

**THE MAKING OF
MODERN GREECE:
NATIONALISM,
ROMANTICISM, & THE
USES OF THE PAST
(1797–1896)**

edited by
Roderick Beaton & David Ricks

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Paradigm nation: the study of nationalism and the 'canonization' of Greece

Paschalis M. Kitromilides

Challenges

The broader epistemological problem motivating the analysis that follows could be considered to be the difficulty facing the academic study of Modern Greece in establishing itself as a recognizable and legitimate subject in contemporary scholarship. To appreciate the problem and to recognize it as such one needs to take, I believe, two logical steps: first to illustrate what is meant by the claim concerning this alleged failure; and secondly to define with some precision the meaning of the term 'canonization', borrowed for the purposes of the present analysis from the field of hagiology.

To illustrate what I consider as the difficulty of Modern Greek studies in developing into a well-established academic field, I might follow the standard method of the human sciences, the comparative approach. The most obvious comparison is of course that between the study of modern and classical Greece. The contrast in this case could not be starker and more overwhelming. It should be pointed out that, in order to make real sense, the comparison between Modern and Classical Greek studies should be attempted as one between two independent fields of research, and their respective structures and standards, and should in no case be allowed to turn into a substantive evaluative exercise focusing on the intrinsic interest, significance, or value of each field.

The comparison over structure and standards, however, could well be enlightening – as it would be between Modern Greek studies and any other professionally constituted field of area-based historical study. On this level of analysis, all indicators of professionalization, such as the range and quality of research resources and *instrumenta studiorum* in general, the number and scholarly standards of specialist journals, the significance, quality, and authority of monograph series, and the level and specialization of scholarly debate and academic judgement in the broad field of classics (history, literature, philosophy, art), make the field of Modern Greek studies outside contemporary Greece appear at best atrophied and essentially

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dependent on the quality of the individual work of a few isolated scholars, mostly in Britain, Germany, North America, and sporadically elsewhere.

Let me clarify two things. My discussion of Modern Greek studies refers to the state of the field outside Greece. Within Greece, and especially in the period since 1974, the field has significant achievements to its credit; and, if anything, the comparison with Classical Greek studies, archaeology excepted, could be reversed. The concern here, however, is with the academic study of Modern Greek history, society and culture as an international discipline, one of the most vexing problems of which is a serious asymmetry in communication and synchronization between developments within and outside Greece.¹

Why then are Modern Greek studies marked by the lag we have identified in comparison with other epistemologically cognate and comparable fields – Turkish studies, for instance? There are no easy or obvious answers to the question, and of course it would not be acceptable to trace the problem to any presumed intrinsic epistemological weaknesses of the subject itself. Such an argument would be futile, naïve, and misinformed, even bigoted, and it is not really voiced with conviction or seriousness by anyone. On the contrary, the quality of several outstanding individual achievements of scholarship in the broad field of Modern Greek studies, spanning the whole spectrum of the human sciences (history, literature, and the social sciences) makes abundantly clear the great intellectual potential, the intrinsic interest, and the broader relevance of the field for understanding important questions of theory and method.²

Still, the field remains marginal and ‘uncanonized’. This is reflected especially in its susceptibility to the vagaries of the market and in its failure to establish a secure institutional presence in universities outside Greece. If the reasons for this cannot be academic or epistemological, then they will have to be sought in the sociology of knowledge, in the domain of extra-academic or non-cognitive factors that determine the course and fate of scholarship. In this interplay between thought and society the study of Modern Greece has fared miserably. It would be a long story to analyse the multifarious expressions of the problem in the intellectual history of Greece itself. What could be seen in this case would be the serious impediments to the growth of knowledge connected especially with the endemic phenomenon of factionalism, clientelism, or more simply power relations in the academic and intellectual spheres, something that the total hegemony of the so-called ‘progressives’ in the cultural life of the country since 1974 has paradoxically intensified instead of overcoming. But our concern here is with the international aspect of the problem, to which I must turn.

On this level it would be hypocritical to ascribe the problems of the canonization of Modern Greek studies to funding, availability of positions, or institutionalization. This is particularly true of North America as opposed to Europe. In the USA and Canada there are chairs and richly endowed programmes of Modern Greek or

¹ For a parallel case study see Shubert 2004.

