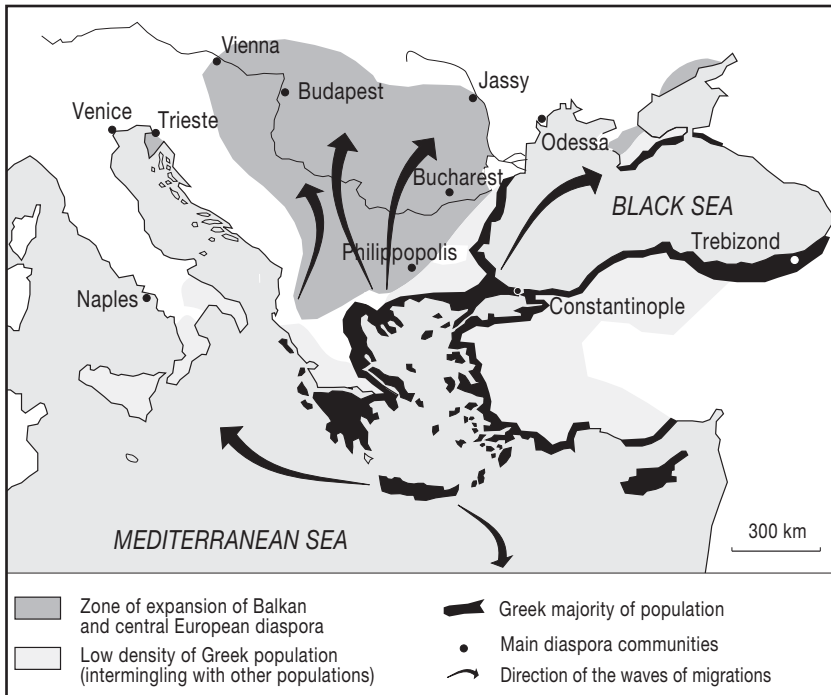
The territory of the first Greek state corresponded to the historical-geographical fantasy of the Philhellenes, nurtured as they were on the narrative of the Peloponnesian War. An ellipse centred on Athens and Sparta roughly covers the areas recognised by Europe as ‘Greek’. The organisation of Greek spaces around the Aegean was entirely ignored. The defeat in 1922 rounded off the destruction already registered in representations going back to the founding of the Greek state. ‘Another dreadful thing accompanied the Asia Minor disaster. We were completely severed from the East, every contact or movement to-and-fro ended, and we were cut off unilaterally. We are still paying dearly for this disruption of circulation (in the sense of blood circulation), our territorial amputation, our becoming a mere appendage to Europe’, notes Zisimos Lorentzatos in his *Collectanea*.

tian subjects. In the case of Greece, the Church's gaining of independence was linked to the state. Later, in leading up to the creation of Bulgaria, Pan-Slavism brought into play the link of the Church to ethnicity. This policy was the precursor of the dispute over the role of the Patriarchate. The new state, then, not only acted in a divisive manner at the expense of the Greek nation; it also laid the ground for the Bulgarian 'ethno-phyletist' attack on Hellenism.

The new state also needed an official and unitary language, because its population groups exhibited linguistic polymorphy. Of course the ritual language of the Church, enriched by popular word-making fantasy and tradition, was a fully effective linguistic tool; tellingly, this medium of expression also prevailed as the language of commerce in the Balkans and elsewhere. But the newly established state wanted to distance itself from whatever connected it to the Ottoman Empire. It therefore imposed its own competing language, an archaising Greek. This was a forced, embalmed form of ancient Greek—a language fixed in time, 'purified' of outside influence on diction, and rejecting the evolution of grammar and syntax. It is no coincidence that the archaising *καθαρεύουσα* ('purist language') and the equally artificial, hyper-popularising demotic were both constructed in counterpoint to one another by diaspora intellectuals in France: Adamantios Koraes and Ioannis Psycharis, respectively. Here lay the origins of what later became the 'language question'. The divorce from the linguistic past, pursued as an educational policy in reaction to the 'ancestor worship' of the seven-year military dictatorship, has reduced the language skills of present-day Greeks. Forms of expression in Greek were, indeed, linked to ideological agendas.

Obviously, it is unfair to lay the blame for recent developments on decisions taken decades or even centuries earlier. These decisions were made under the pressure to cut the umbilical cord connecting the populations of the Greek state, via the Church, to the Ottoman Empire. What is worth noting, however, is the fact that

THE GREEK DIASPORA IN THE 19th CENTURY



Source: Prevelakis (2001), 130.

practices were devised and carried out as a means of building the nation states that emerged from the Ottoman Empire. For the Orthodox, the creation of a national Church was a necessity. This can be seen even today in the attempt of the Church of Skopje to sever every tie to the Patriarchate of Belgrade; in this way the state Church, it is hoped, will be able to play a role in the process of ethnogenesis.

A comparison of Greece and Turkey reveals interesting parallels in matters of language. Kemalism not only replaced Arabic script by the Latin alphabet, but it also carried out a drastic linguistic reform, 'Turkifying' the language of the Ottoman Empire. Turks nowadays do not understand Ottoman texts not only because they do not know Arabic script, but also because they are not acquainted with much of the vocabulary and syntax of Ottoman. They have been cut off from their tradition. The difficulty of young Greeks in understanding 19th century texts reflects an analogous deficit: the wealth of the language is subject to the demands of modernist transformation. Unlike Greece, Turkey today has realised the problem, and plans are underway for teaching the Ottoman language in secondary school.