Κάμπος

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Greek Orthodoxy: an exclusive slogan or a universal mystery?

Bruce Clark

All religious discourse is a struggle to reconcile the particular and the universal, the specific and the transcendent. At its best, religious experience enables us both to focus intently on a particular moment in time, and see that moment in the light of eternity; to understand the true significance of a particular place by grasping its relationship to the whole of creation.

Interpreters of the Christian revelation have faced this challenge in an especially acute form. When they explore the mystery of the Incarnation, they have to hold in balance the two poles of a great paradox. On one hand, the Word or Logos has existed from the beginning, and He is with us always; on the other Christ lived and died at a particular place and time. He spoke a particular language, lived under a particular regime, and was brought up within a particular culture.

A good deal of the New Testament, both the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, is devoted to reconciling the particular circumstances of Christ's appearance with the universal significance of his Incarnation and Resurrection. He represents both the Messiah awaited by the Jews, and the moment when Judaism is transcended. He has come not to abolish the Jewish Law but to fulfil it. Yet Christ redefines "Israel" to mean a community of believers which transcends the boundaries of geography and culture. He tells a Samaritan woman that in future, people will worship neither in Jerusalem, nor in the particular mountain which her people call sacred, "but in Spirit and in truth" (John 4, 23).

The Christian aspiration to sweep aside all cultural and linguistic barriers is most vividly conveyed in the second chapter of the Acts of Apostles, describing the descent of the Holy Spirit which miraculously enabled people from many different countries to hear the apostles' message in their own language

(Acts 2, 1-11). Inspired by the Pentecost story, eastern Christian thought places particularly strong emphasis on the role of the Spirit in overcoming the contradiction between particularity and universality. One of the most distinguished Greek Orthodox theologians of modern times, Metropolitan John Zizioulas, elaborated on this point during a recent lecture:[1]

> The fact that the Son of God entered a specific culture, that is the Hebrew or Jewish milieu, at a certain time in history, may be easily taken to imply that He sanctified and affirmed only a particular culture, calling all other cultures to be converted to this particular one. Indeed a Christology which is not conditioned by Pneumatology (an understanding of the Holy Spirit) may lead to such a conclusion.
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> But the Holy Spirit is present everywhere. He blows where He wills and fills all things, as the prayer to Him says [...]. In the Spirit, Christ ceases to be Jewish or Greek. The Spirit allows Christ to enter every culture and assume it by purifying it, by placing that culture in the light of ultimate meaning.

It is significant, from the Orthodox point of view, that the gift of Pentecost did not involve the apostles speaking some kind of Esperanto which all their listeners miraculously learned. On the contrary, the linguistic differences between the "Parthians and Medes and Elamites and dwellers in Mesopotamia" remained intact, but they were somehow rendered irrelevant.

The paradoxical ideal of universality without uniformity is also reflected in the Orthodox understanding of ecclesiology, or church structure. The world's Orthodox communities are, ideally at least, linked like an unbreakable chain, by virtue of common participation in the sacraments, but they are not subject to any single hierarchical authority, comparable with the Vatican. Nor are they expected to conform to any particular cultural or political model. On the contrary, from an Orthodox perspective, it is entirely to be expected that Church organisations in various countries will, in significant ways, reflect the political and cultural circumstances in which they find themselves – and therefore look very different from one another, at least on the

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[1] Lecture delivered at Balamand, Lebanon, on 4 December 1999 (see www.balamand.edu.lb/theology).

surface. In the Soviet Union, what remained of the Russian Orthodox Church was organised as a branch of the communist power structure; under the Ottoman empire, the Greek church was effectively a tool of imperial administration. More recently, as a tiny Christian island within overwhelmingly Muslim Turkey, the Patriarchate of Constantinople has managed to carve out a new role for itself, entirely consistent with the Patriarch's position as a law-biding Turkish subject, by campaigning against environmental pollution. In the United States meanwhile, where the public face of Christianity tends to be more muscular and hearty, Orthodox bishops have been keen participants at political conventions and White House prayer breakfasts. What all these examples highlight is the way in which Orthodoxy – to a much greater extent than Roman Catholicism – can change its external appearance while keeping the inner core of its mystical life intact.

Most paradoxically of all, Orthodox Christians in one nation may find themselves at war with co-religionists in another nation; that state of affairs would certainly be regarded as tragic but it would not compromise the validity of the Orthodox faith in either country. In 1904, when war broke out between Russia and Japan, the Russian missionary to the Japanese, Bishop Nikolai Kasatkin urged his flock to pray for their own army and give thanks for its victories – while explaining that he, as a subject of the Tsar, could not join these prayers. At the same time, the Japanese Orthodox were told to remember that "they have another fatherland to which all men belong without distinction of nationality".[2] Theologically speaking, the fact that Japanese adherents of eastern Christianity were at war with the world's most powerful Orthodox empire did not make them any less Orthodox; nor did imply that the Holy Spirit was absent from the life of the Church in Japan.

I thought it worthwhile to preface my remarks about Orthodoxy and Hellenism by offering those few hints of the subtle, almost baffling way in which the eastern Christian tradition seeks to solve the problem of universality versus

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[2] Quoted by Father Luke Veronis, *Missionaries, monks, and martyrs: Making disciples of all nations* (Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing 1994), p. 120.

particularity. The manner in which Orthodoxy expresses itself in a specific place and period will invariably reflect that place and period; but the Spirit transcends the limitations of space and time, often in ways which are not immediately visible to the individuals who are participating in this mysterious process. It may often prove impossible for people to make a clear distinction in their mind between their Orthodox faith and other claims on their loyalty, including the community and nation in which they have grown up. Nor, even from the most objective viewpoint, can the "essence" of Orthodoxy be extracted, or abstracted, by some simple technique from the national cultures which have been interwoven with that faith for many centuries. As Father Alexander Schmemann noted in a brilliant essay on Orthodoxy in the United States: "One cannot by a surgical operation [...] distil a pure 'Orthodoxy in itself' without disconnecting it from its flesh and blood, making it a lifeless form."[3] But the mere fact that there are so many different types of "flesh and blood" to which Orthodoxy can be connected is a reminder that in the light of eternity, there is no single culture, regime or society which guarantees its participants a swift route to salvation.

So much for theology. Having begun my remarks by exploring some of the paradoxes of Orthodox ecclesiology, I would now like to make an almost complete change of subject matter and tone by remarking, in an impressionistic way, on one of the most surprising developments which seems to have occurred in Greece during the 20 years or so in which I have been either a resident or a frequent visitor to that country. I am referring to the fact that for an increasing number of Greeks, of many different educational and economic levels, the Orthodox faith has, so to speak, resurfaced from the collective unconscious and become a powerful factor in their conscious experience.

Let me digress for a moment to say what I do not mean by this. On the face of things, the clearest sign of religion's increasing salience is the fact that relations between Church and state now generate far more passion than any other public issue in Greece. With the fading away of cold-war arguments over

[3] Father Alexander Schmemann. "Problems of Orthodoxy in America. The Canonical Problem", *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 8.2 (1964) 67-84 (see www.orthodox.info/ecumenism).

political ideology and economics, the traditional Greek parties of left and right are rapidly losing their appeal, and quarrels about religion and identity have to some extent filled that vacuum. It is the Church, rather than any political party, which now calls hundreds of thousands of people into the street to demonstrate against government policies. In summer 2000, it organised two huge rallies to protest against the government's decision to issue identity cards that make no reference to the holder's religious affiliation – and to warn the government against any further moves to downgrade the role of Orthodoxy as the semi-official creed of the Greek state. The Holy Synod has begun a campaign to collect millions of signatures in support of its demand for a referendum on the issue. With Prime Minister Costas Simitis unwilling to back down over what he, too, regards as a matter of principle, relations between the state and the Orthodox hierarchy are in a state of almost unprecedented ferment. All this makes for a very different climate from the one which prevailed in the early 1980s, allowing the newly elected Socialist government to ignore – at little or no political cost – the hierarchy's advice on matters ranging from civil marriage to nudism to abortion.

I would suggest, however, that the most important signs of religion's rising importance in the lives of many Greeks are not to be found in noisy public arguments or quasi-political protest meetings. The fact that such meetings can take place is, at most, a symptom of some profounder developments which are unfolding beneath the surface.

Something so elusive as the importance of religious belief can only be judged subjectively and perhaps tentatively; I do not believe that statistics about church-going or parish registers are an accurate indicator, especially in Greece where religious practice has often been a bewildering mixture of formalism and real devotion. All I can report is that among the individuals, communities and extended families I have known in Greece for the past 20 years, a much higher proportion takes the Orthodox faith seriously – not just as a slogan or national symbol, but as an abiding mystery, with the power to transform human beings and reconcile them to their Creator – than was the case when I first visited that country.

During my four years as a foreign correspondent in Athens in the early 1980s, I interacted socially and professionally with people from every walk of life. In all that time, I do not think I met more than a couple of people below the age of 40 for whom the Church was anything other than a faded relic of the past. Some saw it is a charming and beautiful relic, and others welcomed its decline. But it was very, very unusual to find a young, well-educated person who took the teachings of the Church seriously.

These days, by contrast, it is no longer a surprise to meet young Athenians who observe the fasts, use prayer-ropes, consult spiritual directors and make regular use of the Orthodox sacraments. Of course, these external signs of piety are confined to a minority, and they do always point to an authentic religious experience; but they sometimes do. In Athens and the provinces, churches seem fuller of people of all ages. There are a number of parishes in the greater Athens area which have had striking success in attracting young, professionally successful people and their families, not just as churchgoers but as active participants in community life. The monasteries of the Holy Mountain, which appeared to be in precipitous decline only 25 years ago, are experiencing something more akin to growing pains with numbers rising, the average age falling, and the average educational level much higher than before.

