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The 1821 uprising in the Romanian principalities has long been the subject of controversy for those studying the history of Eastern Europe. The detailed historical research undertaken concerning the revolutionary activity has not fully elucidated the complexity of issues surrounding it. Florescu cites the Romanian communist historian, Stirbu, as saying that, even now, ' there are many aspects of the revolution of 1821 which remain to be clarified in order to draw a rigorously scientific picture of this significant event in our history. 1 This is in part caused by the fact that no less than three revolutionary movements arose in the Principalities in 1821-22.

These are defined by Florescu as being – 1) A Greek uprising planned years in advance by the Philike Hetairia, which aimed, primarily, to secure the liberation of Greece but ultimately wanted to gain the support of the entire Balkan Christian population and overthrow Turkish rule throughout the Peninsular. 2) A Wallachian peasant insurrection directed against the tyranny and exploitation of the Phanariot hospodars and the native boyars. Their goals were social rather than political, since their grievances were over their taxes and the conditions of landholding. 3) A ' bloodless coup' by Maldo-Walachian nationalist boyars who sought an end to Phanariot rule, autonomy for the Principalities and the reestablishment of native rule. Their attitude to the Porte was ambivalent. They were prepared to consider Ottoman suzerainty.

2 The difficulties encountered in the study of Vladimirescu's revolution stem from confusion over which one of these causes motivated the revolutionary leader. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that, as the fortunes of the uprising changed so did the aims and allegiances expressed by Vladimirescu.

This essay will chart the events of the 1821 uprising in Wallachia in order to try and determine the extent to which it can be defined as a national revolution. The revolutionary climate that characterised the situation in the Balkans at the beginning of the nineteenth century finds its roots in the Enlightenment ideas of the French Revolution, which prompted the revival of national consciousness among intellectuals. Alexandru Zub notes that, in the Romanian context the interest in ideas of ‘nationalism’, ‘fraternity’, ‘liberty’, ‘equality’ and ‘popular sovereignty’ went beyond simple curiosity. Political and intellectual elites were ‘eager to use these events for the “country’s welfare.

“ 3 However, it was not Romanians who formulated the first concrete plans for revolutionary activity on Romanian soil. Paradoxically, the Vladimirescu uprising that was substantially driven by hostility to Greeks and carried out by Romanians in the heart of Wallachia was ‘conceived and executed as the first act of the Greek Revolution’<sup>4</sup> The Greek national movement in the Principalities was based on Phanariot support and linked to nationalist activity in Greece itself by the Greek revolutionary organisation, Philike Hetairia, or the Friendly Society. Founded in 1814, the society’s basic aim was the organisation of an uprising against the Ottoman Empire with the object of establishing a Greek state with Constantinople as the capital. The limited initial success of the Hetairia prompted the leaders to elect an influential figurehead and seek financial and military assistance from Russia to advance their cause. In 1818, the society’s headquarters were moved to Constantinople and it following increased dramatically. Despite repeated failure to achieve firm backing from the Russian government the leadership

of the organisation often implied they were acting with the knowledge and support of the Tsar in order to gain prestige.

In order to provide a 'real' sign that they had Russian assistance the Hetairia appointed Alexander Ypsilantis as its leader. A general in the Russian army and an aide-de-camp of the Tsar, Ypsilantis convinced the governors of Bessarabia and the Odessa region that he had official backing from Russia and these areas became the seat for planning the revolution. It was decided that the revolt should centre in the Greek region of the Peloponnesus, with prior diversionary action in the Principalities. This was a natural choice given their strategic significance,\* the Phanariot regime's sympathy with the Hetairian cause, and the long years of misrule in the Principalities, which meant that the native peasants and boyars were ripe for rebellion. The initiative for an armed uprising in Romania came from Tudor Vladimirescu, a former commander of the pandours (a legal militia recruited from the free peasants) and a successful businessman and landowner.

