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OF MILTIADES AND
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RUSSIAN WARRIORS IN THE LAND OF MILTIADES AND THEMISTOCLES: THE COLONIAL AMBITIONS OF CATHERINE THE GREAT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN²

The Mediterranean policy of Catherine the Great gave rise to a discussion about how extreme her colonial ambitions in the Mediterranean were. This article argues against the theories that ‘the Greek idea’ was only a political game for Russia, that Russian activity on the Aegean islands was only military, and that the success of the Archipelago expedition (1769-1775) was primarily due to foreign support. It shows that Catherine II’s colonial ambitions were in fact rather limited compared to other powers of the period. Russia could not imagine having a colony in the eastern Mediterranean, but planned only a small military base surrounded by liberated self-governed Greek territories under the Catherine II’s protection. When the liberated Greek islands became an obstacle to enlarging Russian territory on the Black sea coast, however, they were exchanged, primarily for Crimea.

JEL Classification: Z

Keywords: Catherine the Great, Southern Mediterranean, Greek liberation, philhellenism, Archipelago principality of Catherine II, Russo-Turkish wars, foreign policy of Russia

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1. Introduction

The Archipelago Expedition in conjunction with the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-74 began Russia's military and political presence in the eastern Mediterranean. The military success of the expedition is well known. The victory of Chesme (June 24-25, 1770) helped to realise Catherine II's dreams led to a blockade of Istanbul-Constantinople, helped Russia to become master of maritime transportation in the Levant, led to the declaration of twenty islands in the Aegean sea as a 'Russian archipelago principality', helped in the capture of Beirut, and developed contacts with Arab rulers and princes. A number of errors and defeats also took place. There was a defeat in Peloponnese in May-June 1770, and the lack of military forces sent from Russia with the Russian fleet doomed the land operations that followed. In 1774 after the Peace Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainardji, the Russian fleet had to leave the Eastern Mediterranean and Archipelago islands. This stranded the island inhabitants, who for five years had considered themselves subjects of the Russian empress. The Russians also abandoned a partially-built military base on Paros, and their allies in Syria and Palestine. As a result, it is difficult to agree with Catherine II that "sending off her fleet to the Archipelago, its glorious stay, and its happy return to Russian ports might be considered the most successful event of [Catherine II's] rule"³

The Russian fleet went to the eastern Mediterranean to gain a strategic position to the rear of the Turkish forces. Even so, after the victory in the Russo-Turkish war, Russia could strengthen its positions only in the northern Black Sea, in the Levant it managed to maintain nothing more than several consulates; they could not establish a Mediterranean military base. Was then this war a manifestation of increasing Russian colonial ambitions, or just an attempt to secure interests on the Russo-Ottoman border? And what about all other intentions—to free Constantinople and to liberate Greeks—were they only 'castles in the air', no more than a theme in the Empress' correspondence with Voltaire and a game played for European public opinion?

The discussion on the goals and consequences of this expedition continues to this day⁴. Recently discovered archival materials primarily from the Russian State Archive of the Military Fleet (RGA VMF)⁵ shed new light on some important political and cultural aspects of the First Russian Archipelago expedition and the Russian political activities on the Aegean islands.

³ Materialy dlia istorii russkogo flota. Sankt-Petersburg, 1888. T. XII. P. 299.

⁴ See, for example, recent publications in Russian: *Smilyanskaya I.M., Velizev M.B., Smilyanskaya E.B.* Rossiya v Sredizemnomor'e. Arkhipelagskaya ekspeditsiya Ekateriny Velikoy. Moskva, 2011; *Grebenshchikova G. A.* Baltiyskii flot v period pravleniia Ekateriny II. Sankt-Petersburg, 2007. On different positions in the Western historiography see: *Anderson Matthew Smith.* Great Britain and Russo-Turkish War of 1768-74 // English historical Review. 1954. Vol. XIX (№270). P. 39-58; *Anderson Roger Charles.* Naval Wars in the Levant. 1559 – 1853. Mansfield Centre, Conn. : Martino Pub. 2005; *Freller Thomas.* In Search of a Mediterranean Base: The Order of St. John and Russia's Great Power Plans during the Rule of Tsar Peter the Great and Tsarina Catherine II // Journal of Early Modern History. 2004. Vol. 8. P. 3-30; *Pappas Nicholas Charles.* Greeks in Russian military service in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Thessaloniki : Institute for Balkan Studies 1991; *Thomson Gladys Scott.* Catherine the Great and the Expansion of Russia. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985, etc.

⁵ This refers to documents collected primarily in G.A.Spridov's (RGA VMF. F.190), A.V.Elmanov's (GRA VMF. F.188) and some other collections.

2. The Greek idea in the Catherine II's policy

The idea of the Archipelago expedition was planned by Grigoriy Orlov and Catherine II before the beginning of the 1768 Russo-Turkish war, and therefore it was not as spontaneous as Kluchevskii thought⁶. Different sources show that Catherine II began to design her Mediterranean policy and to discuss the idea with the Orlovs even in the early 1760s, the beginning of her reign. She used diplomatic means, sent fleet officers for training in Malta and in Britain, paid special attention to the navigation in the Southern Seas, to shipbuilding, to cartography of the region, etc⁷. The secret missions of Russian emissaries to the Balkans and to Peloponnesus, including two by Papzoli (with Palatino and Saro) organized by Grigorii Orlov, brought information that in Morea Greek 'captains' (leaders of Mani clans) and landowners were ready to take up arms if Russians came with ships and weapons. Greek envoys were also sent from Peloponnesus to the Russian capital or to the Russian mission in Constantinople with different projects for their liberation⁸. As a result, in St.Petersburg there was the hope that the Peloponnesian Greeks were ready and able to participate in a common anti-Turkish war.

In the 1770s Russian diplomatic agents through the European press, and the Empress herself through her correspondence (especially with Voltaire), tried to present the First Archipelago expedition primarily as an attempt to liberate suppressed co-religionists, who 'believed in ancient prophecies that they would be liberated by fair-haired race from the North, that the Marble Emperor who slept below the Golden Gate of Constantinople would rise and restore the Byzantine Empire'⁹.