Of course, the picture is not a simple one. Even as the Church makes gains in some places, it is continuing to decline in others. The number of priests serving small villages is falling, simply because the number of small villages is falling. But as a broader trend, the resurgence of Orthodoxy as a force in people's lives is unmistakable. Moreover, at the risk of sounding contrarian, I would argue that it has no particular connection with the appointment, in 1998, of a charismatic and controversial figure as Archbishop of Athens, and the re-emergence of church-state relations as a hotly-contested public issue.

For one thing, the revival of active interest in Orthodoxy predates the appointment of Archbishop Christodoulos by at least five years. Nor is there any simple correlation between support for the Archbishop over the policy issues currently in dispute, and religious sentiment as such. There are Orthodox Christian believers who think it would be better for everyone if

the Church were more clearly separated from the state; and there may well be people who take the hierarchy's side, on grounds of nationalism or cultural conservatism, but are not particularly devout.

It is probably true, however, that the decision by the Archdiocese of Athens to do battle over certain areas of government policy – and by implication, to challenge the right of secular institutions to be sole regulators of those areas – would not have been conceivable if there had not been some rediscovery of Orthodoxy's gifts at a much more private level. The underlying religious revival provided a context in which church-state relations could become a controversial issue; but I do not believe the relationship between those two developments is any closer than that.

How can this revival be explained? The theologically correct answer is that the Holy Spirit is at work But on a more worldly level, is there anything useful one can say about the circumstances in which Greece's "modernisation" – as a secular-humanist would define that term – has seemingly gone into reverse? I think it is possible at least to describe the background to this revival in political, cultural and even geopolitical terms, though it would be a mistake to view any one of those elements, or even all of them taken together, as decisive.

One factor has been negative. With the passage of time, the Church's image has recovered from the damage it suffered as a result of its close association with the military regime of 1967-74. For a decade or so after the Junta's fall, anybody in the social and political mainstream who laid particular emphasis on the link between Hellenism and Orthodoxy would have risked incurring ridicule or worse by conjuring up memories of the colonels and their slogan of "Greece of the Christian Greeks". For a whole generation of Greek citizens, religious teaching became associated with the sterile authoritarianism and bone-headed chauvinism that characterised official discourse – whether in schools or army barracks or public speeches – during the dictatorship.

A secular sociologist would no doubt add that Orthodoxy's revival is as a sort of rearguard action against the forces of globalisation and homogenisation. As the influence of global markets and mass culture sweep over Greece, like many other

countries, they seem to trigger a sort of defensive mechanism which gives people a renewed interest in and attachment to the things which mark them out from other places. If that is the main reason for the revival, one might expect the resurgence of Orthodoxy to go hand in hand with renewed attachment to non-Christian aspects of Greek culture, from the Karagiozis puppet theatre to rebetika songs.

It is also a commonplace of modern history that in societies undergoing intensive modernisation, there can be upsurges of popular piety – often prompted by visions or apparitions, or increased devotion to local saints or sacred objects – which are almost beyond the control of conventional religious authorities, and are in certain ways made possible by mass literacy and communications.[4] The current resurgence of Orthodoxy in Greece might certainly be described as a late example of that phenomenon, although that is by no means a full or adequate explanation.

Another part of the context is geopolitical, at least in the broad sense. The collapse of communism in the Balkans and the wars over the future of ex-Yugoslavia have revived deeply-rooted fears and atavistic loyalties, which are often conceived and described in religious terms.

Personally, I would argue that the objective importance of Orthodoxy as a geopolitical factor in south-eastern Europe has been exaggerated. It is by no means clear, for example, that the traditionally Orthodox nations of Romania and Bulgaria have had, either recently or over the past century, the same geopolitical orientation as Greece or Serbia. Nor has a common Orthodox heritage prevented tension between Athens and Skopje, or dissuaded Russia from backing the Muslim Abkhaz against the ancient Orthodox nation of Georgia.

But the wars of Yugoslav succession certainly did lay bare a deep well of pro-Serbian feeling in Greece. I would argue that this is not so much rooted in religious sentiment as in common fear of perceived adversaries such as the Turks and Albanians. But it so happens that Orthodoxy is the most obvious common denomi-

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[4] See Nadieszda Kizenko, *A Prodigal Saint: Father John of Kronstadt and the Russian people* (Pennsylvania State University Press 2000), especially chapters 2-3.

nator in the Greek and Serbian heritages; so the easiest way of understanding and describing the friendship between those two countries is to call it solidarity among fellow Orthodox Christians. And some religious links between Greece and Serbia do exist. Most of the senior Serbian clergy, for example, have studied in Greece and speak fluent Greek – although, interestingly, many of them seem more western-oriented and universalist in their cultural outlook than their Greek counterparts.

To a striking extent, Greece's alignment with Serbia – a stance which puts it at odds with most west European nations – has tended to heal ideological differences within Greek society. Demonstrations against NATO's air attacks on Belgrade were supported with equal fervour by Greek Orthodox bishops who sympathised with their co-religionists and old-fashioned Marxists who instinctively disapproved of military action by an American-led alliance. This marks a contrast with the cold-war fault lines which ran down the middle of Greek society: on one hand there were people who were self-consciously Orthodox, politically conservative and therefore pro-American, and on the other, there were people on the mildly anti-clerical left who admired Soviet Russia, more on ideological grounds than cultural ones. In Turkey, too, the war over Kosovo led to a similar fading of ideological division in favour of geopolitical solidarity: leftists and traditional conservatives overcame their lingering anti-Americanism to endorse NATO's air war; and they hailed the outcome of that war as a victory against the "Orthodox axis".

But whatever the effects of a perceived "Orthodox axis" on people's cultural and religious consciousness, I think we should remain cautious about acknowledging that such an axis objectively exists.

Certainly, the existence of an "Orthodox bloc" in international affairs has been posited both by outsiders – of whom the most famous is Professor Sam Huntingdon, the ideologue of "clashing civilisations" – and by insiders, such as the Greek, Serbian or Russian nationalists who regard recent events in the Balkans as a conspiracy against Orthodoxy. But is there even a trace of truth in the assertion that the recent history of the Balkans reflects some sort of anti-Orthodox plot? Or do such theories dangerously ignore the possibility that leaders, govern-

ments and nationalist movements may at times prove to be their own worst enemies?

On reflection, I find only one, tiny grain of truth in the conspiracy theory. When outside powers – and I am thinking particularly of the United States – take stock of the Balkans and their interests there, they do not only consider the region's internal dynamics. They also consider the likely knock-on effects of events in the Balkans on other regions which may be of similar or greater strategic importance. And it is certainly true that one of the factors, though by no means the only one, which informed American policy towards the Bosnian war was fear that a collapse of the Bosnian Muslim cause would discredit the United States in many other parts of the Islamic world, and make it harder for pro-western leaders of Muslim countries to retain credibility.

It was also true that the likely knock-on effects of a defeat for the Bosnian Muslims were more damaging than the likely knock-on effects of a defeat for Serbia. While the latter outcome would certainly cause unhappiness in Greece and Russia, this reaction was less likely to have unbearable political consequences – such as a complete reversal in either country's orientation – than a surge of an anti-Americanism throughout the Islamic world. This does not imply that there was any conspiracy against Orthodox Christianity – merely that factors other than the welfare or sentiments of Orthodox nations took priority in the calculations of the leading western powers.

What connection, if any, exists between the trade-offs of geopolitics and the private deliberations of Greek citizens as they rediscover their historic faith and explore the answers it provides to the mysteries of life, death and God? Arguably, none whatsoever. Geopolitics never saved anybody's soul – or condemned anybody's soul, as the paradoxical story about the Japanese Orthodox makes clear. But I think it is true that some Greeks were prompted to re-examine their spiritual heritage as a result of fear and uncertainty engendered by conflict in the Balkans – and therefore embarked on a voyage of discovery which turned out to be a spiritual quest rather than a purely political or cultural one.

Moving far away from the world of high politics or geopolitics, I think another important factor in Orthodoxy's revival

has been the influence of perhaps half a dozen *startsi*, individuals who have been credited with mystical and pastoral gifts as a result of ascetical discipline and prayer. There is only one of these people whom I feel able to describe in any detail, and I think it worth digressing for a moment to speak of him.

Before he passed away in 1991, Father Iakovos Tsalikis was the abbot of the monastery of Osios David in northern Evvia, leading its revival from a state of near-extinction to become one of the most important places of pilgrimage in Greece. He was born in Asia Minor to a family which had produced many generations of monks. He was brought to Greece as an infant and raised in the austere conditions of a remote Evvia village. He had very little formal education but his piety, humility and ability to discern people's innermost feelings exercised an extraordinary influence over everyone who met him. People who sought his advice included judges, army officers and churchmen who were far senior to him in rank. Some of the 20 or so monks who make up the Osios David community today are highly educated and could easily have made successful worldly careers. Their community, and the memory of Father Iakovos, are held in enormous esteem throughout northern Evvia and indeed throughout Greece, although they are virtually unknown to the wider world.