Vladimirescu was drawn into the planning of the Greek uprising by a number of the high profile members of the Philike Hetrairia, including Constantin Samurcas,? all of whom were, according to Hitchins, 'determined to overthrow Ottoman rule and considered Vladimirescu the most capable Wallachian military commander and the one best able to mobilize a sizeable army. The degree to which Vladimirescu was involved in the society is however, a matter of dispute between historians. Florescu treats his actions separately to those of Ypsilantis, claiming that 'the question of his Hetairist affiliations is debateable.' 6 Jelavich indicates that there was an 'understanding' between Ypsilantis and Vladimirescu but suggests that

Vladimirescu's uprising was initiated not by the Hetairists as such, but rather by members of the temporary Wallachian government (in office because Prince Alecu Sutu was dying) who sympathised with the Philike Hetaria and who promised their support if he incited a peasant rebellion<sup>7</sup>.

In contrast, Hitchins suggests that 'Vladimirescu carried on extended negotiations with both the Hetairists and the boyars in Bucharest between November 1820 and January 1821 (though) he did not become a member of the society'<sup>8</sup> However, he also stresses the different aims and agendas of the two factions, claiming that Vladimirescu did not 'intend to subordinate his own claims to theirs. He goes on to assert that Vladimirescu's aims included ending Ottoman rule in Wallachia, reasserting independence and bringing about political and economic change that would benefit the lesser boyar class to which he belonged and ease the economic burdens of the peasantry. In January 1821 Alecu Sutu died. The Prince had not supported the Greek Revolutionary cause and had frustrated the temporary governments attempts to legislate in its favour. In the month following his death, either as a direct response to the Society or by agreement with its sympathisers, Vladimirescu left Bucharest for Oltenia where, according to Jelavich he 'issued a violently revolutionary declaration.

.. which had nothing to do with Greek, or even Romanian, national liberation: Brothers living in Wallachia, whatever your nationality, no law prevents a man to meet evil with evil...

How long shall we be enslaved? <sup>9</sup>Communist historians have since cited Vladimirescu's early appeals to the peasantry, which highlight social

injustices, as evidence that he was a social crusader. Florescu notes that ' according to them he was neither a Hetairist nor a Romanian nationalist but the head of the Romanian branch of an international " progressive" movement linked with the Decembrists in Russia. '10 However, he dismisses this interpretation as ' a frenzied search for precursors', which, in the light of Vladimirescu's later action, seems to be a valid conclusion. To a certain extent it seems that the revolutionary leader exploited the socialist sentiment in order to gain the cooperation of the peasant masses, which, unlike Vladimirescu and his boyar supporters in Bucharest, ' had social, rather than national or political goals'11 Having gained popular support, Vladimirescu initially had little control over the actions of the peasants, who looted and burned boyar estates, despite their leader's attempt to distinguish between those boyars that espoused his cause and those that opposed it.

In an attempt to remedy this he organised the People's Assembly, based around six hundred trusted pandours. The force then started to March towards Bucharest, where it arrived at the end of March 1821. At this stage in the revolution Vladimirescu and his followers appealed to the Sultan to restore the conditions that existed in the Principalities before the Phanariot rule and also to send a representative to Romania to investigate the abuses and suffering endured by native Romanians under Phanariot domination. This highlights the fact that, in principle, the uprising was not focussed against the Porte.

In fact, as Florescu observes, the rebels were ' in touch with Ottoman agents and with pashas in command of the Danube' throughout the period. 12

During this time, Ypsilantis had crossed the border from Bessarabia into Moldavia (6 March) and had taken control of the government there. Initially he received a great deal of support from both Romanians and Greeks, who believed, along with both Ypsilantis and Vladimirescu, that the Russian army would soon arrive to assist their cause. Russia delayed her reaction for weeks, whilst Ypsilantis built up the pretence of her involvement in order to canvas further support. However, by the end of March the revolutionary activities of both parties (which, it is worth noting, had been treated as separate issues by the Russian authorities) had been denounced by the Tsar.

From this point one can chart the decline of the revolution. Vladimirescu arrived in Bucharest on April 2nd with 65, 000 men, where he co-operated with the Wallachian government and continued to negotiate with the Ottoman authorities. During this period he began to revise the socialist aspect of his movement, instructing his followers to pay their taxes and attempting to prevent their acts of violence towards the boyars, who were fleeing the country in large numbers. Overlooking his earlier socialist sentiment, Vladimirescu opted for a more acceptable nationalist platform, focussing instead on the idea of restoring native rule.