Since the first centuries of the Rus, the Greek idea seemed to mean much more for Russia than for its European neighbors, with a common faith influencing the political course of Russian rulers. Enlightened Russians (including the empress) celebrated Greece's role in the development of European civilization, but Orthodox Russians also developed an appreciation for the region as a holy land, imbued with over a millennium of Christian history. For them, Greece's "pagan" past was sometimes overshadowed by its connections with sacred Orthodox places, saints, and monasteries. Mount Athos and Patmos were still important stops in the pilgrimage to Jerusalem from Russia. For example, when the Russo-Turkish war started in 1768,

⁶ Vassiliy Kluchevskiy saw in this expedition a 'poorly prepared adventure', whose success was possible only due to the impetuous courage of the Orlov brothers and their combatants – *Kluchevskii V.O. Kurs Russkoy istorii. Part 5 // Sochineniya v 9 tt. Moscow, 1989. T. V. P. 43, 44.*

⁷ See: *Freller Thomas. In Search of a Mediterranean Base; Anderson Matthew Smith. Great Britain and Russo-Turkish War of 1768-74; Smilyanskaya I.M., Velizev M.B., Smilyanskaya E.B. Rossiya v Sredizemnomor'e. P.29-38.*

⁸ For example, on Jan. 6, 1769 Greek captains from Mani applied to Catherine the Great for help assuring the empress that more than 140 000 warriors in Peloponnesus were ready to fight for their freedom, if they 'get Your [Russian empress'] forceful hand for their strengthening'; representatives of the aristocratic family Paleolog visited Obrezkov, the Russian ambassador in the Parte, several times in the 1760s with similar appeals to send the Russian fleet and to bring arms for Greek warriors. – See also: *Smilyanskaya I.M., Velizev M.B., Smilyanskaya E.B. Rossiya v Sredizemnomor'e. P. 116, 118.*

⁹ *Mansel Ph. Levant: Splendour and Catastrophe on the Mediterranean. Hachette UK, 2010 г. (e-book) Ch. 2. Note 129.*

more than 40 ‘Russian monks’ lived on Mount Athos¹⁰, and dozens of pilgrims from the Russian empire appeared to be in great danger in other Ottoman territories¹¹.

The enlightened enthusiasm for the classical world shared by the Russian Empress also influenced political estimations about possible support from co-religionists. The sponsors and the members of the expedition imagined the Greeks, whom they were going to liberate, almost as direct descendents of antique heroes. As such, the Russian military expedition can be also interpreted as a cultural mission to the cradle of an antique civilization that had been trampled by barbarians¹². This helped to sway the public opinion of enlightened Europeans; from the late seventeenth century the eastern Mediterranean represented to Western intellectuals both the birth of civilisation and its modern decline.

The difference between the Western and Russian points of view, however, was in the origin of the decline of the classical culture in Greece. Western travellers and writers blamed the degradation of culture not only the Turks, but also on Byzantine Orthodoxy and the Great Schism of 1054. That is why in their search for ancient ideals, westerners often desired to find an almost mythical, imagined Greece (as did Leroy, Barthelemy and many others¹³) glossing over or looking past the ancient Christian monuments and links to contemporary life. Even when reality intruded—through the need for organised trade or political relations—literary stereotypes still influenced everyone from adventurers to military engineers. All of these men described the region as “the Land of the Iliad” or the “Land of Odysseus”. Catherine II herself called the inhabitants of Morea/Peloponnesus “Spartans,” albeit ones holding an Orthodox cross in their hands. Preliminary information received from the Balkan region assured Catherine II, and especially the Orlovs, that the Greeks were ready to take arms against the Turks and that, if the Russian fleet came to the eastern Mediterranean, the Greeks would become combatants in the war against the Ottoman Empire.

But from the first action in Morea in the spring of 1770, the image of Christian Spartans was disabused. After failures in Morea, many illusions about Orthodox unity dissipated; the Russians started to criticise the Greeks for their inability to fight in a regular army against their enemies, even that Maniot ‘traitors’ and ‘robbers’ prevented Morea from the ‘use of Greek liberty’¹⁴. For their part, the Greeks accused the Russians of not giving enough support and

¹⁰ RGA VMF. F 190. Op. 1. D. 22. P. 72–72 a.

¹¹ For example, Grigorii, a monk from the Kiev Maksakovskii monastery, was on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem when the war started. The only way for him to return to Russia was to become a priest on one of the Russian military ships – RGA VMF. F 190. Op. 1. D. 43. P. 321 a.

¹² *Smilyanskaya E., Smilyanskaya I.* The Russian Presence in the Eastern Mediterranean: Religious and Political Discourses in the Period of Catherine the Great // *Chrześcijańskie dziedzictwo duchowe narodów słowiańskich. Seria II: Wokół kultur sroziemnomorskich. T. 2. Historia, Język, . Kultura.* Białystok, 2010. P. 369-385.

¹³ *Eisner R.* Travelers to an Antique Land: The History and Literature of Travel to Greece. Ann Arbor, 1991; *Roessel D.* In Byron’s Shadow. Modern Greece in the English and American Imagination. N.-Y., 2002. P. 13–41; *Augustinos O.* French Odysseys: Greece in French travel literature from the Renaissance to the Romantic Era. Baltimore; London, 1994.

¹⁴ RGA VMF. F. 188. Op.1. D. 16. P. 74.

provoking an inevitable disaster in Peloponnesus¹⁵. In fact, disagreements about the role of the Russians in the tragedy of Morea still influences Russian and Western—mostly Greek—interpretations of the First Archipelago expedition. However it is necessary to conclude that the tragedy was caused by both sides: the Greeks and the Russians overestimated each other's abilities. The Russian empress hoped to maintain Greek hopes and European public opinion. The war showed that exaggerated anticipations gave rise to exaggerated disillusionment on both sides. In support of a Russian interpretation, it could be argued that in sending her fleet Catherine II never claimed that she sent it only for the liberation of the Greeks, but to give both Russians and Greeks help for “each side” to gain “what is worthy” for itself¹⁶. Although later the majority of Catherinian eulogy-writers preferred to emphasise her military actions in the Levant only as a ‘charitable help’ for the Greeks¹⁷.