² A mirror of relevant work is provided in the useful survey by Constantinides 2000.

Hellenic studies, as the case may be, in several major universities, along with an active professional association and several journals; but the record of canonization has been negative rather than positive. The problem has to do with the management of such resources as there are, with the motivations and the inadequacies of persons who have found themselves in strategic institutional positions, and with a general failure of leadership in charting trajectories and developing visions for the field. This is broadly the history of Modern Greek studies in America in the last four decades or so. The problems in continental Europe are of a different order and need to be addressed on their own terms.

In order to clarify the terms of the argument, we must now turn and reflect on the idea of canonization itself and on the requirements that need to be met in order to approximate it. As mentioned above, the term is borrowed from hagiology. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 'canonization' means the official ecclesiastical acknowledgement and proclamation of sanctity and among its prerequisites are popular veneration, evidence of miracles, and the creation of an iconic and hagiographic tradition. To use this term to discuss the methodological and epistemological problems arising from the cultivation of a modern secular subject of research may sound perverse or, at the very least, idiosyncratic. If one thinks seriously about the subject, the idea and the term, however, it will be appreciated that it provides a useful and concise way to articulate a complex problem. Canonization means first of all the attainment of authority in the consciousness of an interested public – in the case under consideration here, authority in the academic consciousness of a professional community. And authority as far as this particular public is concerned depends on seriousness, on the recognition of genuine worth and intrinsic significance, on a general consensus about an intellectual pursuit as being valuable for its own sake on account of its contribution in substantive and substantial ways to the growth of knowledge and to the enhancement of understanding.

A second aspect of canonization is the connection between the attainment of authoritative status in the domain of the cultivation of knowledge and an evolving intellectual tradition, not iconic and hagiographical of course, yet certainly critical and capable of self-reflection and self-criticism; a tradition with its normative standards, its evolving debates and its canon of sources and frames of reference. Without these features there is no tradition and no canonization.

One of the factors working against canonization in Greek studies is the inequitable international division of academic labour. This is another expression of the interplay of power with scholarship. It is reflected in the prerogative reserved to themselves by all those who enjoy power in the academic and scholarly world – that is all those occupying positions in powerful institutions in core countries, receiving consequently the lion's share of research funding and controlling the media of academic communication (journals, conferences, lectures) – a prerogative of pronouncing on general subjects and engaging in theoretical elaboration, thus defining what is academically mainstream, while leaving what is considered 'ethnic

scholarship' to the rest of the academic community. This last includes all those working in the smaller countries and writing in languages other than English – and maybe French – but whose judgement and views, regardless of the quality of their work, leave indifferent the power-wielders of the mainstream. They are only expected to produce ethnic scholarship, which at best may prove of some interest or relevance to mainstream scholarship for illustrative purposes. This attitude of domination amounts to a powerful pressure towards marginalization felt by fields like Modern Greek studies – and the only way to resist it is canonization and all that it involves. Otherwise the field is bound to be reduced to resignation, introversion, and eventually extinction.

Possibilities

The problems on the way to the canonization of the study of Modern Greece we have identified so far should be viewed as challenges, not as pointers to despair. In any case, as we know from the history of social theory, a sense of impasse or crisis may prove a source of striving and eventually of creativity, and it does not have of necessity to lead to resignation. So if we turn to observe and reflect upon the contemporary scene of scholarly production, we shall easily discern the promising reception of the Greek paradigm in one important and dynamic area of research, the study of nationalism. This I think is Greece's opportunity. I sincerely hope it will not turn out to be a missed opportunity.

Since the momentous years 1989–1990 and the changes they brought about to the political map of Europe and to power relations in the world, nationalism has been a growing and dynamic field of scholarship, plagued of course by many problems. This is not the place to discuss those problems, but we should reflect seriously on the place of the Greek experience in this field. Let us begin with a few caveats. Although the younger generation of scholars who gravitate with great eagerness to the study of nationalism very often appear to believe that the field has begun with their own supervisors, in fact the field is much older and so is the place of Greece within it. When Friedrich Meinecke published his epoch-making work in 1907, the study of nationalism was already on its way to becoming a fledgling field of critical scholarship.³ It has therefore at least a century-long history.

