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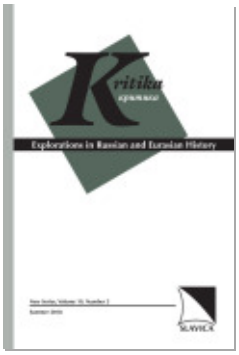

Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History, Volume 19, Number 3, Summer 2018, pp. 661-670 (Review)

Published by Slavica Publishers
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/kri.2018.0035*

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Lucien J. Frary, *Russia and the Making of Modern Greek Identity, 1821–1844*. 304 pp. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. ISBN-13 978-0198733775. $100.00.

We do not have an obvious need for studies of Russian involvement in Greece in the decades surrounding the Greek Revolution of 1821. What became the Kingdom of Greece in 1832 was a small territory on the southern tip of the Balkan Peninsula, while Russia had strategic interests spanning three continents. The existing works of Grigorii Arsh, Norman Saul, I. M. Smilianskaia, Olga Petrunina, and Avgusta Stanislavskaia are careful and good. Together they cover the geostrategic, cultural, and institutional-religious importance of the region in this period, roughly 1770 to the 1840s. Russia became a Black Sea naval power under Catherine II and acted intermittently to extend that power in the Mediterranean. Russian armed forces intervened in the Morea (Peloponnese), where they stimulated the Orlov Rebellion of 1770–71; in the Ionian Islands in 1799–1807, where they evicted the French Republic and established the Septinsular Republic; and in different parts of Italy from the 1790s on, where they sparred with revolutionary and imperial France.[1] We need a reason for further engagement.

[1] Grigorii L. Arsh has written several monographs, including *Rossiia i bor'ba Gretsii za osvobozhdenie: Ot Ekateriny II do Nikolaia I. Ocherki* (Moscow: Indrik, 2013). Avgusta M. Stanislavskaia has also authored several works, the most pertinent being *Rossiia i Gretsiia v kontse XVIII–nachale XIX v.: Politika Rossii v Ionicheskoi Respublike, 1798–1807 gg. (*Moscow: Nauka, 1976). See also I. M. Smilianskaia et al., *Rossiia v Sredizemnemor'e: Arkhipelagskaia ekspeditsiia Ekateriny Velikoi* (Moscow: Indrik, 2011). Strictly on matters of war and diplomacy, see Norman E. Saul, *Russia and the Mediterranean, 1797–1807* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). In the Greek language, the issue of Russo-Greek relations tends to be embedded in studies of the diaspora, the Greek uprisings per se, and local studies, e.g., the Orlov Rebellion in the Peloponnese: N. Rotzokos, *Ethnaphypnisē kai ethnogenesē: Ophlophika kai ellinikē istoriographia* (Athens: Vivliorama, 2007). Petrunina and many others are represented in the multilingual volume on Russia and the Mediterranean: Katerina Gardika,

Things do become interesting when we consider that Greek speakers at the time were extremely active in multiple regions of the world, pertained to flows and loci sooner than states and nations, and had very little respect for borders. The examples are myriad, from the Italian states to which Greek speakers and Orthodox migrated to study, soldier, and trade to France after 1789, where they joined the army and commanded forces in the Caribbean, at Waterloo, in Algeria, and later still in the Franco-Prussian War. In the Ottoman Empire after Greek independence Greeks owned most of the merchant marine, and the Greek-speaking, Orthodox Phanariotes continued to manage major aspects of the state, its moneys, and its foreign relations. They manned the fleets and irregular forces that defended the Porte against foreign attack, rebellions, and revolutions, Greek ones included.[2]

Russia, too, was a powerful magnet and had been since the time of Ivan III. A generation of scholars trained by the estimable Theofanis Stavrou have been documenting these movements with an emphasis on the 18th and 19th centuries. Lucien Frary is one of those scholars, and his book goes far in tracing networks of Greeks in connection with Russia from the time of the Greek Revolution to the 1840s. Most of Russia's Mediterranean diplomatic missions were manned by Greeks. Greek merchants were based as often in Odessa and Azov as in Cephalonia, Syros, or Piraeus, and behind references to Russian shipping were often Greek captains (and their Albanian crews) from all around the eastern Mediterranean.[3] The Russian navy and the corsairs sponsored by Russia were stacked with Greek commanders. Lambros Katsonis was the most famous of the corsairs, and the military leader of the Greek Revolution in the 1820s, Theodoros Kolokotronis, had a spell as a pirate under the Russian flag before 1810. The regular army also attracted hundreds of Greek soldiers and officers like the Ypsilantis brothers, who later organized the Greek uprising of 1821—to the chagrin of Nicholas I.[4] Greek theologians populated Russian seminaries and went on regular missions to St. Petersburg. Presumably the Russian emperors valued their language skills and trusted their Orthodox religion, while for a time their oath to the tsar trumped fears of nationalist parochialism.