Father Iakovos was certainly not a Greek nationalist or a nationalist of any other kind. He was utterly indifferent to earthly powers. He often used to speak of intense, secret piety practised in Ottoman times in his ancestral homeland of "Asia Minor" and, in a gentle way, make unfavourable comparisons with his adopted country, Greece. This does not mean that he was an irredentist who wanted to claim Asia Minor for Greece, or a nostalgist for the Ottoman Empire. He was simply more interested in the kingdom of God than in the realms of this world.

The contrast between Orthodoxy as a geopolitical slogan, and Orthodoxy as a mystical path to union with God, open to human beings of any ethnic background, is vividly brought home in a thought-provoking new book on the "Orthodox world" by the journalist and travel-writer Victoria Clark.[5]

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[5] Victoria Clark, *Why angels fall: a portrait of Orthodox Europe from Byzantium to Kosovo* (London: Macmillan 2000).

Without fully explaining either, she makes particular use of two terms to describe what she regards as least attractive, and most attractive, in the Orthodox heritage. The first is "fyletism" or racial exclusivity, a heresy that was roundly condemned by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1872 but continues to rage in much of eastern Europe. The second is "hesychasm", a term she uses to cover Orthodox mysticism in general, although in some contexts it has a more specific meaning.

She has certainly hit on an important point: the human heart, defined in Orthodox theology as the part of our being which longs for communion for God, has no nationality; yet there is a great deal of religious and quasi-religious discourse in traditionally Orthodox countries, including Greece, which seems to obscure that point – as though the salvation of a person's soul mainly depended on being born into the right ethnic group or geopolitical bloc.

Indeed, this paradox is such an acute one that it risks torpedoing the whole premise of her book – whose self-imposed task is to describe "eastern Orthodox Europe, an entity whose separate values, traditions and therefore history we have at best denigrated and at worst ignored". But is there really such a thing as "Orthodox Europe" or any territorially-defined "Orthodox world"? This very proposition is cast in doubt by one of her most interesting informants, Father Sava Janjic, who is known as the cyber-monk because of his prolific use of the Internet to highlight the predicament of Kosovo's ancient Serbian monasteries. If there really were a territorial standoff between Orthodox nations and the rest of the world, then Father Sava's job would presumably place him in the front line. But he makes the opposite point: he believes the future of Orthodoxy lies mainly in the West, which has become thirsty for eastern Christendom's spiritual refreshment; the traditionally Orthodox countries, by contrast, may be too fascinated by western technology and consumerism to make proper use of their own heritage.[6]

If Father Sava's thesis sounds far-fetched – as it certainly would to many Greek ears – it may be worth noting that Orthodoxy is almost the only form of Christianity which is gaining

[6] Ibid., p. 88.

significant numbers of new adherents in western Europe (while also losing the active allegiance of many migrants of "ethnic Orthodox" heritage). The number of Orthodox parishes in Britain has doubled over the last 15 years to about 200 – to a large extent because of converts from various forms of Western Christianity. (I should put my own cards on the table and say that I have the great joy to be one of them.)

Orthodoxy is also taking deep root in France and Germany among worshippers whose ancestry, a couple of generations back, may have been in Russia or the eastern Mediterranean but who are now firmly established in their adopted homeland. Distinguished Orthodox Christians with no "ethnic" connection to the faith include Olivier Clément, the French theologian, and Sir John Tavener, who is perhaps the most important composer of contemporary religious music in Britain.

Is there any connection, then, between the revival of Orthodoxy in Greece, and in other places where it has deep historic roots, and the growth of Orthodoxy, albeit from small beginnings, in the western world? Are the two phenomena related, and even if they started separately, will they eventually converge?

For the reasons suggested at the beginning of this paper, it is inevitable and perhaps even desirable that Orthodoxy's style and appearance, and its public discourse – insofar as it touches on matters other than the faith itself – will vary enormously from country to country and time to time. So perhaps it is neither tragic nor amazing if Orthodoxy as a newly-discovered faith in western Europe, appealing in the first instance to the relatively highbrow, should look and sound rather different from the same faith in Greece and other traditionally Orthodox societies.

Perhaps understandably, "cradle Orthodox" are often a little wary of those from other cultures who embrace their faith, without adopting the cultural baggage that goes with it. In the United States, for example, a group of former evangelical Protestant ministers who had become Orthodox by conviction found it very hard, at first, to persuade any of the established, "ethnic" Church organisations (Greek, Serbian, Russian and so on) to accept them; eventually the (Damascus-based) Patriarchate of Antioch took them in. Now they are a significant part of the American Orthodox scene.

Bishop Kallistos Ware, the Oxford academic who is probably the best-known exponent of Orthodoxy in the English language, has told the story of meeting a Greek dentist who declared himself to be an atheist, but nonetheless Orthodox by dint of cultural and ethnic heritage. All English people, the same informant argued, should be Anglicans for similar reasons. Such an attitude comes close to "henotheism", the belief that there is one deity for each nation, but no universal or transcendental truth. Every eastern Christian who is not of "ethnic Orthodox" heritage will from time to time face a reaction of scepticism, puzzlement or plain hostility among those who were raised in the faith.

Given the significant differences of political culture and historical experience between Greece and most west European countries, it is perhaps not surprising that the political causes associated with Orthodoxy in Greece are somewhat remote from the concerns of Orthodox converts in, say, Britain or Germany. Take the issue of identity cards. Whatever their religious beliefs, most British people would instinctively be suspicious of any requirement that they be required to carry proof of their identity – let alone one that specified their personal convictions.

If it is possible to make a generalisation about the encounter between "cradle" Orthodoxy and "adopted" Orthodoxy, it is probably this: whatever the cultural or political or economic variations between them, Orthodox Christians who understand their faith as a path to union with God, which all human beings are called on to tread, will invariably find ways of understanding one another. (Nothing about the cultural or personal background of Grand Duchess Elizabeth, raised as a sheltered Anglo-German noblewoman, prepared her to care for destitutes in the slums of Moscow or face martyrdom at the hands of Bolsheviks. But she has become one of the revered saints of the twentieth century.) On the other hand, those who regard their Orthodox identity primarily as a cultural or geopolitical determinant, like the dentist described by Bishop Kallistos, are bound to be suspicious when "outsiders" lay claim to their heritage.

Ultimately it is not the cultural or political communities of the world that will converge, or form alliances, on the strength of their common faith. On the contrary, it is the hope and belief of Orthodox Christians that they, almost by definition, will

form a new sort of community, perhaps not visible to the naked eye, as fellow citizens of the "heavenly fatherland" to which the Russian missionary in Japan referred. But that mysterious process has no automatic implications for the civic or geo-political loyalties of the people involved.

Having said all that, it is sometimes hard to observe the difference in tone and style between Orthodoxy in, say, the theological lecture-rooms of Cambridge and, say, the streets of Athens without feeling a twinge of regret. After all, neither camp sets out with any insuperable prejudice against the other. While voices do exist in the Greek Church which are openly hostile to western Europe in general, and to the European Union in particular, that is not the position of the Holy Synod of Athens, which has repeatedly emphasised Greece's integral role in "European civilisation" and its support for Greek participation in the European Union, including monetary union.[7] Like the more sophisticated variety of British Tory Euro-sceptic, the Church of Athens has carefully steered its criticism away from the European Union as such, and aimed it instead at a government which is alleged to be acting over-hastily and unnecessarily to sacrifice national identity on the European altar.

And on the "western Orthodox" side, there is no certainly no anti-Greek prejudice. Indeed, the encounter of a small but influential group of Englishmen with Orthodoxy (some of whom became sympathetic observers of that faith, while others actually adopted it) was a by-product of the last great wave of "philhellenism": the war service of classically-educated British officers who found themselves exposed, in the Cretan mountains or the plains of Thessaly, to a new sort of Greek and a new sort of Greekness.

Perhaps the outstanding member of this group was Philip Sherrard, the Anglo-Irish translator, critic, man of letters and theologian, who had a deep knowledge of Greek history – whether ancient, medieval or modern – and was also a thought-provoking interpreter of his adopted Orthodox creed. His critique of modern Greek religious discourse was a contrarian one, but I think a useful one for anyone trying to understand why

[7] Speech by Archbishop Christodoulos at a public meeting in Athens on 21 June 2000 (available on www.ecclesia.gr).

Orthodoxy sounds and feels so different in different environments. He did not upbraid the Greek hierarchy for being too anti-western, but for being too western, in outlook. Sherrard applied this critique both to the post-schism eastern Church in general and to the Church of independent Greece in particular.

As a convert to Orthodoxy, Sherrard naturally believed the "eastern" side was in the right over the specific issues which led to the schism: Papal supremacy and the inclusion of the "filioque" in the Creed which seemed to downgrade the Holy Spirit. But as Sherrard saw things, the schism was not only a disaster for western thought; it also did serious harm to the east, by prompting it to abandon Christian universalism in favour of a self-conscious, defensive Hellenism. An extreme example of this was the neo-Platonist crypto-pagan atmosphere which prevailed in Mystra during Byzantium's twilight years.

While some readings of history emphasise the way in which Ottoman rule, in a sense, "saved" Orthodoxy by sealing it off from western influences, Sherrard makes the opposite point. Even while pickled in Ottoman aspic, Sherrard argues, the Patriarchate was buffeted by unfortunate western ideas about the respective merits of different moments in Greek history. In the sixteenth century, for example, the Patriarchate appointed a rationalist Aristotelian philosopher to be head of its academy in Constantinople; later in the Ottoman period, it tried to establish a college to teach western rationalism on Mount Athos – which the monks, commendably in Sherrard's view, burned down. [8]

If the wrong sort of western influence infected the Patriarchate, located in the Queen of cities and heir in some sense to Byzantium's universalist tradition as well as its Hellenist one, then this problem was even more serious – again, from Sherrard's idiosyncratically Orthodox perspective – for a Church hierarchy which was based in Athens, the great metropolis of pre-Christian Greece, and was closely involved in the creation and administration of a modern Greek state.