Within this field the serious study of the Greek experience is also much older than what might be believed by readers of articles in *Nations and Nationalism* and in other journals in the forefront of the field today. On that score we should at least recall the contribution of Arnold Toynbee, first holder of the Koraes Chair at King's College London. Toynbee wrote extensively on Greek nationalism in specialized studies (Toynbee 1922, 1931) but he also used the Greek paradigm as an illustration of broader tendencies in the unfolding of historical change,

³ The seminal work for the understanding of the transformations of German nationalism, by Friedrich Meinecke (1970), first appeared in 1907, was reissued in an expanded version in 1911, and went through five subsequent editions until 1928. On the early history of the critical study of nationalism from J.S. Mill to Acton, see Lawrence 2005, 31–50.

which he tried to systematize in *A Study of History* (Toynbee 1954, 150–98). Epistemologically speaking, this might be considered as an instance of canonization. It would be prudent, therefore, to look at earlier literature on Greek nationalism, for methodological reasons at least, remembering furthermore that Toynbee was not alone, but belonged to a whole generation of Western scholars with a very serious interest in the Balkans, including R.W. Seton-Watson and W.M. Gewehr, who can be credited with some of the most serious early attempts at understanding nationalism in the region (Seton-Watson 1917; Gewehr 1931).

I hope I will be forgiven for issuing these reminders, but I am obliged to do so to be consistent with my earlier argument concerning the necessary connection of canonization with an evolving tradition of research and methodological reflection – an engagement with substantive problems, bibliography, and sources. To make this reference substantive rather than allusive, I should perhaps point to the significance of the contributions of the generation of scholars who could be considered the successors of Toynbee and Seton-Watson in the study of Balkan nationalism. These include Peter Sugar, editor with Ivo Lederer of a classic collective work on the subject (Sugar and Lederer 1969), and in addition Charles and Barbara Jelavich, L.S. Stavrianos, J.F. Clarke, and, slightly later, Robert Lee Wolff, Gale Stokes, Stavro Skendi, and Keith Hitchins – to name just a few of the great scholars without whose work Balkan nationalism would have remained a field of amateur observation, depending largely on perceptive observers of the early part of the twentieth century like Rebecca West (1942). I cannot stress enough that it is essential to identify, reconstruct, and reflect upon these intellectual genealogies in order to have a sense of the growth of knowledge in a field and to avoid the arrogance of ignorance. Building and respecting intellectual genealogies is, therefore, an integral component of the intellectual process of canonization itself.

Among recent major theorists of nationalism, Elie Kedourie was the first to recognize and argue for the paradigmatic character of the emergence of Greek liberal nationalist thought, primarily articulated by Korais, as the first case in the worldwide transmission of Western political thought to non-Western contexts (Kedourie 1970, 42–8; 152–88). The Greek example is present as a reference in all major works on nationalism from Hans Kohn to Eric Hobsbawm and Benedict Anderson. But in all these cases, and in many others, in contrast to Kedourie, the example is marginalized, the details are ignored, the conversation with sources that would lend substance to the discussion remains non-existent. In other words, the subject remains uncanonized. This may appear rather surprising, but even some scholars of Greek origin, writing for the most part in America, contribute very little to canonization, largely because of their unwillingness or inability to converse seriously with the sources. By contrast, interesting and original work has been produced in Greece, although on a limited quantitative scale (Kitromilides 2004), but there the problems arising from extreme factionalism in the scholarly world impede canonization in other ways, which lead us back to the sociology of knowledge.