Catherine II's image of Christian Spartans was surely theatrical, but on the whole the Greek idea for Russia in the eighteenth century was discussed seriously and meant much more than a play in the political theatre. The ‘Greek Project’ of Catherine II, Potemkin and chamberlain Bezborodko on one side, and Josef II and Kaunitz-Reitberg in Vienna on the other, on the division of the Ottoman European possessions is considered to be one of the greatest geopolitical projects of the eighteenth century¹⁸. The Greeks appeared to be the main hope of the Russian Empire for gaining an influence in southern Europe, and were the main targets of the Mediterranean direction in Catherine II's foreign policy.

3. ‘Archipelago principality’ of Catherine II

Another issue of the Russian presence in the eastern Mediterranean in 1770s was the colonial ambitions of Catherine II and the conquest of Greek islands.

After they had to leave Peloponnesus, the Russians had nothing else to do but to seek a general battle with the Turkish fleet to prove that the appearance of two Russian squadrons in the Levant was not in vain. Without the overestimated Greek strength, the Russian forces in the Mediterranean were weak and poorly equipped, which is why the resulting victory of Chesme

¹⁵ Γριτσόπουλος Τ.Α. Τα Ορλωφικά. Η εν Πελοποννήσω επανάστασις του 1770 και τα επακόλουθα αυτής. Αθήναι 1967; *Camariano-Cioran A.* La Guerre Russo-Turque de 1768-1774 et les Grecs // *Revue des etudes sud-est europeennes*. Bukarest, 1965. T. III. № 3–4. P. 518, 519; *Κουγέας Σ.* Συμβολαί εις την ιστορίαν της υπό τους Ορλώφ Πελοποννησιακής Επανάστασεως (1770) // *Πελοποννησιακα*. 1956. № 1. Σελ. 50–107; on historical discussions about it see: *Ροτζώκος Ν.* Εθναφύπνιση και εθνογένεση : Ορλωφικά και ελληνική ιστοριογραφία. Αθήνα, 2007.

¹⁶ *Solovyev S.M.* Istoriya Rossi s drevneyshih vremen. Sochineniya. Moscow, 1994. Kniga 14. P. 293.

¹⁷ More about it: *Smilyanskaya I.M., Velizev M.B., Smilyanskaya E.B.* Rossiya v Sredizemnomor'e. P. 413-478.

¹⁸ See more about it: *Petrova M.A.* Ekaterina II and Iosif II. Formirovanie rossiysko-avstriyskogo soyuza 1780-1790. Moscow, 2011; *Ragsdale H.* Evaluating the Traditions of Russian Agression: Catherine II and the Greek Project // *The Slavonic and East European Review*. 1988. Vol. 66. P. 91-117; *Ragsdale H.* Russian projects of conquest in the eighteenth century // *Imperial Russian foreign policy / Ed. and trans. Hugh Ragsdale, V.N.Ponomarev.* Cambridge, 1993. P. 75-102.

(June 24-25, 1770) was miraculous (and so it was described in Russian poetry¹⁹). By July 1770, the Russian fleet was the master of the eastern Mediterranean, blockading the Dardanelles and Istanbul and inspecting all the ships plying the region's waters.

In no way was Russia prepared for its new geo-political position, and the political and economic consequences of its Mediterranean presence were still not completely clear. Worse, the Russian empress had no real strategy for state building in the Aegean, possibly relying on the Greeks and their future choices. Count Panin, head of the Foreign office, proposed to build 'something like Dutch sates' in Greece, but Catherine II never seriously considered it. On September 16, 1770 when the State Council in St. Petersburg discussed the possible conditions of a peace treaty with the Porte there for the first time appeared a demand concerning 'one Archipelago island' *if* [sic] the Russian fleet manages to 'conquer one'²⁰. In January 1771, writing a letter to the King of Prussia, Catherine II still considered having, from a 'victorious war that costs a lot', in the Archipelago 'not a big island like Rhodes, or Cyprus, or Crete, but a small isle with a port to leave her garrison there'²¹.

In the Archipelago, however, nobody had any information about Catherine II's intentions. Without a ruling order from the capital, the Russian command (primarily Alexey Orlov and Grigoriy Spiridov in Orlov's absence) decided to create the Russian Fleet's main Mediterranean military base on the Isle of Paros in the Naussa bay, and to tear away as many Archipelago islands as possible. And so the Greek islands were invited to make a choice—either to accept the new order and to recognize the Russian empress as their supreme ruler, paying modest taxes and waiting for later liberation or to be treated as 'conquered territories' and to pay reparations without limitation. It came as no surprise that in 1771 islands with a Greek majority and without Turkish fortresses or garrisons accepted an invitation to become 'Russian'. In January 1771, about fourteen islands in the southern Aegean sea accepted admiral Spiridov's proposal to swear an oath to the Russian Empress. Their inhabitants really did begin to call themselves 'subjects of Catherine II'. The elders and the clergy of these islands asked the Empress 'to accept into eternal protection and patronage the unhappy Archipelago', and Spiridov proclaimed these group of small Cycladic islands to be an 'Archipelagic Great principality' and informed the Empress²². Later in 1771 through 1774, about twenty more islands followed the example of the first fourteen, and a group of around 31-34 islands in Aegean sea created a wide net of 'Russian

¹⁹ See, for example: *Proskurina Vera*. Creating the Empress: Politics and Poetry in the Age of Catherine II. Indiana Academic Studies Press, 2011.

²⁰ Arhiv Gosudarstvennogo Soveta. St.Petersburg, 1869. T.1. P. 60.

²¹ Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts (RGADA). F. 10. Op. 1. D. 79. L. 5 a – 6 (Empress Catherine II notes on possible peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire. January, 4, 1771).