In the middle of April 1821 Ypsilantis arrived in Bucharest with less than 5, 000 men. The clashing and competing interests of the two men came to light in their meeting on April 20th, where it emerged that both leaders were contenders for the hospodarial throne. Vladimirescu wanted Ypsilantis's force to leave the Principalities and go to Greece as had originally been planned, while his own forces stayed in Bucharest to, as he claimed, 'remedy the abuses in the government, rather than to challenge Ottoman rule'<sup>13</sup>.

Vladimirescu's diplomacy at this stage complicates attempts to elicit the true nature of the Wallachian uprising. His difficult and dangerous situation meant that his decisions were made with the intention of minimising the danger he faced, and placating as many of the parties involved as possible, without compromising his desire for personal gain. By trying to avoid conflict with the Ottomans (whose army he had no hope of defeating), the boyars (many of whom shared his national aspirations) and the Greek force (which many of his men would not fight because of the large proportion of Romanians in its ranks) he had to publicly change his objectives and, in the eyes of his followers, this compromised his original motivations.

This, in conjunction with his harsh treatment of pandour officers he expected of looting, alienated many of Vladimirescu's supporters. The power struggle that emerged between Vladimirescu and Ypsilantis was settled at the beginning of June, when the Greek leadership, with help of defectors from Vladimirescu's force, executed the Wallachian revolutionary leader.

Thereafter, Ypsilantis, having tried and failed to assume command of his rival's militia, saw his men defeated by the Ottomans at Dragasani. He deserted the remnants of his army and fled to Transylvania where he was arrested and taken to an Austrian prison for the last seven years of his life.

Following their defeat of the Greek forces the Ottoman army remained in the Principalities for sixteen months, during which time the principle concern was to restore a stable political situation. In April 1822, a delegation from each Principality came to Constantinople to present programs for the government of Romania. The main demands were the reestablishment of home rule, an end to Phanariot exploitation and the establishment of a Romanian militia.



The Porte agreed to all the demands and made the heads of the delegations the princes in their respective principalities. Thus, ultimately, the Revolution of Tudor Vladimirescu ended with the establishment of native rule.

Having examined the events of the uprising, it is now necessary to determine whether or not it can be seen as a nationalist movement. Florescu identifies two principle schools of thought concerned with the revolution. Firstly he deals with the 'traditionalist' approach, which went essentially unchallenged until the mid-twentieth century. This theory characterises Vladimirescu as a martyr and national hero, whose 'initial social objectives were subordinated to, and conditional on, the attainment of certain nationalist aims.

'14 In 1945, the Romanian historian Andrei Otetea challenged this theory by suggesting that Vladimirescu was simply an emissary of the Greek national movement who used Romanian national claims and socialist ideas to increase the support base of the Philike Hetairia. This theory resolved certain answered questions, for example, where had Vladimirescu got the resources to stage such a large-scale revolution? If this interpretation is to be believed then the Romanian hero of earlier studies becomes an opportunist traitor who betrayed the Greek national cause. The truth is perhaps to be found in a synthesis of the two interpretations. It is quite plausible to argue that, while Vladimirescu had nationalist and, to a lesser extent, socialist aspirations for Romania, he used the Greek national movement as a springboard for their realisation. The Philike Hetairia had the ultimate goal of inciting a Balkan wide uprising against the Turks and Vladimirescu would therefore not strictly

have been betraying their trust by wanting to extent the national aspirations to the Romanian context.

It must also be remembered that the society betrayed the trust of its followers by assuring them of Russian assistance when they themselves had no firm assurances from the Tsar. However personal greed and ambition cloud the earlier interpretations of Vladimirescu as a hero and martyr. In conclusion, one can argue that, whilst Vladimirescu is likely to have shared the enthusiasm for French Enlightenment ideas that infused much of the boyar class in the Principalities, and also joined in the hatred of the Phanariot class that characterised the peasants and the boyars, the masses that made the Revolution the important issue that it has become in the history of Romania were more motivated by social issues that by nationalist ones. It was the false hope that these would be realised, rather than any nationalist aspirations on their part that caused the uprising.