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[8] For this point, and for Sherrard's argument in general, see John Campbell and Philip Sherrard, *Modern Greece* (London: Ernest Benn 1968), especially Chapter 6.

Since the foundation of that state, the Archdiocese of Athens has gradually extended its authority at the expense of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, through a process that roughly, but not precisely, coincided with the expansion of the Greek state. The secular statesmen who forged modern Greece regarded the creation of a Church that was independent from Constantinople as an essential component of state-building, whatever their own religious beliefs or lack of them.

For a number of overlapping reasons, the Athenian hierarchy's ideology – and here I am referring not to the Orthodox faith's unchanging essence, but the particular manner in which it was presented – was almost bound to be more occidental, in certain ways, than that of its mother church on the Bosphorus. (Here again I am following, and perhaps slightly elaborating, the argument advanced by Sherrard, who was second to none in his fascination with Hellenism, and his devotion to Orthodoxy, but regarded them as "two incompatible ways of thought".)

Why then was the Athens Church, whose organisation was modelled in part on the great seculariser of Russia, Peter the Great, destined in certain respects to grow more "western" in outlook? For one thing, the project in which it played a part – namely the creation of a linguistically and "ethnically" homogenous nation-state, based on a self-consciously cultivated national identity – was itself a modern, western idea, exported to the traditional empires of eastern Europe from Napoleonic France and later from Germany and Italy. For another, the construction of the Greek polity was largely, if not wholly, made possible by one of the characteristic devices of modern state-building: the reinvention of religious communities as territorially-defined political units.

Perhaps the most obvious example of this phenomenon has been the state of Israel, created as a homeland for people who were of Jewish heritage but not necessarily believers in the Jewish faith or even theists. But the Jewish diaspora, which the state of Israel was designed to gather in, had always been a more or less well-defined community in which religious practice and cultural identity were viewed as co-extensive, and unique to that community. In the case of Greece, the application of the "re-invention" principle was in some ways stranger, since it required a "fencing in" of certain adherents of the Christian faith, which

aspires to be a universal creed, not confined to one ethnic or cultural group.

Consider the paradox. The Hellenic Kingdom, or Republic, has always been organised as a largely secular state, in some ways more so than Britain where the Queen is head of the Church and bishops sit in the legislature. Yet its defining principle, the yardstick by which some people were granted citizenship and others denied it, was to a large extent a religious one. I am thinking both of the fact that the first Greek constitution defined Greek citizens as Christians living on the kingdom's territory, and also, in particular, of the population exchange of 1923, through which Greece and Turkey became "mono-ethnic" states. The criterion by which the population exchange was enforced was a religious one – so that Greek-speaking Muslims from Crete were deported to Turkey, and Orthodox Christians in central Anatolia who spoke no language but Turkish were dumped in the northern Greek plains. Whatever these people "really" were – and it is only in the minds of feverish nationalists that such questions have clear or meaningful answers – they or their children were soon told what they were: "ethnic" Greeks or "ethnic" Turks, and heirs to the partially real, partially invented histories of whichever country their religion had assigned them to.

So in a certain sense, the statement that "to be Greek is to be Orthodox" (which can often be reversed, so that "to be Orthodox is to be Greek") is more than an assertion about cultural or religious history; it is a plain statement of fact. Orthodox Christians who lived in Asia Minor (leaving aside the minorities that were allowed to remain in Istanbul and two Turkish islands) were pronounced Greek, whether they liked it or not. And people living on Greek territory who happened to be Muslims (unless they were in western Thrace or a couple of other pockets) were pronounced non-Greek – again, whether they liked it or not. In medieval central Europe, the expression "cuius regio, eius religio" had been coined to describe the principle that people should follow the religion of their ruler; nation-building in the Balkans employed almost the opposite principle: "cuius religio, eius regio".

Small wonder, then, that religious as well as political language in modern Greece should lay enormous emphasis on the

idea that Hellenism and Orthodoxy are co-extensive, and that religious as well as political leaders have great difficulty accepting the idea that Greece could ever turn into a multi-cultural, multi-confessional state, as most of its European Union partners have become. Nor is it surprising to hear the assertion that without Orthodoxy, there would be no Greece. As well as being a value-judgement – on the way the Church preserved certain aspects of Hellenism during the Ottoman period – it also expresses a factual truth, almost a tautology – given that modern Greece was quite literally constructed out of the Orthodox Christian subjects of certain parts of the Ottoman empire,

For most of the time since it helped to found the modern Greek state, the Church has never had to think twice about the stance it should adopt in worldly affairs. It merely had to remind people of its historic role not just as a standard-bearer of the Greek national cause, but as co-manager of the whole project of statehood: a project which did not so much imply the semi-sacralisation of the state as the semi-secularisation of the religious community of Orthodox Christians.

Now the role played by the "Church in captivity" – serving as a department of state for a Muslim theocracy, the Ottoman Empire – may have been a strange enough function for Orthodox bishops to carry out; but the Church's post-independence role – which involved merging itself with a modern, ethnically-defined nation-state – has also required some ideological contortions.

Strangest of all, perhaps, was the fact that the Church of Athens had to make concessions, in its "public" ideology, to a notion of Hellenism which seemed to place more emphasis on Greece's pagan past than on Christian Byzantium. That is because the ideology of the modern Greek state, of which it is in a sense the co-sponsor, was based to a large extent on the cultural choices of western philhellenes, who in the nineteenth century at least, found far more merit in Aristotle and Aristophanes than in St Gregory of Nyssa or St John Chrysostom.

One of the characteristics of modern, nationalist ideology is that it seeks to play down contrasts and contradictions between different phases in a people's history, if necessary by sweeping inconvenient facts under the carpet and exaggerating continuity. Once it has been firmly established that history's most powerful

truth is the abiding genius of (say) the Irish, the Serbs, or the Lithuanians, then it hardly matters which phase of the nation's glorious past is under examination. At any given moment, the "ancestors" can be presented either as exceptionally noble savages, or remarkably civilised for the times they lived in, or perhaps both at once.

Greek nationalist discourse – whether secular or semi-religious – rests on an attempt to iron out or play down the differences between ancient Athens and Christian Byzantium. But that is not easy – given that the very term Hellenism was used in a pejorative sense during the first millennium of Byzantine history. It is particularly difficult to construct a version of the Greek past which maintains the primacy of the Christian revelation as the most important event in human history, while continuing to bask in the compliments of westerners who – at least until recently – found vastly more merit in pre-Christian than in post-Christian Greek thought and art.

The difficulty of solving this almost insoluble problem has often resulted in a nationalist discourse – whether secular or religious – that is somewhat shrill and defensive. It contrasts the glorious past of Greece with the inferior heritage of western Europe ("we were building theatres and temples while you were painted savages") while succumbing slavishly to certain western prejudices as to which aspects of the Hellenic past are meritworthy.

Quite justifiably, the "Athenian" (as opposed to Byzantine) understanding of history always assigns a crucial role to the appearance of St Paul in Athens and his assertion that the Christian revelation represents in full what his listeners have dimly apprehended. To recall the words of the apostle: "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by [...], I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you" (Acts 17,22-3).

The story's references to Athens ("a city wholly given to idolatry") and its philosophers (who "spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing") are hardly flattering, but for modern Greek readings of Christian history, St Paul's speech plays a pivotal role: it provides a link between Orthodoxy and the philosophy and art of the ancient

world, whose high standing in the eyes of the West is crucial to Greece's legitimacy and self-esteem.

But ironically, the very "westernism" of this emphasis may be rather off-putting to westerners who are interested in Orthodoxy. Whatever drew Sir John Tavener or Olivier Clément or Philip Sherrard to Orthodoxy, I suspect it was probably not any conventional theories about the role played by Greece in "founding European civilisation". On the contrary it is more likely to have been a questioning of the very premises on which the notion of European civilisation is based.

Whether Christian or not, few modern observers would deny the brilliance of the Greek philosophical tradition. But the story of how it was distilled by the Fathers of the eastern Church – who wrote in Greek but were not necessarily Greek in any narrow sense – is in fact far more interesting than any crude nationalist rendering would suggest. The articulation of the Christian mystery – insofar as it could be expressed in human language, an important qualification – was made possible by a subtle cross-fertilisation between Greek, Jewish and other strands of east Mediterranean thought.

For many theologians, the high point of Greek-Christian thought was attained by St Maximus the Confessor, a brilliant, courageous mystic who took refuge in Rome but was captured, mutilated and exiled by the rulers of his native Byzantium because he insisted (correctly, as posterity judged) that his fellow Greeks had fallen into heresy with respect to vital theological issues which had to do with human freedom. The thought of St Maximus is often described as a perfect synthesis of the New and Old Testaments, ancient-world thought and the traditions of the Desert Fathers, whose work comes down to us in Greek but who were not necessarily Greek themselves.[9]

Early Church fathers like St Maximus and more explicitly Saints Justin and Clement of Alexandria saw merit in ancient Greek philosophy but they were still unshakeable in their belief that the Christian revelation superseded everything which had gone before – so the merit or otherwise of classical thinking was not the most important issue for them.