²² In English see: *Smilyanskaya E. B.* 'Protection' or 'Possession': How Russians Created a Greek Principality in 1770-1775 // Power and Influence in South-Eastern Europe. 16th - 19th century / ed. by Maria Baramova, Plamen Mitev, Ivan Parvev and Vania Racheva. Berlin-Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2013. C. 209-217.

possessions' between the Balkan Peninsula and the Asia Minor. These islands included Paros, Antiparos, Naxos, Myconos, Tinos, Andros, Milos, Kimolos, Ios, Kea, Kythnos, Syros, Sifnos, Serifos, Anafi, Folegandros, Thera (Santorini), Small Cyclades, Termia, Amorgos, Anafi, Samos, Skopelo, Alonissos (Northern Sporades) in addition to Pathmos and Hydra, and a fortress of Castelorizo.

Spiridov was ready to protect the islands from the Turks and pirates, promising in response not to overload the inhabitants with high taxes.²³ The Russian admiral thus gave hope to inhabitants of the islands, writing that they would gain their freedom and possible independence if the Russian military found in the inhabitants a proper diligence and submission during a period of Russian command.²⁴

Having little time between military actions, the Russian commandant used the Turkish system of self-government and taxation for the islands. The Russian addition to the scheme came from the so-called 'proper relationship' between civil institutions and the Church, the 'regular order' of life, and the rights and duties of the insular administration. In winter-spring of 1771 Admiral Spiridov demanded three deputies to be elected from each island, sending them to Paros to swear an oath to 'serve'. Their 'service' consisted of:

- 1) collecting one tenth of produce as taxes,
- 2) ruling their islands,
- 3) judging and punishing (except capital punishment, which had to be approved by the Russian military administration in Archipelago)²⁵.

The deputies from fourteen islands swore an oath to become 'subjects of the Russian Empress' and 'to fulfill her injunctions' and 'to lose the barbarian yoke forever'. These deputies, however, responded that by paying taxes they needed assurance that they would be protected by the Russian fleet from 'all enemies', and they asked the Russians to confirm social structure of each island ('to separate superiors from lowers') and not to demand more taxes 'than the isle is able to pay'. For their part, the inhabitants of islands were to show 'respect and to be obedient' to their deputies, were forbidden to move from one island to another without passports from the deputies, and had to show the deputies all correspondence²⁶.

On Paros, deputies from the Russian islands elected a general deputy, Anton Psaro from the isle of Mikonos, who was already a Russian lieutenant. A special

²³ Russian military commandment has gathered necessary data about forms of taxation of each island by Turks, and all the taxes in future were reduced (RGA VMF. F. 190. Op. 1. D. 16. P. 38-59, 98, 205; D. 2. P. 27-60). Camariano-Cioran is not right in talking about extremely high Russian taxes, her argumentation is based on incorrect data from the isle of Lesbos, that has never been a part of the 'Archipelago principality' and paid unlimited reparations (*Camariano-Cioran A. La guerre russo-turque de 1768-1774 et les grecs // Revue des etudes sud-est europeennes*. Bukarest 1965. № 3-4. P. 541).

²⁴ RGA VMF. F. 190. Op. 1. D. 16. P. 76-76 a.

²⁵ RGA VMF. F. 190. Op. 1. D. 16. L. 53 a. An appeal of Admiral Spiridov (not signed) to primates and inhabitants of the Isle of Paros to show "respect and to be obedient".

²⁶ RGA VMF. F. 190. Op. 1. D. 16. L. 53.

Archipelago chancellery was opened on Paros. In March 1771, this ‘deputy of the subjects of the Archipelago islands’ was sent out on a military ship with a reliable guard ‘to prove to the Greeks that as they became Our Great Empress’ subjects, we protect them and defend them from enemies’²⁷. Letters sent by Psaro to the islanders (some of them are still preserved in archives of the islands²⁸) show that his duties were wide-ranging: he collected taxes; controlled the businesses making dried bread for the Russian fleet; set up regular elections of syndics, etc. By June, 1771 he had already placed his brother Peter Psaro in the chancellery for help.²⁹

One part of the Greek clergy, the bishops of Athens, Peloponnesus, and ‘the Russian’ islands chose to accept not only the Russian military administration but also the Russian Synod which was a sign of their complete separation from the Ottoman Empire.

Everything seemed to be organized for a long-term administration of the islands. On the isle of Naxos, Alexey Orlov (possibly following Catherine II’s advice) demonstrated the enlightened perspectives of the Russian presence and opened the first civil school at a time when Greeks only had parish schools and few theological academies. Orphans and children from families of various economic backgrounds were sent to Naxos, with all their expenses paid by Orlov. “The Greeks boys who were in the Naxos school, including the children of primates, as well as orphans and children of poor islanders, were supplied by me with clothing, food, and education, in accordance with the magnanimity and generosity of our All-Merciful sovereign...who, like a Mother, tends to the upbringing of these poor families...”³⁰. The children were educated by the “teachers assigned to them... in the basics of Christian law and grammar,” as well as the Russian language (“so that they would be taught Russian grammar, and became able to read and write”). Spiridov also thought it necessary to teach the boys “navigation”, as “46 young Greeks from Naxos” were temporarily sent out “as cabin boys to various ships.”³¹ The Greek Giovanni Azzali, a native of Patra was the director and the bursar of the school³².

The school children lived in isolation from their families and were probably supposed to constitute “a new breed of people” for a new Greek state, who would also be grateful and loyal to the Russian Empire. The purpose of the school was articulated as follows: “the intention of his grace [Orlov] is only that the generation of these poor children extol the compassion and

²⁷ RGA VMF. F. 190. Op. 1. D. 44. L. 37 a. About Psaro’s activity also and contacts with syndics of islands see: *Κοντογιάννης Π.Ν.* Οι Έλληνες κατά τον πρώτον επί Αικατερίνης Β’ Ρωσοτουρκικόν πόλεμον 1768-1774. Αθήνα, 1903. Σελ. 235.

²⁸ *Στέφανος Κ.* Ανέκδοτα έγγραφα αποσταλέντα προς τους κατοίκους των Κυκλάδων κατα την υπο των Ρώσων κατοχήν. Αθήνησιν, 1878. Σελ. 36-38.