Olga Katsiardē-Hering, and Athena Kolia-Dermitzakē, eds., *Rōsia kai Mesogeios*: *Praktika 1. Diethnous Synedriou (Athēna, 19–22 Maiou 2005*) (Athens: Herodotus, 2011), vol. 2.

[2] Christine Philliou, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

[3] Amid parallel historiographies that portray Odessa as innately Greek or sublimely Jewish, the late Evrydiki Sifneos tells a story of loci, mobility, and cosmopolitanism (*Imperial Odessa: Peoples, Spaces, Identities* [Leiden: Brill, 2017]).

[4] Nicholas C. Pappas, *Greeks in Russian Military Service in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1991).

What to call these people was not at all obvious and the multiple labels invite query. In Russia the terminology still includes *greki* (the catchall), *pontiitsy* (from the Black Sea region), *ellintsy* (from the country, Greece), and in earlier centuries *grechane*, with further subcategories for certain spaces in today's Caucasus region and Ukraine. In the Ottoman Empire, they called themselves Romans (*Romioi*), as many Greeks do today, while Turkish-speakers called them *Rum*, all in reference to the Eastern Roman Empire and the Orthodox Church it spawned. It was the category under which the Ottomans organized the Orthodox *millet*, no matter what language they spoke. Greeks arriving in the Balkans but not Ottoman subjects were *Graikoi*, according to the Romans. Since Greek independence one may add *Yunan*, meaning a Greek from the country of Greece, though that term had its origins in "Ionia," the main part of modern Turkey.

One has every right to be confused, because the self-representations and ascriptions were in motion, and in 1821 the association of the person with a national territory was ahistorical; religion and station were more important. Consider the case of Ioannis Kapodistrias, the first governor of independent Greece, whose biography might still be written with an appreciation for the crooked lines of history rather than the straight ones, the ironies sooner than the certainties.[5] He was recruited from Corfu during the Russian occupation as the Conte Giovanni Capo d'Istria, served as the Russian foreign minister at the Congress of Vienna as Graf Ioann Kapodistriia, along the way wrote the Swiss constitution, and became the first head of the independent Greek government. That his command of both Greek and Russian was precarious mattered less to the Russians and the Greeks than his aristocracy, his Orthodoxy, and his fluency in Romance languages, including his native Italian. A very good study of the Ionian Islands by Konstantina Zanou, including the Russian phase, does problematize matters of nationality in an evolving imperial context, and fittingly her source base even for the Russian documents is largely in Italian.[6] All sorts of demographic categories should be in play rather than assumed for the historian of the region: Russian (in many cases Greek- and Albanian-speaking), Greek (in many cases Russian subjects), Italian (many of them Greek citizens), French (many of Greek origin), Albanian and Turkish (including Greek-speaking Muslims and Albanian- and

[5] The lines are very straight in C. M. Woodhouse, *Capodistria, the Founder of Greek Independence* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973); and Grigorii Arsh, *Ioann Kapodistriia v Rossii, 1809–1822* (Moscow: Aleteiia, 2003).

[6] Konstantina Zanou, *Transnational Patriotism in the Mediterranean, 1800–1830: Stammering the Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming in 2018).

Turkish-speaking Orthodox Christians), and Ottoman (all of the above, and more), to name the most obvious.

Greeks had been an object of fascination for Europeans for a good century before 1821, in part because they tried in vain to sort them out, often lamenting that they did not speak "Greek," by which they meant the language of Plato. Theophilus Prousis, another product of the Stavrou school, shows that the Greek Revolution (or, depending on one's tastes, rebellion, uprising, or war of independence) occupied an outsized space in the minds of educated Russians who used the press and their semisecret societies to support the cause.[7] Predictably these were Grecophiles of the columns-and-icons varieties: as European Philhellenes they dreamed of ancient civilizations (martial and monarchist Spartans or democratic and artistic Athenians—choose your Greek) and as Orthodox coreligionists they beckoned to a shared Byzantine heritage of ritual, hierarchy, and autocracy. The country that came into being was small and the population of Greek-speaking Christians dispersed, but there was at the time and intermittently ever since a sense of a special affinity. Greeks and Russians repeat this axiomatically in scholarly tomes and casual conversation,[8] and state visits end up on the Acropolis, Mt. Athos (technically not Greece but only reachable by traversing Greece, and only by mammals that are male), and, for the more fun-loving and shamelessly wealthy, Mykonos, Santorini, or a yacht in between. Left at that, it is all rather banal.

