

Citation style

Klabjan, Borut: review of: Konstantina Zanou, *Transnational Patriotism in the Mediterranean, 1800–1850. Stammering the Nation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, in: *Hungarian Historical Review*, 2019, 2, p. 465-467, DOI: 10.15463/rec.1293031756, downloaded from recensio.net

First published:
<http://www.hunghist.org/82-book-reviews/578-2019-2-reviews>



copyright

This article may be downloaded and/or used within the private copying exemption. Any further use without permission of the rights owner shall be subject to legal licences (§§ 44a-63a UrhG / German Copyright Act).

Transnational Patriotism in the Mediterranean, 1800–1850: Stammering the Nation. By Konstantina Zanou. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. 248 pp.

At a time when the Mediterranean Sea is in the focus of international audiences, especially because of flows of migrants from the global south towards Europe, it seems that the Mediterranean space has begun to meet with new interest in scientific research, as well. Numerous studies which in recent years have re-analyzed this area from the perspective of its history have focused primarily on the scope, frequency, and diversity of mutual transfers, exchanges, entanglements, and interactions along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The monograph by Kostantina Zanou, Assistant Professor of Italian at Columbia University and a historian specialized in the history of nineteenth-century Mediterranean, is part of this research. Zanou's work, however, is not a general overview of the history of the Mediterranean. The main characters of her book are not the countries, empires, and nations still featured in much of the traditional historical narratives, but rather the life stories of people who lived amid (and some of them through) the historical changes that this region witnessed in the first half of the nineteenth century. This was the time when the Venetian Republic collapsed after a long period of almost complete domination in this part of the world. It was also the period in which the first germs of nationalism, an ideology which in only a few decades did away with century-old empires and gave rise to semi-nation-states in their stead, emerged on the horizon. The book does not focus on the entire Mediterranean space. The geographical analytical framework is the seven Ionian Islands in the southeastern corner of the Adriatic Sea, which were situated at the crossroads of the Venetian and Ottoman worlds and which during that time shifted sovereignties among the French, British, Russian, and Habsburg Empires. The changing geopolitical conditions are intertwined with multiple histories of individuals into a novel attempt to describe these complex processes from a point of view which combines microhistory with macrohistory. As she writes, Zanou is attempting "to look at the big picture through the small details" (p.2). Particularly the intellectuals, who became heralds of the nation and the national idea in the individual national movements (especially the Greek and Italian) are examined in a new light which reveals their other role: non-national or, rather, trans-national patriots whose perceptions of themselves differed significantly from the perceptions posthumously imposed on them by nation builders. In their diasporic wanderings and experience as exiles, they represented a bridge

between cultures and languages, marking a time and space not yet codified into national paradigms.

The introduction brilliantly presents the essential focus on Zanou's inquiry and outlines the direction of the analysis, which then extends over four parts. These parts are based primarily on the personal profiles of intellectuals such as Ugo Foscolo, Andreas Kalvos, Dionysios Solomos, Mario Pieri, Andrea Papadopoulo Vretto, and Andrea Mustoxidi, which intertwine in the text with many other characters, ranging from noted politicians and prominent diplomats, such as Ioannis Kapodistrias, and influential scholars, like Adamantios Koraes, to perhaps less familiar names, such as Alexandros Vogorides, Christodoulou Clonares, Spiridion Vlandi, and Spiridion Naranzi, mostly from the Ionian environment, who in different ways and on different levels left a mark on much broader regions.

The second part in particular, in which Zanou describes the strategic presence of Russia in the southern Adriatic and the role that Orthodox Christianity played in patching up the “plot gaps” in national ideology, is one of the main strengths of the book. By the eighteenth century, the Mediterranean had become part of the Russian political horizon. Even at the time of the Russo-Turkish war between 1768 and 1774, the Russian navy successfully countered the Turkish forces and further reinforced its presence and role in the period to follow. Despite the superiority of the British and the growing appetites of Italian irredentism and Austro-German expansionism in the Balkans, from the nineteenth century on, Russia was an important international force in shaping the Mediterranean environment. The study reveals the complexity and diversity of options and choices available to the protagonists of this book over a relatively short period of time in the wake of the collapse of *la Serenissima* and Napoleon's ambitions for the eastern Mediterranean. By examining the choices made by the figures who are the protagonists of her narrative, Zanou leads the reader to an understanding of the Ionian version of patriotism. Although it mainly deals with the intertwining of Italian and Greek cultural and political milieus, the work is not (nor does it aspire to be) a study of Italian and Greek literary cooperation in the pre-national era. The personages represent paradigmatic figures compatible with a broader Mediterranean environment, standing alongside Niccolò Tommaseo, likely the best-known *Kulturträger* of mutual transnational dialogue along the Adriatic shores during the period in question. Based on assorted archives and personal legacies, as well as secondary literature in several languages, Zanou thus provides the reader with new perspectives on the issue of the Greek Revolution and its

actors, philhellenism, European post-Enlightenment society, the concrete traps of post-imperial governance, different understandings of *patria* and patriotism, the intermingling of religion and nationalism, and the significance of linguistic diversity in Europe at the time.

The questions regarding how the disintegrating empires, changing sovereignties, emerging states, shifting loyalties, and imagined national communities were reflected in the writings of these southern Adriatic intellectuals evolve into fulcrums of European history. This becomes especially clear in the conclusion, which shows that nationalism in practice proved much more complex and problematic than nationalism as a set of theoretical concepts. In this context, the Ionian Islands were no exception. Rather, they could be seen more as a European paradigm of the changes that marked global developments. Thus, this book will be engaging not only for the ever more numerous enthusiasts who have taken an interest in the Adriatic region in recent years, but also for readers looking for a novel, fresh perspective on Europe and the Mediterranean during a crucial period of their histories.

Borut Klabjan
European University Institute