²⁹ RGA VMF. F. 190. Op. 1. D. 5. L. 427. Peter Psaro knew Russian and was a translator in the chancellery. In 1775 he migrated to Russia (RGADA. F. 10. Op. 1. D. 645. L. 61-61 a, 65, 66).

³⁰ RGA VMF. F. 188. Op. 1. D. 92 . L. 158-159.

³¹ RGA VMF. F. 188. Op. 1. D. 92 . L. 158-159. See also: *Grebenshchikova G. A.* Baltiyskii flot v period pravleniia Ekateriny II. P. 411-413.

³² RGA VMF. F. 190. Op. 1. D. 119 . Later in 1784 he became a Russian consul in Cyprus (see: *Ulianitskii V.A.* Russkiye konsul’stva za granitsey v XVIII veke. Moscow, 1899).

generosity of our All-merciful Sovereign—the nurturer of orphans and protector of peoples that share our faith, who took part in this war and grew wretched because they lost their homes and their fatherland.”³³ Staring in July 1773, Orlov, wanting to give his school experiment a bigger resonance, transferred the students to Pisa, where he acquired a house specifically for his school. There, he took on Ekaterina Marin (the widow of Greek volunteer George Marin) as a warden of the school; her children were educated there as well, at the expense of the Russian treasury. Orlov wrote to Spiridov: “I ask you not to abandon the Greek children, who are recruited already and will be recruited in the future, and who, in groups of about 15, should be sent to me here [in Pisa] by ships when the opportunity arises. I am establishing a school for them here, and acquired a big house in Pisa for this purpose; I do not know what the court will order to do with them in the future, but I think that there is a house prepared for them there as well, where they will be admitted for various kinds of learning.”³⁴

The school was filled not only with Aegean children but with students from the Ionic islands, possibly refugees from the Peloponnese. On the island of Zante (Zakynthos) there were possibly over 300 boys and girls ready to be enrolled. In a letter sent July 2, 1773 to Count Mocenigo, who represented Russian interests in the Adriatic, Spiridov wrote that boys between fourteen and twenty years of age should be sent with passing ships to Naxos at the expense of the Russian treasury, but that both boys and girls could also be sent directly to Livorno, so that, after quarantine, they could enroll in the school founded by Count Orlov³⁵. In the following years, 1774-1775, Orlov continued to look after the school, instructing Elmanov to send, “with provisions,” “all boys to Italy for education and upbringing in the school established for them in Pisa” (with the proviso that this should only be done with their parents’ permission, “without any coercion.”)³⁶. When the fleet left the Mediterranean, the Greek students were taken from Pisa to Russia³⁷. In January 1775, a special school for the Greeks boys from the Archipelago was established in St. Petersburg, which was transformed in 1792 into the “Corps of Foreign Coreligionists.”³⁸

The first modern reliable descriptions of the Greek Archipelago appeared in 1770s-1780s as the ‘Archipelago principality’, written by the Russian naval officer Kokovtsov and a Dutch volunteer Pasch van Krienen, both of whom had actually visited the places they described³⁹. Their publication in Italian and Russian signified that the Russians intended to develop newly

³³ RGADA. F.21. D. 67. L.1.

³⁴ RGA VMF. F. 190. Op. 1. D. 119. L. 29 a. (A letter of Alexey Orlov to Grigorii Spiridov, 1773).

³⁵ RGADA. F.21. D.67. L.1-1a. A letter of Grigorii Spiridov to count Mocenigo; 2.07.1773.

³⁶ RGA VMF. F. 188. Op. 1. D. 92. L. 158-159, 167-173 об.

³⁷ RGA VMF. F. 172. Op. 1. D. 135. L. 148; Gazette d’Amsterdam. 1773. № 93.

³⁸ This “Corps of Foreign Coreligionists” was closed only after Catherine the Great’s death in 1796 г. Until 1796 all pupils had their special uniform and a program of the education.

³⁹ *Pasch van Krienen Heinrich Leonhard*, conte. Breve descrizione dell’Arcipelago e particolarmente delle diciotto isole sottemesse l’anno 1771 al dominio Russo, Livorno, 1773.

acquired territories for the long term. Otherwise, it would have served no purpose to gather information about mineral resources or discuss perspectives of the economic development of islands.

Russian documents note that, in 1771-1774 the Archipelago islands ‘were flourishing under Catherine the Great’s subjecthood’⁴⁰, and many archival documents show that taxes on these islands were reduced in comparison with the Ottoman period⁴¹. Indeed, Admiral Spiridov promised not to overload inhabitants of ‘our’ islands with taxes and particularly pointed out that ‘neither me, Grigory Spiridov, nor any of my officers wish anything for ourselves and will not take anything’. Several times Spiridov asked islanders not to bother themselves with ‘gifts’⁴². In overcoming Alexey Olov’s considerable skepticism concerning the future of the Archipelago possessions, admiral Spiridov sought to create a new state and, in contrast to the majority of the conquerors of his time, expressed no intention to gain all possible profit from these very modest lands.

From April to August 1772, a new stage in the state building of the Archipelago principality began. This period was connected with Admiral Spiridov’s relative and aid-de-camp Nesterov, who had to fulfill Psaro’s duties while he was on a military expedition to Syria and Lebanon. In the spring and summer of 1772, trying to develop Spiridov’s ideas, Nesterov wrote the Determinations to regulate the activities of the central and island chancelleries, the commissions of its deputies, the system of taxes and takings, the legal procedures in civil affairs, etc. On June 24, 1772, Nesterov even started a census on the islands of the Archipelago state⁴³.

Nesterov’s documents⁴⁴ prove, that this state consisted of units (each island was a unit); every year each unit had to elect its head, ‘main members of the whole island’ or ‘island deputies’. (As there are no precise comments of norms and rules of elections it is highly possible that these elections were organized according old traditions of each island.) Deputies—under Russian rule just as it had been previously—conjoined the functions of ruling and judging, and they gathered to settle ‘state and public affairs’ in a chancellery of an each island.