Many would offer, instinctively sooner than knowledgeably, that the bond was first and foremost religious, though in so doing we set aside a century of communist internationalism and the wave of refugees who populated cities like Tashkent after the Greek Civil War ended in 1949. And we paper over the even larger demographic of fellow-travelers, of whom Nikos Kazantzakis is the most famous.[9] Be that as it may, it is true that in the 1830s Russia and Greece were the only independent Orthodox states. Frary is the first to make the case that the bilateral relation was based on institutional religion. He does so on the basis of methodical research that blends the institutional religious with the geostrategic and diplomatic. Frary shows that alone of all the foreign powers intervening in Greece while claiming not to be intervening, Russia did so on a basis of religious identification and made institutional religion a cornerstone of its policies. That religion should have been the common

[7] Theophilus C. Prousis, *Russian Society and the Greek Revolution* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994).

[8] A compendium of articles typically on the boundary of performed friendship and scholarship is Charalampos Vlachoutsikos et al., eds., *Chilia Chronia Ellinismou-Rosias/Hellas-Russia: One Thousand Years of Bonds* (s.l.: Gnosi, 1994).

[9] Nikos Kazantzakis, *Russia: A Chronicle of Three Journeys in the Aftermath of the Revolution*, trans. Michael Antonakes and Thanasis Maskaleris (Berkeley, CA: Creative Arts, 1989).

denominator made sense in both countries, the one officially ruled by an Orthodox Caesar, the other ruled for a time by an absolute monarch who was protector of the faith. In both states Orthodox faith facilitated immigration and naturalization. Frary has conducted some hugely impressive research in Russian archives and libraries and research libraries in Athens, and he makes his argument incontrovertible: religion really did matter, perhaps more than anything else, to Russians at all levels of state service. Scholars of Orthodoxy who have been reminding us, rightly and against our will and disposition, of the importance of religion or confession in Russian history should be deeply satisfied to see religion permeating things as "real" as war, diplomacy, and geopolitics.[10]

The Greek state was established thanks to Russian arms at Navarino and in the Danubian principalities, and thanks to its diplomats who negotiated a series of agreements with France and Britain (1827–32) that moved gradually to a vision of full independence under a European prince. Thereafter the movement of Russian officialdom to and around the new kingdom was sustained. Frary takes his readers through the comings and goings of Russian clerics and missions, diplomats and emissaries, many of them Russian subjects of Greek origin hailing from one or another empire or kingdom. They were sent by the Foreign Ministry, the Holy Synod, and the emperor to impress upon the Greeks the correct reading of absolute monarchy, conservative foreign policy, and especially catechism and dogma. Greeks who shared the values of respect for authority, hierarchy, and property formed the Russian party in Athens, competing with the English and French parties representing one or another constitutionalism, rule of law, and individualism. Greece would be the foreign model of what was the new ideology in Russia itself.

This was the era of Official Nationality in Russia, and Frary argues that it was internationalized in all but name. Not many historians have made this clear connection between domestic and foreign policies, and it is a large point indeed.[11] Russian emissaries used the Greek press (which they subsidized), its embassy (which dispersed funds openly and otherwise), and church missions (more money and shockingly dear church paraphernalia) to pursue a series of policies: induce the new king to become Orthodox (he was Catholic), if not

[10] To name a few who impress me: Vera Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Eileen Kane, *Russian Hajj: Empire and the Pilgrimage to Mecca* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); Robert D. Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); and most broadly, Paul W. Werth, *The Tsar's Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[11] David MacLaren McDonald, *United Government and Foreign Policy in Russia, 1900–1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

necessarily Greek (he was Bavarian); avoid constitutions; maintain the unity of the church under the patriarch of Constantinople; maintain peace with the Ottoman Empire; and avoid territorial enlargement, which might further destabilize the post-1815 European order, unless approved by the Great Powers (1864 and 1881). By the standards of the day, it was a thoroughly conservative agenda. Greek independence itself cast doubt on the status quo, joining the simultaneous challenges posed by Belgium, some Italian states, Spain, Portugal, and Poland.[12] Whatever those events were, the insurgents were better off calling them something other than "revolution," and the Greeks succeeded by calling their movement "War of Independence" and "National Liberation" but not a liberal or social revolution. Somehow, in ways that are not entirely clear, the new state was asked to be Orthodox but not necessarily Greek, patriotic but not ethnocentric, and sovereign but not nationally so. It was a delicate balance reminiscent of the careful calibrations taking place in Russia itself as the autocrat promoted Official Nationality as an antinationalist program of inaction.