Before turning once more to the question of canonization, we should pause and reflect for a moment on what is substantively significant about the Greek experience of nationalism that might render it a subject of broader concern. In this regard Kedourie supplies the point of departure. In his 1970 anthology he pointed out, as mentioned above, the precocity of the phenomenon and its significance for understanding the whole process of transmission, adaptation, and reception that has universalized Western culture in the last quarter of the second millennium of the Christian era. I might add that, from this point of view, of equal significance and interest might be considered the Greek literature of the Enlightenment, which supplies precise textual evidence for this whole process of transmission and reception of modern secular ideas, a process of intellectual change in which nationalism originated. It is incumbent upon Neohellenists, therefore, to make this literature known, to bring it back, as it were, into the republic of letters from which it sprang, through modern critical editions, translations and in-depth studies of its comparative importance.⁴ The story of Greek nationalism, therefore, both before and after the 1820s (that is, the period of its decisive mutation in the crucible of revolutionary action from an intellectual campaign to a mass popular movement that forged a modern nation), possesses paradigmatic comparative significance: it represents, in fact, a veritable historical laboratory for observing the intricate processes of nation-building and, concomitantly, for appraising and controlling pertinent claims put forward by current theories of nationalism.⁵

Beyond this, the story of Greek nationalism in the nineteenth century possesses unique interest for intellectual history in its preoccupation with the reinvention of the past. Here we have the reconceptualization and reappropriation of a very ancient intellectual tradition that had been received in European history as a shared legacy of Western culture as a whole and, in its Christian guise, as the dominant intellectual tradition of a universal Christian empire, only to be reinterpreted and claimed as its distinct ethnic heritage by a particular nation in the nineteenth century. A further aspect of the reinvention of the classical past in Modern Greece has to do with the marked differences in attitudes toward antiquity in pre-independence Greek culture, which tended to adopt the democratic classicism of the Enlightenment and the approach of radical civic humanism, and the official rhetoric of the Greek state with its archaism and ancestor-worship, devoid both of critical temper and of the quest for a substantive acquaintance with antiquity as embodied in the humanist tradition. This aspect of the history of the classical tradition represents, I would say, the most intellectually significant dimension of the project of Greek nationalism.

Finally, it should not escape our attention that the subject possesses a normative dimension reflected in the dilemmas with which Greek political thought in the

⁴ Two attempts in this direction are Kitromilides 2006 and Tabaki 2003.

⁵ A pointer to how the Greek case might be integrated within broader forms of discourse on nation-building is to be found in Michael Burleigh's over-ambitious *Earthly Powers* (2006, see esp. pp. 164–9), which, however, should also serve as an example of flaws to be avoided in similar attempts, namely: marginal documentation, uncritical reliance on secondary sources, and inaccuracy in historical detail – the endemic weaknesses of this type of generalizing scholarly discourse.

nineteenth century had to grapple in charting the course of national politics. This aspect of the question is also of considerable relevance for the possibilities it possesses in articulating political criticism and for grounding a realistic criticism of nationalism itself, as the political culture of modernity, upon an appraisal of actual political decisions and their practical consequences in historical action.

Dialogues

In view of these substantive dimensions of the subject it is not, I would submit, an illegitimate quest to reflect seriously on how the obstacles to canonization might be overcome. The problem might be approached in terms of two dialogues: one with theory, the other with research. Theoretical agnosticism is really not an option for work in the human sciences. We must converse with theory, always having in mind the need for economy, circumspection, and contextualization. Theory will supply pointers and insights for gauging and appreciating the broader significance of empirical information. Case studies in turn will provide checks upon (and suggest limits to) theoretical claims and generalizing statements. If this interplay can be carried through meaningfully, mature work of some significance cannot but emerge. In the field of the study of nationalism, there are plenty of theoretical approaches capable of providing such insights, and pointers that might enhance the meaningfulness of specific studies.

The challenge to the study of nationalism in the Greek context has precisely to do with the meaningful use of theory to fertilize historical research. In this connection, it must be said plainly that it would be absurd to be dogmatic about the use of theory or to espouse one position versus others, as occasionally happens with the debate between so-called 'modernists' and 'primordialists'.⁶ Theoretical approaches have contributions of varying usefulness to make, but it would be unthinkable to try to apply them wholesale to the conduct of inquiry. In the case of such an attempt, theories are bound to prove obstacles rather than agents of understanding. Ernest Gellner, for example, produced a theory of nationalism that is replete with suggestions for a critical understanding of pertinent phenomena; but try to imagine what might emerge if one were to attempt to apply wholesale the theory of industrialization and social entropy to most historical contexts of nationalism.⁷ Benedict Anderson in turn has proposed an analytical category that has proved of extraordinary heuristic power and interpretative effectiveness, which means that its use has contributed significantly to understanding nationalism. But can interpretation and judgement be considered complete in just showing how the vast community of the nation might be imagined by its members? I do not believe that many scholars would be prepared to claim as much.⁸

⁶ For an explanation of these terms, see Introduction, pp. 8–11.