In their legal practice deputies were ordered to follow mainly their own laws and only in uncertain cases to ask the central chancellery. It was clear that in legal practices the Russian commandment did not intend to change anything, but to arrange the civil administration ‘properly’⁴⁵. Deputies could also gather a home guard to make arrests or to protect the island

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ *Smilyanskaya I.M., Velizev M.B., Smilyanskaya E.B.* Rossiya v Sredizemnomor’e. P. 174-175.

⁴² RGA VMF. F. 190. Op.1. D. 16. L. 73-77. The first Declaration to the primates of 14 islands to be signed by Admiral Spiridov on Jan.12, 1771 on the ship “Europa” in Auza.

⁴³ Στέφανος Κ. Ανέκδοτα έγγραφα αποσταλέντα προς τους κατοίκους των Κυκλάδων κατα την υπο των Ρώσων κατοχήν. Σελ. 33.

⁴⁴ RGA VMF. F. 190. Op. 1. D. 121. L. 99-100 a, 67-68, 94-97.

⁴⁵ RGA VMF. F. 190. Op. 1. D. 121. L. 94-97.

against pirates. They were obliged to create quarantine establishments on every island, and to allow all islanders to move from one island to another only with passports issued by chancelleries. Importantly, deputies were not competent authorities in all the cases connected with the Orthodox clergy. Nesterov completed one of his ‘determinations’ with the words ‘for every one and for all together I order—love each other, get rid of hostility, behave according to the duties of our Greek Orthodox Christian faith [...] and you will gain the mercy of our great commanders and my true love and support’⁴⁶.

By 1772 the Archipelago principality seemed already to have become a state with an administration system in the center and on the islands⁴⁷. Yet while the Russian fleet continued to stay in the Aegean sea, this state was ruled by Russian command and not by its own Senate. Nesterov behaved more like a semi-colonial governor, than an advisor to an independent government although his rule was not long. In August 1772, Psaro returned to his position as general deputy, staying until the Russian departure in 1775. In 1773, Psaro had still intended to organize a ‘Council of elders’ on the isle of Paros calling it ‘a Senate’ with representatives of all the islands of the ‘principality’. By the time of the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kanardja, however, the Senate had not been created⁴⁸.

The experience of creating a new state was nearly unique in Russian history—the only close parallel might be Fedor Ushakov’s actions in the Ionian Republic in 1799-1800, though even that formally existed under Ottoman protection.⁴⁹ Greeks of more than thirty Mediterranean islands apparently considered themselves to be Catherine II’s ‘subjects’, celebrating Russian Imperial holidays and receiving instruction from Russian officers on how to improve both the self-governing administration of every island and of the island federation as a whole. Crucially, the Russians considered these islands not to be conquered, but to be liberated from the Ottoman yoke, placing ‘our Greeks’ in opposition to those who continued to be subjects of the Porte.

How these Russian possessions could exist surrounded by Turks and such a long way from Russia, and how much their defense and supply would cost were questions that might have provoke discussions in St.Petersburg, but in the Archipelago, Spiridov and his staff seemed to have no time for hesitations or deliberations. In addition to the liberated and protected Greek state, they realized Catherine II’s idea of creating a military base on Paros. Well fortified military camps with stone barracks, a hospital with a Russian church, and an admiralty appeared in just four years. It is possible even now to find remains of these buildings, surrounded by modern

⁴⁶RGV VMF. F. 190. Op. 1. D. 121. L. 100 a.

⁴⁷ Πασχάλη Δ. Αι Κυκλάδες υπό τους Ρώσους (1770-1774). Μετ’ ανέκδοτων έγγραφων Σελ. 234-292.

⁴⁸ Στέφανος Κ. Ανέκδοτα έγγραφα αποσταλέντα προς τους κατοίκους των Κυκλάδων κατά την υπο των Ρώσων κατοχήν. Σελ. 38; Κοντογιάννης Π.Ν. Οι Έλληνες κατά τον πρώτον επί Αικατερίνης Β’ Ρωσοτουρκικόν πόλεμον 1768-1774. Σελ. 242.

⁴⁹ McKnight James Lawrence. Admiral Ushakov and the Ionian Republic: the genesis of Russia’s first Balkan satellite. Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1965; Stanislavskaja A. M. Politicheskaja deiatel’nost’ F.F. Ushakova v Gretsii, 1798-1800. Moscow, 1983.

hotels in Naussa bay. In the 1770s, the AUSA base and its fortifications (with up to 5 000 soldiers and sailors) was compared in the Western press with Kronshtadt—the main Russian naval base on the Baltic sea⁵⁰.

In the end, the Russians in the eastern Mediterranean rarely acted like colonialists or conquerors. Without any experience in creating an overseas colony, with no special economic interests in eastern Mediterranean, but with an ambition to play a role in the Mediterranean ‘concert of powers’, Russia could desire no more than a system of patronage over a federation of self-governed islands that might surround and protect a small Russian military base in the eastern Mediterranean.

Five years of the Archipelago principality of Catherine the Great were not enough to deeply effect the contemporary realities of the eastern Mediterranean political system, but it became absolutely clear for Spiridov and his officers that Greece must be improved according ‘new European examples’. The problem was that they measured these European examples with Russian instruments for example in creating a new administration, new relations between the state and the Orthodox church, and this very much influenced the Russian state building experiments in the Aegean.

4. Western volunteers and *les aventuriers* of the Archipelago expedition.

It is evident that without Danish and especially British diplomatic and material help (ship repair, the preparation of Russian naval officers, volunteer services, transports, etc.) the Russian Mediterranean enterprise could not have taken place. The Russian base in Tuscany (in Livorno and Pisa) and the assistance of Duke Pietro-Leopoldo played an equally decisive role. Starting in the 1760s, Catherine II aimed for the support of Malta too, and Russia received some assistance in ship repair there between 1771-1773. Foreign sailors and diplomatic agents also served on the Archipelago expedition. Heinrich Leonhard Pasch van Krienen, the author of the description of the Archipelago principality in Italian, was a Dutch aristocrat who came to the Levant to hunt for antique treasures sometime before the Russo-Turkish war, he undertook semi-professional research in Asia Minor and appeared on Paros in 1771, having travelled from Smyrna. Van Krienen hoped to continue his studies in antiquity on the Archipelago islands, combining a Russian state order and his own private interest. He was sent by the Russian command to reconnoiter the islands of the Archipelago in the summer of 1771, and described the economic resources, ancient monuments, population and mineral resources, noting that the inhabitants,

⁵⁰ More about it: Smilyanskaya E.B. 'Protection' or 'Possession': How Russians Created a Greek Principality in 1770-1775.