But could a special bond translate into a special relationship? That Russia failed on every major policy objective is the quieter fact of Frary's book. The new king never converted, and he granted a constitution following a coup that left Nicholas I livid and his ambassador to Athens unemployed. The Church split from the Patriarchate and became autocephalous. Conflict with the Ottoman Empire became regular, and Greece tripled its size in a series of wars that culminated in 1913 and made the country less hospitable to Slavs despite their Orthodoxy. For all Russia's efforts and resources, its open and covert interventions, and its obvious sense of identity with the fount of Orthodox belief, Greece would mark the first of many Russian disappointments in the region and arguably in Europe and Asia as well. Although Russia had done more than any other power to secure Greek independence, having rewarded the new state with protection, loans, and subsidies, and having shown more sympathy and empathy than the Western representatives, who did not bother to conceal their contempt for the Balkan upstarts, Greece drifted into the orbit of France and Britain, there to remain until the late 1940s when the United States took their place.

Many other states in Europe and Asia would follow the Greek example and drift away from the Russian sphere. In the Balkans alone, think Bulgaria, Montenegro, and Romania, not to mention an extremely ungrateful Austria after 1849. (If we were to extend our sights to the 20th and 21st centuries,

[12] Richard Stites, *The Four Horsemen: Riding to Liberty in Post-Napoleonic Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

think too of the movement of Yugoslavia, and more recently Serbia, away from Russia and toward NATO and the European Union.) By 1854, Russia had been so marginalized as to fight alone when attacked in Crimea by Britain, France, the Ottomans, and of course Sardinia. Any suggestion that Greece might support Russia was preempted by French and British warships that arrived on the Greek coast in 1853 and occupied Piraeus until 1857, with threats and promises of more loans. Two Russian successes in Greece—quashing the American and British Protestant missions and securing an Orthodox king after the deposal in 1862 of the Catholic Otto (the new one was Danish, but he converted)—made Greece self-reliant and distinct in religious institutional terms. Still Russian influence declined as Greece pursued nationalist irredentism and Franco-British alliances and patronage, and of course more loans.

Any topic should address a subject. Through his sustained investigation of religion in this bilateral relationship, Frary has brought us to some very large questions about Russia in the world. The first is the staying power of Russian might abroad. This was Russia in the era of revolutions, first the French and then the national ones, where Russia struggled mightily to use ideology (Official Nationality) and alliances based on ideology (the Holy Alliance) to impose stasis on movement. In the Balkans, it used Orthodoxy per se, hoping perhaps to capitalize on and cultivate a strictly hierarchical and conservative version of the creed. Frary points out that religion, while the animating ethos in Russia's Balkan policy, rested uneasily with two others, Slavic community and ethnic nationalism, until they split into incompatible approaches. The Greeks were not Slavs, and the Russians were not nationalists.

The second is that any Russian impulse—pan-Slavism, religion, or a Mediterranean presence—was animated by a larger way of looking at the world. No matter what the specific objective, Russia's was a Platonic ethos (what does not change is good) in a world of Heraclitus (all is in flux). Russian policy makers put a premium on stability, but whether it was a framework wide or flexible enough to accommodate circumstance and change is doubtful. This is part of the story of Russia and Europe between Waterloo and Sevastopol′, but the same paradox would characterize Russian policy past 1856: active intervention to secure changelessness, furious activity to call the outcome the status quo, and remarkable military success followed by diplomatic disaster. Consider the aftermath of the Ottoman War of the 1870s, and one sees a similar failure to capitalize on a military victory, coupled with a steady loss of clients or allies who owed their existence or independent status to Russia. Clearly sympathy and freestanding ideology were not enough. Orthodoxy then is interesting in

this connection: it was promoted as a pillar of stability and permanence, not by engaging the massive social, national, and geopolitical changes underfoot, but by insisting that religion could be insulated from the others.

