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Review of Nikos Andriotis, Πρόσφυγες στην Ελλάδα 1821-1940: Άφιξη, περίθαλψη, αποκατάσταση

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Nikos Andriotis,
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Nikos Andriotis

*Πρόσφυγες στην Ελλάδα 1821–1940: Άφιξη,
περίθαλψη, αποκατάσταση*

[Refugees in Greece, 1821–1940: Arrival, care, settlement]

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In the Greek historical context, the term “refugees” has become synonymous with the Greek-Christian populations that were expelled from the Ottoman Empire from 1922 to 1924. The violence of the events that took place in Smyrna in August 1922 has created an image that is so stark that it has turned into a lens through which the concept of “refugeehood” is still understood in Greek national memory. Asia Minor refugees are the refugees par excellence, those to whom the term “refugees” is thought to refer to, if not stated otherwise. Nevertheless, they were neither the first refugee wave towards Greece, not the last, even when the focus is only on the first half of the twentieth century. Nikos Andriotis’ book addresses this problem already in the introduction. Andriotis states that forced population movements are inseparable from the process of nation building in the Balkans and Anatolia (that is, the regions where the Ottoman Empire used to be) and, therefore, refugee waves had already begun with the 1821 Revolution, which introduced the notion of national identity in the area and transformed political loyalties in a way that could not be overlooked. At the same time, he expands his study to the end of the interwar period, on the grounds that after the Second World War the reception of refugees was institutionalised and organised according to international legislation.

Both his points are important for understanding the historicity of refugee movements from the nineteenth century onwards and they are elaborated in the eight chapters of the book. First of all, as national historiographies are (still) organised as narratives of the national biography, movements from and towards their territories often fall beyond their scope or, at best, on its margins. So does the history of population groups that are not perceived as co-ethnics. Therefore, little is said about what happened to Muslims that lived in the lands liberated by the Greek Revolution and, on the other hand, what happened to Greek Christian populations that lived in other parts of the empire, where the revolution had

no power. Andriotis' book addresses such issues, focusing on the refugees that entered the Greek state (or, earlier, the lands liberated by the revolution) as well as on the practices and institutions that developed for their reception and accommodation. He convincingly argues that the wars involved in the expansion of the state caused refugee movements to which the state needed to respond. This is an interesting point that had not yet been adequately highlighted in the relevant scholarship. Revolts, revolutions and wars connected to the emergence and expansion of nation-states changed the perception of "otherness" among previously cohabiting ethnicities and, therefore, caused violent reactions and refugee movements. At the same time, the newly formed nation-states felt obliged to respond to the needs of the refugees that reached their territory, moved not only by humanitarian motives but mainly by political ones. Populations that fled to Greece during the nineteenth and early twentieth century were afflicted by violence because they were perceived as Greeks – and fled to the country for the same reason. Even if they had not yet developed a strong national identity, the process as such solidified the sense of national belonging. The second point raised by the book is that institutions developed to meet the refugees' needs were important not only for the refugees, but for the elaboration of the state's infrastructure. By meticulously and systematically analysing the institutions that were formed to meet the needs of each refugee wave from the nineteenth century onwards and the way state practices met private initiatives and vice versa, Andriotis shows step by step how a discourse on refugees emerged, how it changed over the decades and how it intersected with understandings of national belonging.

The book's eight chapters (besides the introduction and the appendix) are organised chronologically. The first four chapters engage with the refugee movements before 1922 (during the Greek Revolution, during the second half of the nineteenth century and between 1906 and 1922), while the next four with different aspects of the arrival, reception and settlement of refugees after the Greek-Turkish War of 1919–1922. Nevertheless, connections between different periods (and chapters) are carefully cultivated, so that refugeehood can be studied at different levels that highlight continuities and changes throughout the period under discussion. More precisely, which refugee movements occurred in each period, the agency of the refugees in the emergence of discourses of care, state and private initiatives regarding their reception and settlement, and relations between natives and refugees, are some of the topics that Andriotis analyses in each of the above-mentioned periods, making in this way the connections between the development of the institutions traceable.

Andriotis' book is a valuable contribution to the scholarship of refugee studies. Besides its detailed elaboration of the nexus of refugee movements and care practices and institutions in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Greece, it has two additional strong features that makes it stand out in the relevant scholarship. The first one, as already stated,

is that it deals with the refugee movements over an extended time spectrum, covering the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century and that, in doing so, it explores their entanglements, the way that each one became a reference base for the technologies of reception of the next. The technologies of reception – who and how cared for the refugees and, maybe most importantly, who was considered a refugee, how the refugees were categorised as co-ethnics and aliens and what this categorisation meant for the spectrum of rights they were entitled to – are aspects of the history of refugee movements that are closely connected to the way that the state developed both its infrastructure and its ideology. The second feature is the book's detailed reference to existing scholarship and archival material. Andriotis' book is extremely well documented, to a point that its notes and bibliography can be used as a complete overview of the existing historiography and the archival sources of the subject. The appendix on the refugee movements after the Second World War and on the international context of the refugee movements provides a smooth closure to the subject, while it underlines that forced population movements are an open historical phenomenon. Therefore, the book is not only relevant for the refugee movements of the past but for the present ones as well.