‘under the wise government of the Russian Empress, are in a happy condition’⁵¹. Soon a volunteer in the Russian army, van Krienen (or ‘count de Grun’) became known all over Europe for his excavations on the Isle of Ios, where he claimed to have found the tomb of Homer.⁵² With his findings from ‘Homer’s tomb’, van Krienen left the Russian service and the Archipelago for Livorno. In 1772-1773 he edited his book about the tomb in Livorno, adding a brief description of the Archipelago and especially his archeological ‘success’ on Ios.

Van Krienen’s activity was both as an adventurer and also very useful to the Russian command. It is also evident that Van Krienen created a special version of his *Breve descrizione dell’Arcipelago* for the Russians, wherein he answered a questionnaire prepared by the Russian naval staff and gave some advice on how to rule the islands, but his advice were hardly used⁵³.

The story of another aristocratic volunteer is different but also illustrative. The Russian extraordinary envoy on Malta, Marquis de Kavalkabo (himself a person of unusual biography⁵⁴) persuaded the Count de Masin, a Knight of Malta, to join the Russian fleet. On September 24, 1771, on his own ship under the pretext of private affaires in Italy, de Masin⁵⁵ left Malta and sailed to the squadron of Alexey Orlov in the Levant. This Maltese chevalier wrote a letter for the Grand Master Manuel de Pinto (delivered a week after his departure) explaining his wish ‘to take advantage of an excellent occasion to be an eye-witness to the war that the Russians are waging with such success against enemies of the Order, and with an aspiration to lend from such a brave and warlike nation, some useful information from Malta concerning military affaires’⁵⁶. De Masin’s actions were notable first because the Maltese chevalier accepted Catherine II’s appeal to fight against common enemy—the Turks. Likewise, after the Chesme battle, the Maltese knights who were formerly teachers of the Russian naval officers became their students, interested in ‘useful information concerning military affaires’. It was said that when Catherine II received information about de Masin’s act she exclaimed ‘Here is a chevalier who breaks loose!’⁵⁷.

After a month, de Masin’s ship appeared in Paros in October 1770. In one of the expedition diaries, there is a note about de Masin’s arrival in Naussa, near the ship where Alexey

⁵¹ *Graf Pasch van Krienen H.L.* Abdruck seiner italienischen Beschreibung des griechischen Archipelagus mit Anmerkungen und einer Abhandlung über den Verfasser und seine Auffindung des Grabes Homers auf Ios aus dem Nachlasse von Ludwig Ross. Halle 1860.

⁵² See more about it: *Constantine D.* Early Greek travelers and the Hellenic Ideal. Cambridge, 1984. P.215-218.

⁵³ It is possible that the version remained uncompleted and surely was not prepared for publication, but it was translated into Russian by Pavel Zhukov, who served in the Archipelago expedition as a chief French and Italian translator for. It is possible that, when the fleet returned back to Russia, this translation ended up in the manuscript collection of a well-known Admiralty Chief, Count Ivan Chernyshev. Now the manuscript is in the State Historical Museum in Moscow. We have edited it in: *Smilyanskaya I.M., Velizev M.B., Smilyanskaya E.B.* Rossiya v Sredizemnomor’e. P. 517-546.

⁵⁴ See for example: *Blondy A.* L’Ordre de Malte et Malte dans les affaires polonaises et russes au XVIII e siècle // *Revue des études slaves.* 1994. LXVI / 4. P. 733-755.

⁵⁵ *Nastenka I.A., Yashnev Yu. V.* Istoriya Mal’tiyskogo ordena. Moscow, 2005. Kniga 2. P. 36.

⁵⁶ *Zakharov V.A.* Istoriya Mal’tiyskogo ordena v Rossii. M., 2006. P. 93.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Orlov had his staff⁵⁸. Surprisingly, de Masin stayed in the Archipelago no longer than several weeks. At the end of 1770, de Masin, who had become close to Alexey Orlov, travelled with him to Italy and never returned to the Archipelago and did not witness the creation of the 'Archipelago principality' in 1771-1775, but nevertheless his role in the future 'Greek Project' and the Greek liberation might be more influential than it is now known.

Giorgio Giuseppe Maria Valperga count Masino was a brilliant *aventurier* of his Age. Adam Wandrushka shows⁵⁹ de Masin was in Orlov's close circle in Tuscany, but during a masquerade in Pisa he secretly talked about 'numerous problems' in the Russian fleet with the Duke of Tuscany, promising to offer special information for the Court of Vienna. Duke Pietro Leopoldo described de Masin to his brother, Emperor Josef II, saying: 'He is a very clever man, full of fire and life, but at the same time he is a hothead, full of unbelievable projects, courageous, and filled with fantasies, a very great intransigent, ambitious and talented [...] I am sure that besides fantasies in his arguments one can find reasonable ideas' (from a letter dating January 21, 1771). Although Pietro Leopoldo characterized de Masin as a person whose service might be useful but whom one could never trust, he delivered to Vienna a very detailed 'de Masin project' for the division of European lands in the Ottoman Empire. In Viennese foreign office it was transformed into the 'Greek project'⁶⁰.

It is possible that de Masin could have shared his information on the Russian fleet when visiting Vienna himself. In the company of Alexey Orlov, however, de Masin had to choose another strategy: he rushed to St. Petersburg without visiting the Austrian court at all. In St. Petersburg, de Masin received an excellent position and a new field. As a rear admiral he was to build a new brigantine according to his 'original design'. However, de Masin handed in his resignation very soon, in Jan. 30 1774, writing that in such a cold climate he could not continue his service, although he had 'wished to stay forever to prove his zeal and devotion'. His resignation was accepted by the empress⁶¹.