In particular, Russian ideology did not tally with the facts of nationalism and capitalism. And whereas we know quite a lot about Russian unease with nationalism at home and abroad, we know much less about Russia and global capitalism, save the great French bond operations of the 1890s and the channeling of loans to China. This is a third observation worth exploring, the relative weakness of commercial policy, international finance, and capitalism in the formation and practice of Russian foreign policy. No doubt Britain and France stood for ideas, too, be they "liberty" or national self-determination. Translated into trade and commerce, the ideas were tethered to investment, profit, commercial advantage, and (in the case of a small country like Greece) a deeper penetration and the profound domination of finance capital. It was akin to a colonial relationship, but without the responsibility for the colonial subject; that was for the Greeks to worry about and that was the beauty of sovereignty. The truth is that when Russians protested that they were not interested in crass economic power, in that kind of mercantile advantage, and in that kind of financial domination, they really meant it but were out of step with the times and oblivious to that new kind of empire. Instead Russia expected obedience without understanding how to command it, and an alignment of dogmas without an alignment of economic interests. Russian Foreign Minister Karl Nesselrode wagered superior Russian morality against British and French commercial power in the Mediterranean (231). He was sincere, but it was a losing proposition.

True, Frary selected religion as his topic and therefore selected religious materials, and he recognizes that Russia was also interested in commercial treaties. Other historians may pursue studies that encompass Russian commercial policies, not only in Greece but anywhere. But one suspects that if one were to peer more deeply into this dimension of Russian policy, there would not be a lot to find. Missing or at least obscured in Russian policy, and ever-present in the French and British cases, were the armies of merchants and entrepreneurs large and small in the provincial towns, ports, and the capital; the petty and large investors, engineers, and architects; the railway builders and canal diggers; the commercial attachés at the service of the entrepreneurs; and the bankers and financial capitalists who propped up and subordinated the Greek state and called in the gunboats when the debts were not repaid, as occurred in the 1850s and in the 1890s. In 1898, the state budget was harnessed to servicing the foreign debt.

If all this is sounding eerily familiar, it should. Greece was born into unserviceable debt, and the discussions surrounding the Greek state's default in 1842–44, replete with demands for austerity (209–13), could be transposed to Brussels today with only a few changes. Around 2010, the Greek state budget was again being transformed into a fantasy of frugality and accountability that would make the Greeks better off by immiserating them. A new socialist government came to power in Athens in 2015, and there was public and official speculation that Russia might rescue Greece from its creditors and overseers on the basis of a special bond (pun intended). Many in the cabinet were former Communists with fond memories of their sojourns in the USSR. As Greek ministers visited Moscow and St. Petersburg (or Leningrad, as one insisted), all agreed on the "ancestral relations" of the two peoples and their shared origins in Byzantine culture, because it was the obvious thing to say and odd not to say it. Culturally retrenching Russians were glad to hear it, and desperate Greeks were happy to utter it, but it came to naught. It is not only that the Greeks in government were largely atheists and the Russians vehemently antisocialist and anticommunist believers in private wealth and the usefulness of the Church. It is that Russia could not afford Greece, for all the temptation of sticking it to the EU and to NATO. Greece was beautiful, the ruins were very cultural, Orthodoxy was deep, and the West was predatory, but Russian officials had their eyes on the collapsing prices of oil and natural gas. Russia could sort of maintain South Ossetia and the Donetsk People's Republic, more by means military than economic, but Greece—still at the time with a higher per capita GDP than Russia's, and even today just below—was too expensive as Russia plunged into its own economic crisis punctuated by its own austerity. Why should Russia do for Greece what Russia would not do for its own citizens?

Russia's sheer economic weakness at one or another moment is only part of the story. The more persistent issue is how one understands power and deploys it internationally. We see an understanding of power that is too narrow to be durable and at the same time too vague to be useful: military force, bags of cash for clients, and recently the capacity to turn off the oil and gas lines, all entwined with some sense of historical affinity that is as vague in Syria as it is in Greece. Such influence is momentary because the penetrating power of capitalism seeps in to fill what is, in the end, a void. It shows little grasp of power as a field that draws in and implicates, a place that clients are forced to inhabit as it narrows their sense of the possible, lets them make free and rational choices among the very few that are left, and calls it sovereignty. There are myriad ways to understand a book, and my reading of Frary's abundantly

researched study is as follows: Russia's Greek involvements at the dawn of the modern world were a first in a long series of misunderstandings of how the modern world works.

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