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[9] See Maximus Confessor, *Selected writings*. Translation and notes by George C. Berthold (London: SPCK 1985).

In modern Greece, the relationship between pre- and post-Christian Hellenism has often been described in a more defensive way. Whether in the mouths of village schoolmasters or neo-Orthodox intellectuals, modern Greek discourse often seems to justify Christianity as an expression of Hellenism, rather than praise Hellenism as one, among many, of the building blocks of the Christian tradition.

Ask a secular or even a religious Greek what makes Orthodoxy different from western Christianity, and he will often defend Orthodoxy on grounds that it is Greek, rather than on grounds that it is true. Two lines of argument are commonly heard: that Orthodoxy is closer to ancient Greek philosophy, or that it is closer to the popular folk-religion which long predates Christianity.

As an example, consider a recent commentary in the Sunday newspaper *To Vima* on the huge crowds which turned up at the main cathedral in Athens to venerate a miracle-working icon of the Mother of God.[10] Some Greek intellectuals had been shocked by this outburst of popular piety and blamed the Church for "failing to educate" its flock, the commentary noted. But in fact, the phenomenon was nothing to worry about; it was really just a thinly disguised continuation of the devotion of the ancient Athenians to gods like Asclepius; so all was well.

At least until recently, most people in Western Europe found Plato, Aristotle and even Asclepius to be of much greater interest than St Maximus or St Clement of Alexandria. Western commentaries on late antiquity, by secular or even religious writers, tended to treat the early Fathers with a certain condescension: we should be grateful to them for keeping alive classical learning, by keeping copies of Euripides and Thucydides in their libraries; what a shame they had to waste so much time on Christianity. The openly anti-Christian bias of Gibbon played an important part in shaping western views of the ancient world – and it also moulded the world-view of western-educated fathers of the Greek state, such as Adamantios Korais.

To this day, this western enthusiasm for the ancient Greek past (as interpreted through the prism of nineteenth-century England or Germany) is regarded as one of the foundations of the

[10] *Το Βήμα της Κυριακής* (13.2.2000).

modern Greek state; and foundation stones cannot simply be tossed aside.

But there is a problem here of time-lag. Modern Greece may be too attached to a legitimising principle which has lost some of its currency in the western world. It may no longer be able to count on presenting itself to western Europe as the repository of rational, enlightened humanism which has its roots in Aristotle; both because the general level of liberal arts education has declined in the West, and also because the assumptions of liberal secular humanism are no longer universally accepted. Whatever has prompted western intellectuals to explore the mysteries of Orthodoxy, it is not the belief that Aristotelian rationalism holds the keys to human understanding, but the very opposite – a sense that the real answers must lie somewhere else.

It would take courage for Greece's hierarchs to start putting more emphasis on the fathers of the Universal Church – whether they were Jews like St Paul, Greek-speakers like Chrysostom or Romans like Jerome – and less on the men of Athens searching for a new thing. And it may seem presumptuous, or even absurd, for a layman in London to advise the Greek clergy on how to interpret history. But I think a return to the Church's mystical roots, which are not confined by any ethnic boundaries, might turn out to be more attractive to the spiritual seekers of the West than a determination to remain locked forever in the classrooms of Victorian England. And such a return might also reduce the distance between the streets of Athens and the lecture-rooms of Cambridge, even though those places will always be, and indeed should always be rather different from one another; and we should learn to rejoice in those differences.

Being a Byzantine after Byzantium: Hellenic identity in Renaissance Italy*

Jonathan Harris

The debate on the continuity or discontinuity of Greek cultural identity has now been waged for so long that it seems most unlikely that there will ever be any meeting of minds between those who see modern Greek national identity as the product of an unbroken tradition reaching back to Homer and those who regard it as the invention of a small group of nineteenth-century intellectuals.[1] Yet whatever continuity or lack of it there was over the centuries, there is one factor which perhaps deserves more attention than it has received to date: the tendency of people who described themselves as "Greeks" or "Hellenes", long before the formation of the kingdom of Greece in 1830, to draw

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[1] For some discussions of this issue, see Anthony D. Smith, *The ethnic origins of nations* (Oxford 1986), pp. 114-15; idem, *National identity* (Harmondsworth 1991), pp. 28-30; Paul Magdalino, "Hellenism and nationalism in Byzantium", in: J. Burke and S. Gauntlett (edd.), *Neohellenism* (Canberra 1992), pp. 1-29; Costa Carras, *3,000 Years of Greek identity. Myth or reality?* (Athens 1983); Robert Browning, "The continuity of Hellenism in the Byzantine world", in: T. Winnifrith and P. Murray (edd.), *Greece old and new* (London 1983), pp. 11-27; Cyril Mango, "Discontinuity with the classical past in Byzantium", in: Margaret Mullett and Roger Scott (edd.), *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition* (Birmingham 1981), pp. 48-57; Speros Vryonis, "Recent scholarship on continuity and discontinuity of culture: classical Greeks, Byzantines, modern Greeks", in: Speros Vryonis (ed.), *The "Past" in Medieval and Modern Greek Culture* (Malibu 1978), pp. 237-56.

elements of their identity from a long, but historical past, and to cling to those elements even in conditions that would appear to favour their complete abandonment. One such group was the members of the Byzantine ruling classes who took up residence in Italy during the fifteenth century, in the wake of the conquest of the Byzantine empire by the Ottoman Turks.

The exodus began in the final years of the fourteenth century, when the Turks began a protracted siege of Constantinople. Fearing the worst, some members of the Byzantine royal family saw refuge in western Europe as the only option left. John VII Palaeologus, acting as regent in the absence of the emperor Manuel II (1391-1425), offered to sell the city to the King of France in return for asylum in the West. His uncle, Theodore, made arrangements to flee to the safety of Venice. When Constantinople finally did fall in 1453 and the Turks conquered the last Byzantine territories in the Peloponnese, Thomas Palaeologus, the brother of the last emperor, took his entire family to Rome to live on the charity of the pope.[2]

The example set by the royal family was followed by many their prominent courtiers. Demetrius Cydones, who had loyally served the Byzantine emperors in the 1360s and 1370s, took up residence in Northern Italy in his later years and adopted Venetian citizenship.[3] A generation later, John Argyropoulos, who had been sent as an ambassador to Italy, France and England in 1456, simply omitted to return after he had completed his mission, using his knowledge of classical Greek literature to secure himself a teaching post at the *Studium* in Florence. Nor

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[2] Manuel II Palaeologus, *Dialogue with the Empress-Mother on marriage*, ed. and trans. Athanasius D. Angelou (Vienna 1991), pp. 43, 98-101; John W. Barker, *Manuel II Palaeologus (1391-1425): a study in late Byzantine statesmanship* (New Brunswick, N.J. 1969), pp. 215-17; *Monumenta Peloponnesiaca. Documents for the History of the Peloponnese in the 14th and 15th Centuries*, ed. Julian Chrysostomides (Camberley 1995), pp. 411, 417-18; Jonathan Harris, *Greek Emigres in the West* (Camberley 1995), pp. 110-13.

[3] R.-J. Loenertz, "Démétrius Cydones, citôyen de Venise", *Échos d'Orient* 37 (1938) 125-6; Kenneth M. Setton, "The Byzantine background to the Italian Renaissance", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 100 (1956) 1-76, at 56-7.

was it only laymen who sought to escape from their homeland. Bessarion and Isidore, Metropolitans of Nicaea and Kiev respectively, went to live in Rome in the 1440s, where they both became Cardinals and amassed considerable personal wealth. They were joined there in 1450 by the Patriarch of Constantinople himself, Gregory Melissenos, who had grown tired of countering anti-unionist agitation.[4]

Not surprisingly, many of their contemporaries took a very dim view of their desertion. In 1396 the friend and pupil of Demetrius Cydones, the emperor Manuel II, wrote to rebuke him for his absence:

> This proves very clearly that you do not love as you should the land that bore you. Do not imagine that you are fulfilling your obligations toward it by loudly lamenting its fate while you stay out of range of the arrows. In its time of crisis you must come and share the dangers and, as much as you can, aid it by deeds if you have any interest in proving yourself a soldier clear of indictment for desertion.[5]

In the same way, Bessarion and Isidore were roundly condemned by those who had remained faithful to Orthodoxy for having "sold the faith for gold".[6] They were clearly regarded as a group of selfish escapees, only too ready to abandon both their country and their fellow-countrymen, taking no further interest in them once they were safely in Italy.

The utterances of the émigrés themselves seem to reinforce this impression. Demetrius Cydones, the object of Manuel II's criticism, wrote that he would much rather hear his country's bad news from abroad. Michael Apostolis, who lived in exile on the Venetian-ruled island of Crete, extolled the vibrant civilisation of Italy, while decrying that of Byzantium as being in its

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[4] Giuseppe Cammelli, *I dotti bizantini e le origini dell'umanesimo. II: Giovanni Argiropulo* (Florence 1941), pp. 65-84; Harris, *Greek Emigres*, pp. 47, 56, 99-102.

[5] Manuel II Palaeologus, *Letters*, ed. and trans. George T. Dennis [Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 8] (Washington D.C. 1977), pp. 172-3.