⁷ Much more 'operational' as a theoretical framework for research on nationalism is Gellner's article (1965, 147–78), which stresses the critical role of educational institutions in the nationalist transformation of societies.

⁸ For a sober appraisal of Anderson's contribution, see Clark 2006, who points out, very reasonably,

A kind of critical eclecticism may therefore be the answer to the question of how to combine theory with historical research in the study of nationalism. That is why it is, I think, sobering and often salutary to bear in mind Kedourie's delightfully understated but firm critical perspective. His pointers to the role of intellectuals and of modern politics in shaping nationalist movements and the national identity of cultural communities, with often entirely unexpected consequences, supplies a convincing reading of the historical record that has proved quite enlightening for understanding the experience both of Europe and of the Third World.⁹ All of these approaches can be very usefully applied to the interpretation of nationalism in Greek society.

The purpose of theory is to clarify and to enhance understanding. If it nurtures confusions and misconceptions it is useless. We must therefore be clear about concepts and terms, and the ways we apply them, to make sense of evidence. Nationalism as a historical category cannot be applied to all periods of history. Such a usage extends the scope of the term so much that it makes it useless. If we are to be able to communicate amongst ourselves, we must surely agree that nationalism is a phenomenon of modern politics and should be interpreted as such. The key to modern politics is the state, the nation state in particular. Nationalism is meaningless if set apart from the state. If we truly wish to understand nationalism, then, we should never lose sight of this connection. Objections pointing to 'nationalism' in pre-modern contexts (in medieval empires in the Balkans for instance) in fact confirm the argument concerning the critical role of the state in shaping ideology and normative discourse in ways that serve the cause of nationalism; that is, in ways that consolidate state power and can be mistaken in those earlier contexts for expressions of nationalism. As for the phenomenon of nationalist movements, articulated and led by intellectuals, in historical contexts preceding the nation state, it must be remembered that these were invariably state-oriented movements – from Enlightenment nationalism in the Greek and broader Balkan context in the eighteenth century, to Zionism, to Third World liberation movements in the twentieth century. The state is always there, as a context, as a vision, as an object of contestation; and pre-state nationalism's main striving is to construct the population base upon which to build the state, in the sense of the modern national state.

That is why the 'modernist'–'primordialist' debate is so meaningless. Is anybody really arguing that nationalism emerges in a historical vacuum? Of course there are population groups, with their languages, cultural traditions, collective memories, and forms of ethnic consciousness which at some point in time along the modernization continuum are claimed by nationalist movements. If these movements achieve their objective to establish a sovereign national state, the populations that are incorporated into the state cross the great divide in history:

that the idea of 'imagined communities' 'gives us the beginning of a way to think about just such matters'.

⁹ This comes across quite characteristically in Kedourie's study of the exposure of religious minorities in the Middle East to nationalism (Kedourie 1984, 286–316).

the state transforms them and the culture they bring with them, and makes them quite different entities in radical ways. Think of languages, how they are changed, standardized, and 'purified' once connected with national states.¹⁰ Or think about religions, or more precisely religious institutions, how they are transformed and manipulated by the state – as a rule, after an initial period of resistance, with the full consent or collusion, as the case may be, of their hierarchies.

So what sense does it make to talk of 'ethnic origins' as a decisive component of nationalism? Nationalism as an expression of the state and an agency for the consolidation of its power destroys pre-modern forms of culture; it transforms and recreates them. The destructive agenda of nationalism toward pre-modern forms of culture was noted by an important critical thinker, now almost totally forgotten by students of nationalism, Rudolf Rucker, as early as 1937.¹¹ So it could turn out to be misleading, unless the term is used with great precision, to talk of 'ethnic origins' as legacies that survive, linger on from the past, and shape the content of nationalism. This is a complex problem which cannot be sidestepped: it has to be recognized and clearly affirmed that, in the context of the nation state, ethnic legacies are transformed and reinvented in ways that bear very little relation to the historical ontology of the pre-modern pasts of societies, which are usually marked by forms of syncretism that are totally intolerable to nationalism. And nationalism is the agency of such transformations and reinventions, which are components of the making of modernity and are 'embedded in homogenous, empty time, created amnesias and estrangement', in the words of Benedict Anderson (1998, 57).