In contemporary Russian literature, de Masin is often described as a 'true hero', and never as one of creators of the 'Greek project' (there are no sources about his talks on the division of the Ottoman Empire with the Russian Empress). But it is possible that de Masin's resignation was both forced and hasty. At the very moment that de Masin submitted his resignation, the envoy of Prussia Count Solms informed his emperor, Frederic II, that 'information appeared' about de Masin, who in the Russo-Swedish war 'had an obligation to the French and Spanish ministers to destroy the Russian expedition'⁶². The Russian empress may

⁵⁸ Russian State Military Historical Archive (RGVIA). F. 846. Op. 16. D. 1860. L. 39a.

⁵⁹ Wandruszka A. Pietro Leopoldo. Un grande riformatore. Firenze, 1968. P. 303-305.

⁶⁰ Petrova M.A. Ekaterina II and Iosif II. Formirovanie rossiysko-avstriyskogo soyuza 1780-1790. P. 94-96.

⁶¹ Materialy dlia istorii russkogo flota. Part 12. P. 228.

⁶² Sbornik Russkogo Istoricheskogo obschestva. St.-Petersburg, 1891. T. 72. P. 477.

also have known about de Masin's treachery and preferred to send him away. Data about Masin's 'obligation' can be found in the *Archives Nationales de France*. In spring 1773, (ten months before de Masin's resignation) the plenipotentiary minister of France in St. Petersburg, François-Michel Durand de Distroff, informed his chief, Duc d'Aiguillon, that de Masin expressed his wish to leave the Russian service if it attacked Sweden. Duran recommended de Masin to duc d'Aiguillon, writing that this 'representative of the best families of Piemont', who 'devoted 22 years to naval service' gave the French diplomat mission all its information concerning the Russian fleet⁶³.

De Masin, in being ready to serve different courts simultaneously⁶⁴, was not exceptional in that period⁶⁵. The suggestion that the Russians were successful in the Archipelago only with the support of foreign sailors and volunteers contains only a part of the truth. The adventurism of Russia's Archipelago Expedition and the adventurism of its participants appeared to serve an important role in the realisation of the imperial ambitions of Russia in the eighteenth century. There is no doubt that the Archipelago Expedition exemplifies the popularity of adventurism in the eighteenth century, and no presentations in the political theatre of this time were played without these intrigues. Yet it is also evident that the majority of the achievements of this period could not have taken place without this spirit of adventurism, and that it that must be treated seriously.

5. Conclusion

After the end of the war in June 1775, the Russian fleet left the Archipelago but never exited the Mediterranean, instead it used different bases and excuses for staying in the region. In the time of Catherine the Great, various tools (sermons, celebrations, monumental propaganda, etc.) were used to shape the historical memory of the First Archipelago Expedition. Russia had its own historical mythology: that the expedition was purportedly organised only to 'help co-religious Greeks and Slavs', and that Catherine II in this way had realised the plan of Peter I. The most successful proclamation of these ideas came from the famous Metropolitan Platon, whom Voltaire mentioned in his letter to Catherine the Great: "as soon as you have Platon in

⁶³ Les Archives Nationales de France. B 3 800. Dossier 10.

⁶⁴ He continued his career successfully and in 1792 became an admiral of Malta. See: *Gentile Guido*. Gli orizzonti della milizia gerosolmitana nell'esperienza e nella memoria di una famiglia piemontese i Valperga di Masino // Gentilhuomini Christiani e Religiosi Cavalieri. Nove secoli dell'Ordine di Malta di Piemonte. Torino, 2000.

⁶⁵ I am far from accusing other foreigners, like British admirals Elfinston or Knowles, or Danish admiral Arf, in a subversive activity without adducing any proof, but the motivations for their behavior are unclear. At least in recent months there appeared a possibility to study the case of the biggest Russian ship "Sviatoslav" under the command of admiral Elfinston that run aground (or was run aground) near the isle of Lemnos in 1770 and changed the course of events near the entrance to Dardanelles. This ship was found under water only in October, 2013 and will be specially inspected by Russian and Greek specialists in 2014, and the data may be compared with documents of the archive of John Elfinston from the Princeton University Library. The role of admiral Elfinstone in the history of the Russian fleet and his biography may become clearer.

St.Petersburg, I am sure that Counts Orlov will replace in Greece the Miltiades and the Themistocles”.

To support this theme, Catherine the Great herself planned to erect a number of monuments to commemorate the Russian presence in the Archipelago. In fact, she continued to play her games with the Aegean islands even after she had to have known that the Mediterranean possessions had become too expensive a plaything.

It seemed that many of the illusions should have been dashed—the Greeks were far from being “Spartans holding Orthodox Crosses,” and their liberation appeared remote. Even more illusory was the taking of Constantinople. However, in St. Petersburg the discourse continued. Catherine’s “Greek Project” of 1782 and the preparations for a new squadron in 1786 showed that the First Archipelago Expedition and the possession of the ‘Archipelago principality’ retained their attraction.

Catherine II’s colonial ambitions in these lands were cautious and went through serious transformations in the period 1760-1780. In 1771, the Empress preferred only to help the Greeks to create their own state in Peloponnesus. Afterwards the experience of the principality in the Aegean islands showed that the Russian military commanders tried to teach Greeks how to live ‘in liberty’ under the Russian protection. Finally, the ‘Greek project’ of 1780s, secretly discussed by Catherine II and Josef II of Austria, showed that the two imperial rulers intended to donate a state to the Greeks. For Europeans, the appearance of the Russian fleet in the Mediterranean created a new geo-political reality, a change in the perceived balance of power. This had social and cultural implications. It is no accident that authors of a contemporary study on the perception of Greece (Olga Augustinos, David Roessel and others) date the birth of European philhellenism—the vision of a reborn and liberated Greece—precisely from the arrival of the Russian fleet and a Greek uprising in Morea in 1770. This revival of interest in all things Greek was clearly linked to the Russian’s presence, which also engendered long-term discussion about the consequences of Catherine II’s own Archipelago adventure.

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