[6] *The Nikonian Chronicle*, ed. and trans. Serge A. Zenkovsky and Betty J. Zenkovsky, 5 vols. (Princeton 1984-9), 1: 62-7.

closing phase. Other Byzantine émigrés made similar unfavourable comparisons between their culture and that of the West.[7]

It would be very easy to condemn such words and behaviour as unpatriotic, although, in the context of the desperate situation of the Byzantine empire of the early fifteenth century, they are hardly surprising. Nevertheless, the conduct of members of the Byzantine élite like Cydones, Bessarion, Argyropoulos and Apostolis raises an important question. Did their flight constitute not only a deliberate abandonment of their country and of their fellow countrymen, but also something more: a relinquishment of their own identity as Byzantines, of all aspects of their political and cultural heritage, of all ties of common political loyalty and religion, in return for a new life and safety in Italy?

Recent work by Anthony Bryer seems to suggest that this is exactly what happened. In his discussion of late Byzantine identity, Bryer makes a detailed examination of a letter written in 1461 by George Amiroutzes, a noble Byzantine living in Trebizond after its capture by the Turks, to Cardinal Bessarion, by then one of the most wealthy and prominent of the Byzantine émigrés in Italy. The letter requested Bessarion's financial assistance in raising the ransom of Amiroutzes' son, who was a prisoner of the Turks.

Amiroutzes clearly faced a considerable difficulty in framing the letter, for on what common ground could he appeal to Bessarion? The two no longer shared the same political allegiance, as Bessarion now lived in Italy, and Amiroutzes was a subject of the Ottoman Sultan. Nor did they have a religious faith in common, Bessarion being a convert to Catholicism. For Bryer, it is deeply significant that Amiroutzes decided to appeal

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[7] Demetrius Cydones, *Correspondance*, ed. and trans. Giuseppe Cammelli (Paris 1930), p. 131; Basil Laourdas, "Μιχαὴλ Ἀποστόλη περὶ Ἑλλάδος καὶ Εὐρώπης", *Ἑτετηρὶς Ἑταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν* 19 (1949) 235-44; Deno J. Geanakoplos, "A Byzantine looks at the Renaissance", *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 1 (1958) 157-62, at 160-1; A.G. Keller, "A Byzantine admirer of 'western' progress: Cardinal Bessarion", *Cambridge Historical Journal* 11 (1953-5) 343-8; Ihor Ševčenko, "The decline of Byzantium as seen by its intellectuals", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 15 (1961) 169-86, at 176.

to Bessarion on the highly selective grounds of shared place of origin, or *patris* in Greek, and to remind him that they both came from the same small area of Asia Minor bordering the Black Sea.

The message appears to be clear. The only grounds upon which the Byzantine émigré, Bessarion, would have been able to identify with Amiroutzes, was in the accident of shared birth place. Any wider conceptions of identity, Bryer implies, linked as they were to the defunct Byzantine empire, would have meant nothing to Bessarion and his fellow émigrés.[8]

This would, I believe, be too pessimistic a view. In what follows it will be argued that, on the contrary, émigrés like Bessarion preserved a great deal of their traditional Byzantine identity, in spite of their removal to Italy and their conversion to Catholicism, and that this retention of their roots motivated them to pursue objectives much wider than merely their own personal advancement.

So what were the elements of identity subscribed to by the members of the late Byzantine élite? Recent scholarship on this question has tended to focus on their exclusive nature, taking its lead from the theory that identity develops not only in terms of what members of a group have in common but also to distinguish them from those outside it.[9] This trend is followed by Anthony Bryer, for although he singles out Religion, Ruler, Culture, Family and Place of origin or *patris*, as the five most realistic marks of late Byzantine identity, he regards the last two, the

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[8] George Amiroutzes, *Epistola ad Bessarionem*, *Patrologia Graeca* 161: 723-8; Anthony Bryer, "The Pontic Greeks before the diaspora", *Journal of Refugee Studies* 4 (1991) 315-25, at 323; idem, "The late Byzantine identity", in *Byzantium. Identity, Image, Influence. Major Papers from the XIX International Congress of Byzantine Studies, University of Copenhagen, 18-24 August 1996*, ed. Karsten Fledelius and Peter Schreiner (Copenhagen 1996), pp. 49-50.

[9] Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London and New York 1985), p. 12; Dion C. Smythe, "Byzantine identity and labelling theory", in *Byzantium. Identity, Image, Influence. Major Papers from the XIX International Congress of Byzantine Studies, University of Copenhagen, 18-24 August 1996*, ed. Karsten Fledelius and Peter Schreiner (Copenhagen 1996), pp. 26-36.

most narrow and exclusive of them, Family and Place, as the most significant.[10]

There is, however, a completely opposite feature of late Byzantine identity, its inclusiveness, rather than its exclusivity. This inclusiveness is of vital importance in understanding why the émigrés did not abandon their traditional identity. For if that identity was something wider than just the ways in which an élite group kept outsiders at bay, then it would be much more likely that it could, with minor adjustments be transferred to a new environment. This inclusive identity can be approached under the first three of Bryer's headings, Ruler, Religion and Culture: under Ruler comes the Roman, Christian, imperial political tradition. Under Religion, which was inextricably intertwined with Ruler, comes Orthodox Christianity. Under Culture, comes the Hellenic inheritance of Greek language and classical literature.

Turning to the first of these, the Roman political tradition is often seen in terms of exclusivity. Great stress has been laid on the fury and resentment with which the Byzantines greeted any attempt to belittle their Roman heritage, and on their feelings of arrogant superiority over foreigners and outsiders.[11] Yet to see it solely in this light would be to ignore an important aspect of the question.

The basis of Byzantine political theory, like that of every other political system in pre-liberal Europe, was the idea of a universal common good, which rose above the interests and needs of any particular individual or group of individuals.[12] In Byzantium this common good was that of all Christians, for with the conversion of the Emperor Constantine (324-37) to Christianity,

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[10] Bryer, "Late Byzantine identity", p. 50.

[11] See, for example, Donald M. Nicol, "The Byzantine view of Western Europe", *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 8 (1967) 315-39, at 315-16; Romilly J.H. Jenkins, "Social life in the Byzantine empire", in *Cambridge Medieval History*, ed. J.M. Hussey, vol. 4, part 2 (Cambridge 1967), pp. 78-103, at pp. 80-1.

[12] Antony Black, "The individual and society", in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c.350-c.1450*, ed. J.H. Burns (Cambridge 1988), pp. 588-606, at pp. 588-9; Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge 1978), 1: 44.

the Roman empire had become the Christian empire, covering the whole civilised Christian world or *Oecumene*. Even though it no longer incorporated all Christians, it remained an institution uniquely favoured by God, the mirror of his kingdom on earth, and the state to which all Christians ought properly to owe allegiance.[13]

Just as all Christians ought to owe obedience to the Christian emperor, so it was uniquely the role of the emperor to protect the common interests of all Christians. As the tenth-century emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913-59) had admonished his son, the future Romanus II (959-63), it was for the emperor to "take thought for the safety of all, and to steer and guide the laden ship of the world".[14] The wisdom and piety of the emperor was perceived as being vital for the well-being of Christians on earth.[15]

This conception of the emperor and his universal role endured as long as an emperor reigned in Constantinople, even when the empire had shrunk almost to nothing and the city was surrounded, under siege, and in imminent danger of falling to the Turks. In around 1396, the Patriarch Anthony IV described the Byzantine emperor in a letter to the grand duke of Moscow as the "single emperor whose laws, ordinances and decrees hold throughout the world, who alone, with none other, is revered by all Christians".[16]

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[13] Walter Ullmann, *Medieval Political Thought* 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth 1970), pp. 32-8; Steven Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy* (Cambridge 1977), p. 22; Donald M. Nicol, "Byzantine political thought", in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c.350-c.1450*, ed. J.H. Burns (Cambridge 1988), pp. 51-79.

[14] Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. and trans. G. Moravcsik and R.J.H. Jenkins [Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 1] (Washington, D.C. 1967), p. 49.

[15] See, for example, Procopius, *The Buildings*, trans. H.B. Dewing and Glanville Downey [Loeb Classical Library 343] (London 1971), pp. 52-5.

[16] Full text in *Acta et Diplomata Graeca Medii Aevi Sacra et Profana*, ed. F. Miklosich and W. Müller, 6 vols. (Vienna 1860-90), 2: 190-2; translations in Ernest Barker, *Social and Political Thought in Byzantium from Justinian I to the last Palaeologus* (Oxford 1957), pp. 194-6; George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, trans. J.M. Hussey, 2nd ed. (Oxford 1968), pp. 553-4.

One can hardly imagine a conception of identity which contrasts more strongly with the narrow claims of shared birth place: it required the subject to identify with the general interest of all Christians, under the leadership of the Christian emperor. It did not necessarily mean that the late Byzantines regarded the rest of the world with scorn, as lesser beings excluded from the true empire. On the contrary it enabled the members of a Byzantine delegation in Rome, in about 1400, to assert that they had something in common with an English priest whom they met there, telling him how Constantine I had been proclaimed emperor in Britain, at a time when the island had still been part of the universal empire.[17]

Turning now to the second of the three wider sources of late Byzantine identity, Religion, it would be very easy to see the Byzantine Church in terms of exclusivity. Based on the teaching of the seven Ecumenical Councils which it recognised, it rejected what were seen as western innovations, particularly papal supremacy and the addition of the *filioque* to the Creed. Moreover, since the defeat of iconoclasm in the mid-ninth century the Byzantine Church had developed a particular approach to religious imagery, which made the veneration of holy icons an essential part of orthodoxy and which led to the evolution of a distinctive visual culture.[18] Byzantine Christians defined themselves almost as much in terms of this visual culture as of the tenets of their theology, distinguishing themselves from western Christians on the grounds that Latin religious imagery failed to portray the Saints correctly.[19]

Yet to focus solely on what the Byzantines felt distinguished their religious beliefs and practices from those of the Latins would be to miss an important point. For the Byzantine Church, like the empire, claimed to be universal, representing the

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[17] *The Chronicle of Adam of Usk 1377-1421*, ed. and trans. C. Given-Wilson (Oxford 1997), pp. 198-9.