To integrate research on Greek nationalism into the contemporary debate on the subject, such issues – and of course others – will need to be addressed in substantive ways in discussing historical evidence and in attempting to recover from the sources, very often forgotten ones, the process of historical, intellectual, and political change connected with nationalism. The question of evidence and sources brings us to our second proposed dialogue, with empirical research. In this task, I can be much more concise, indeed epigrammatic by comparison with my comments on the role of theory. The following paradox is observable in the study of Greek nationalism. Whereas in writing on nationalism within Greece we can very often observe a serious divorce from theory, writing on Greek nationalism outside Greece is marked by an even more serious divorce from research. Although many scholars are keen to pronounce on nationalism, they show no similar eagerness to read the sources and pertinent literature, especially that produced in Greek.

This pathology is reflected especially in the peculiar alacrity, indeed ardour, with which anthropologists like to make pronouncements on Greek nationalism. Generalizing from the limited evidence of ethnographic research, very often on a small island or a remote village or region, as a rule innocent of the whole learned

¹⁰ On this, see further chapter 13 by Peter Mackridge in the present volume.

¹¹ It is high time for students of nationalism to revisit the work of this forgotten but very perceptive thinker, who on account of his anarchism remained on the margins of scholarship as well as of politics, a fact that well illustrates the connection between the two (Rucker 1937).

tradition that has been the main mediator of the articulation of nationalism, and consequently oblivious to the historicity of the phenomenon, anthropologists seem to derive a special pleasure from drawing conclusions – as a rule ignoring the work of non-anthropologists who have looked at these subjects – about the totalizing ‘triumph’ of the *ethnos*, the viciousness of the pervasiveness of nationalist values in Greek life, the identification of Orthodoxy with nationalist values, and so on. In so doing, anthropologists seem to forget that the demonization of nationalism does not really supply the most credible foundation for a critical understanding, and that such phenomena as they attempt to describe are usually the outcomes of complex historical processes, even at the micro-level of local communities. Therefore they should not be described in a language that makes them appear as intrinsic and defining long-term features of Greek society, a special trait of ‘Greek human nature’, as it were.

Unless this unwillingness to engage in primary source research is reversed, no convincing work will be produced. I have the impression that this is a recent pathology, which is tending to become endemic in Greek studies: it is recent, because when Stephen Xydis wrote his classic account of Greek nationalism forty years ago, he made extensive use of source material in Greek and set a serious standard for the generation that followed him (Xydis 1969). This appears to be a peculiar disease of Greek studies, by comparison to Turkish studies for instance, where foreign scholars writing on Turkey use Turkish sources extensively. To a considerable degree this is also a question of professional ethics and standards, and the relevant failures are only symptoms of the deeper problem arising from what we have described as the failure of canonization. Unless this pathology in the dialogue with research can be cured, there can be very little hope for the progression of Greek studies outside Greece towards canonization.

Epilogue

To conclude. For Greece to become established as a serious paradigmatic case and not just as an incidental reference in the field of studies on nationalism, two requirements of scholarship need to be met: the circumspect, indeed ‘economical’, reflective and critical use of theory in pertinent case studies, and the grounding of such work upon a serious dialogue with the whole range of source material pertaining to each particular subject. Only thus can the general standard of the field rise to the professionally desirable level, happily represented by the contributors to the present volume, that will allow work on Greece to be sought after and read by scholars in other disciplines and specialisms, not just as another instance of ‘ethnic scholarship’, but because it is interesting and important in itself. If we reach that stage, we might be able to say that we have with some success resisted the inequitable international division of academic labour and the pressures toward marginalization it entails. We will then have accomplished a few important steps towards the canonization of Greece – and most especially of modern Greece’s ‘making’ – as an academic field of study.

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