[18] L. Ouspensky, *La théologie de l'icône dans l'église orthodoxe* (Paris 1960), pp. 179-200; J.M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford 1986), pp. 67-8; Robin Cormack *Writing in Gold. Byzantine society and its icons* (London 1985), pp. 151-4.

[19] Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453* (New York 1972), pp. 253-4.

orthodoxy or "right belief" which all Christians ought to espouse. Just as not all Christians were in obedience to the Christian emperor, so not all subscribed to Orthodoxy. Nevertheless, they were still Christians.

Finally Culture, a shared language and literary tradition, which like the other two, could be seen in terms of exclusivity. Even though Latin had been replaced by Greek as the official language of the Byzantine empire in the seventh century, for most of the empire's history the Byzantines did not define themselves in terms of this common language. This was partly because not all inhabitants of the empire were Greek-speakers and partly because of the wide gulf between the Greek of everyday speech and that of the classical literature which members of the ruling classes learned to read in a traditional course of higher education.[20] If anything, possession of such education led members of the Byzantine élite to distinguish themselves from their less privileged fellow-countrymen rather than to identify with them.

In the last two centuries of the empire, however, this linguistic aspect of Byzantine identity became rather wider in its focus. The Greek word "Hellene", which had traditionally been employed to denote the pagan ancient Greeks, became a way of referring to all Byzantines, perhaps because the empire had been reduced solely to its Greek-speaking provinces.[21] However, this Hellenic identity included more than just the inhabitants of the shrunken empire: it also extended to those of Greek speech living under Venetian and Latin rule on Crete, Cyprus and in the

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[20] Constantine N. Constantinides, *Higher Education in Byzantium in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries 1204-c.1310* (Nicosia 1982), pp. 1-2; Warren Treadgold, "The Macedonian Renaissance", in: Warren Treadgold (ed.), *Renaissances before the Renaissance. Cultural Revivals of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Stanford, CA 1984), pp. 75-98, at pp. 79-81; Nigel G. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, 2nd ed. (London 1996), pp. 18-27.

[21] Speros Vryonis, "Byzantine cultural self-consciousness in the fifteenth century", in *The Twilight of Byzantium. Aspects of cultural and religious history in the late Byzantine Empire*, ed. Slobodan Ćurčić and Doula Mouriki (Princeton 1991), pp. 5-14; Steven Runciman, *The Last Byzantine Renaissance* (Cambridge 1970), pp. 15-23.

Peloponnese.[22] Language had, therefore, ceased to be merely a marker of élite identity, and had come to provide a common identity for a wide variety of people.

To conclude this survey of the sources of the wider aspects of late-Byzantine identity, then, the political élite among the subjects of the Byzantine emperor seem to have seen themselves in two ways. As Romans and Orthodox Christians, they were inhabitants of the one true Christian empire, and so Christians of the best sort, owing allegiance to the emperor whom God had appointed for the benefit of all Christians. As Hellenes, they were coming increasingly to acknowledge that they were also defined by a common language and literary tradition, not merely by the possession of an education which set them apart from their fellow Byzantines.

So what about those who quit Constantinople when the danger from the Turks became too pressing? In their own way they maintained not only the common Hellenic and Orthodox religious identities, but also one akin to the old Roman universalism, albeit in a rather different form.

The maintenance of the Hellenic aspect of their identity operated on two levels. It was only to be expected that the émigrés, drawn as so many of them were from Byzantium's educated circles, would be concerned to maintain the literary tradition in which they had been raised. Those who were fortunate enough to be possessed of wealth and power, like Bessarion and Anna Notaras, a Byzantine noblewoman who lived in Italy from the 1450s until her death in 1507, patronised the copying of Greek books. Bessarion employed numerous scribes to copy manuscripts, and built up a vast collection which he ultimately donated to the Marciana Library in Venice. Anna

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[22] Athanasius D. Angelou, "'Who am I?' Scholarios' answers and the Hellenic identity", in: C.N. Constantinides, N.M. Panagiotakes, E. Jeffreys and A.D. Angelou (edd.), *ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝ. Studies in Honour of Robert Browning* (Venice 1996), pp. 1-19, argues against the theory that the word Hellene represented a narrower vision in accordance with reality, seeing it as meaning "Greek Orthodox".

Notaras paid for the printing of the massive Greek lexicon, the *Etymologicum Magnum*, in Venice in 1499.[23]

This activity was not motivated purely by scholarly interests. It had a much more important end in view: to ensure that Greeks in exile retained their identity. In a revealing letter written in 1455, Bessarion stressed the vital nature of the task of copying Greek books on the grounds that later generations of Greeks:

> may be able to find intact and preserved in a safe place all the records of their language which remain up to now and, finding these, may be able to multiply them, without being left completely mute. Otherwise they would lose even these few vestiges of these excellent and divine men– which have been saved from what we have lost in the past – and they would differ in no way from barbarians and slaves.[24]

However, this perception of a common identity through language was not restricted to the preservation of ancient texts, comprehensible only to a narrow élite, and serving to distinguish them from foreigners and uneducated Greeks. Common language was widely used by other émigrés, whether drawn from the Byzantine élite or not, to define themselves in the face of the resident majority population. In about 1471, for example, Alexius Effomatos, a craftsman from Constantinople who had taken up residence in London, complained to the Lord Chancellor that he was at a disadvantage in legal suits because he was "a Grieke and of an estraunge nation". He went on to qualify that by explaining that he had "noone of his cuntree and tonge beyng

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[23] L. Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library and the Biblioteca Marciana* (Rome 1979); Émile Legrand, *Bibliographie hellénique, ou Description raisonée des ouvrages publiés en grec par des Grecs aux XVe et XVIe siècles*, 4 vols. (Paris 1885-1906), 1: 55-62; Donald M. Nicol, *The Byzantine Lady: Ten portraits 1250-1500* (Cambridge 1992), pp. 96-109, at pp. 106-7; Klaus-Peter Matschke, "The Notaras family and its Italian connections", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 49 (1995) 59-72, at 71.

[24] Ludwig Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Staatsmann und Humanist*, 3 vols. (Paderborn 1923-42), 3: 478-9; Deno J. Geanakoplos, *Greek Scholars in Venice* (Cambridge MA 1962), pp. 81-2; Harris, *Greek Emigres*, pp. 126-7.

dwellers withyn the seid citee".[25] For Effomatos, fellow Greeks were distinguished partly by their origin or *patris*, but also by their speaking the common language.

Effomatos was not alone in regarding himself as being linked to other Greeks in this way. The scholar Theodore Gaza, a member of the educated Byzantine élite who resided in Italy, seems to have seen himself in a similar light, describing himself a "Graecus de natione".[26] Cardinal Bessarion used a similar Greek expression to describe himself as a "Hellene by race" on the flyleaf of one of his books. He was not averse to writing letters in demotic Greek, rather than the classical language, when the occasion demanded, implying that he regarded not only those who shared his education as his fellow Hellenes.[27]

Such common "Greekness" was often appealed to by the émigrés when seeking favours from their fellow exiles in positions of power. One recipient of such appeals was George Palaeologus Dishypatos. Originally from Constantinople, Dishypatos was a naval commander in the service of the kings of France during the last three decades of the fifteenth century, and was an influential figure, holding the offices of King's Chamber-

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[25] Harris, *Greek Emigres*, p. 195. On Effomatos, see Jonathan Harris, "Two Byzantine craftsmen in fifteenth century London", *Journal of Medieval History* 21 (1995) 387-403.

[26] Johannes Irmscher, "Theodoros Gazes als griechischer Patriot", *Parola del Passato* 16 (1961) 161-73; Deno J. Geanakoplos, "Theodore Gaza, a Byzantine scholar of the Palaeologan 'Renaissance' in the early Italian Renaissance (c.1400-1475)", in Geanakoplos, *Constantinople and the West. Essays on the Late Byzantine (Palaeologan) and Italian Renaissances and the Byzantine and Roman Churches* (Madison, Wisconsin 1989), pp. 68-90, at p. 73.

[27] Biblioteca Marciana, Venice, Gr. 460, fol. 1 in Elpidio Mioni, *Introduzione alla Paleografia Greca* (Padua 1973), plate XX; S.P. Lambros, "Τρεῖς ἐπιστολαὶ τοῦ Καρδιναλίου Βησσαρίωνος ἐν τῇ δημώδει γλώσσῃ", *Νέος Ἑλληνομνήμων* 5 (1908) 19-39; Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, 3: 531-6; Emanuele Kriaras, "Giovanni Meursio, Giacomo Pontano, Leone Allacci e una lettera del card. Bessarione in greco volgare", *Miscellanea Marciana di Studi Bessarionei* (Padua 1976), pp. 187-99.

lain and Commander of the King's ship.[28] Thus when Hussain Bey, a Greek convert to Islam, was sent to France on an embassy for the Ottoman Sultan in 1486, he was quick to point out that he was a kinsman of Dishypatos, no doubt taking advantage of the common bond of family to enhance his prospects of success.[29]

However, it was not always on such narrow grounds that Dishypatos was appealed to. In 1476 Andronicus Callistos, a Byzantine scholar then residing in London, wrote to ask him to assist George Hermonymos, who had been imprisoned in England and saddled with a large fine which he could not pay. Like Amiroutzes and Hussain Bey, Callistos made use of some of the narrower aspects of common identity, family and place, reminding Dishypatos that he had once known his parents and that they shared the same *patris*, Constantinople.[30] At the same time, however, he stressed that by helping Hermonymos, Dishypatos would be bringing honour not only to himself but also to "the unfortunate Greek race".[31]

Callistos' appeal clearly demonstrates that the Greek émigrés had much more in common than the occasional accident of shared place of origin and family connections, and the lesson is reinforced by another case, that of Thomas Frank or Le Franc. Like Dishypatos, Thomas was a Greek in French service, in this case the personal physician of King Charles VII (1422-61) from 1451 until 1456. However, unlike Dishypatos and most of the other émigrés discussed so far, he was not drawn from the Byzantine political and literary élite. He was not even origin-

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[28] On Dishypatos see Jonathan Harris, "Bessarion on shipbuilding: a reinterpretation", *Byzantinoslavica* 55 (1994) 291-303, at 299-301; idem, *Greek Emigres*, pp. 175-80.

[29] Nicolas Vatin, "La traduction ottomane d'une lettre de Charles VIII de France (1486)", *Turcica* 15 (1983) 219-30, at 220-2.

[30] Andronicus Callistos, *Epistola ad Georgium Palaeologum*, *Patrologia Graeca* 161: 1017-20. On George Hermonymos, see now Maria Kalatzi, "Georgios Hermonymos. A 15th century scribe and scholar: an examination of his life, activities and manuscripts", University of London PhD thesis (1997); idem, "Are the two Greek scribes, George Hermonymos and Charitonymos Hermonymos, one and the same person?", *Θησαυρίσματα* 26 (1996) 105-18; Harris, *Greek Emigres*, pp. 142-6.

[31] Callistos, *Epistola*, 1020: "... καὶ τὸ δυστυχὲς τῶν Ἑλλήνων γένος".

ally from Constantinople but from Corone, a Venetian-ruled town in the southern Peloponnese. He held both English and French denizenship, and his Latinised name, although no doubt derived from "Frankos", suggests that he was very thoroughly integrated into western society. Most of the surviving documentation concerning him shows him to have associated with Italians rather than Greeks. If ever there were a Greek who had completely abandoned his identity, it would have been Thomas Le Franc.[32]

Yet like Dishypatos, Thomas received several appeals asking him to help his fellow Greeks. They were written by the Italian humanist Francesco Filelfo, who requested his help for a number of Constantinopolitan refugees, including John Argyropoulos.[33] In this case there was no question of shared *patris*, but that did not prevent Filelfo from appealing to a common Greek identity by stressing not only Argyropoulos' wisdom and learning, but also his Greek origin.[34]

The idea that a member of the educated Byzantine ruling élite and a Latinised Greek from a Venetian colony could have had a common identity on the basis of language would not have been unusual in the medieval world. The Council of Constance had decided much the same thing when it decreed in 1415 that a nation was "a people marked off from others by blood relationship and habit of unity or by peculiarities of language".[35] Filelfo's application of that formula to Greeks could be dismissed as the ignorance of a western outsider, but such an argument would be unconvincing. He was in a good position to know how the Byzantines perceived themselves, having lived

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[32] On Thomas Frank, see Harris, *Greek Emigres*, pp. 35, 90-3, 135-6, 167-8.

[33] Francesco Filelfo, *Epistolarum Familiarum Libri XXXVII* (Venice 1502), fols. 89v, 94r-94v; Émile Legrand, *Cent dix lettres grecques de François Filelfe* (Paris 1892), pp. 73-7.

[34] Filelfo, *Epistolarum*, fol. 94v: "Nam hoc uno nemo est in universo genere graecorum neque doctior, nec sapientior."

[35] James F. Lydon, "Nation and Race in Medieval Ireland", in: Simon Forde, Lesley Johnson and Alan V. Murray (edd.), *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages* (Leeds 1995), pp. 103-24, at p. 115; Louise R. Loomis, "Nationality at the Council of Constance. An Anglo-French dispute", in: Sylvia L. Thrupp (ed.), *Change in Medieval Society. Europe North of the Alps 1060-1500* (Eaglewood Cliffs NJ 1964), pp. 279-96.

for some time in Constantinople, and being married to a Byzantine, the niece of Manuel Chrysoloras.[36] There can only be one conclusion: the émigrés regarded themselves as linked to their fellow Greeks elsewhere in the world by their language. The conception of a common identity, which cast its net much wider than merely shared *patris*, had not been jettisoned in the flight to Italy.

Nevertheless, one would expect to find one particularly strong divide between the émigrés and their fellow Greeks who lived in what remained of Byzantium and under Ottoman rule, and that rift would be on the grounds of religion, the most powerful marker of identity in the medieval period.[37] Almost all of the émigrés, including John Argyropoulos, Demetrius Cydones, and Bessarion, had either converted to Catholicism or, after 1439, accepted the Union of the Churches proclaimed at the Council of Florence, when the representatives of the Byzantine Church had agreed to accept papal supremacy and to recognise the orthodoxy of the *filioque*.[38] The only exception appears to have been Anna Notaras, who continued to have the Orthodox liturgy celebrated secretly at her house in Venice.[39]

However, acceptance of Union with Rome did not necessarily mean a complete abandonment of all aspects of traditional religious identity. If, as has been argued, Byzantine religion was not an exclusive creed, one would expect the émigrés to have retained aspects of their traditional faith even if they had accepted some elements of western Christianity. This appears to

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[36] Setton, "Byzantine background", p. 72.

[37] It was to remain so among peasant societies in the Balkans well into the twentieth century. See: Dimitris Livanios, "'Conquering the souls': nationalism and Greek guerrilla warfare in Ottoman Macedonia, 1904-1908", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 23 (1999) 195-221, at 196-9.

[38] Joseph Gill, "The sincerity of Bessarion the unionist", *Miscellanea Marciana di Studi Bessarionei* (Padua 1976), pp. 119-36; Frances Kianka, "The Apology of Demetrius Cydones: a fourteenth century autobiographical source", *Byzantine Studies* 7 (1980) 57-71, at 60, n. 19; Tia M. Kolbaba, "Conversion from Greek Orthodoxy to Roman Catholicism in the fourteenth century", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 19 (1995) 120-34; Harris, *Greek Emigres*, pp. 42-3, 54-5, 99.

[39] Nicol, *Byzantine Lady*, pp. 101-3; Harris, *Greek Emigres*, pp. 58-9.

have been the case even for Bessarion, who, although he had become a cardinal and was considered for the Papacy on two occasions, retained a veneration for icons in the Byzantine style. He is thought to have presented a thirteenth-century icon of the Virgin and Child to the church of Santa Maria in Grottaferrata, and he restored a chapel near Bologna which contained an icon of the Virgin, said to have been brought from Constantinople in 1160.[40] He also retained the appearance of an Orthodox priest and monk by keeping his long beard, even though on one occasion it was to ruin his chances of election to the Papacy.[41]

Bessarion's loyalty to his origins helps to explain his generous assistance to numerous refugees from Constantinople after 1453 – there is no evidence whatever that he enquired into their exact opinions on papal supremacy or the *filioque*. The same applies to the ex-patriarch Gregory Melissenos, who was entrusted with funds from the papal treasury to distribute among the refugees.[42]

Thus, the émigrés had not abandoned all links with their past, and these links often impelled them to help their fellow countrymen. But what of an even wider loyalty beyond that of shared language and religious identity? In the past, as we have seen, the Romano-Byzantine tradition had transcended matters of race and language, requiring only orthodoxy in religion and political submission to the one true Christian emperor. The utter annihilation of the Byzantine political tradition in 1453 might

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[40] Henri Vast, *Le Cardinal Bessarion* (Paris 1878), p. 185; Paolo Guerini, "Il Bessarione a Grottaferrata: un'ipotesi sulla donazione dell'icona", *Studi Medievali* 32.2 (1991) 807-14; Fabrizio Lollini, "Bessarione e le arti figurative", in: G. Fiaccadori, A. Cuna, A. Gatti and S. Ricci (edd.), *Bessarione e l'umanesimo* (Naples 1994), pp. 149-68, at p. 166. On the significance of icons in general, see: Thalia Gouma-Peterson, "The icon as a cultural presence after 1453", in: John J. Yiannias (ed.), *The Byzantine Tradition after the Fall of Constantinople* (Charlottesville and London 1991), pp. 151-80.

[41] Pius II, *Commentaries*, trans. F.A. Gragg and L.C. Gabel (Northampton, MA, 1936-57), pp. 75-6; Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204-1571)*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia 1976-84), 2: 162, n.6.

[42] Harris, *Greek Emigres*, pp. 101-2. Among the recipients of Bessarion's generosity was a grandson of his tutor, George Gemistos Plethon: Henri Noiret, *Lettres inédites de Michel Apostolis* (Paris 1889), p. 94, lines 3-4.

be thought to have put an end to any such universalism. It is noticeable that in the second half of the fifteenth century, the younger generation of exiles appear to have completely lost touch with their Roman heritage. The nephew of the last Byzantine emperor, Andreas Palaeologus, living in Rome but eager to claim his inheritance, took to styling himself *Imperator Constantinopolitanus*, a parochial title which his imperial forebears had never used.[43] The émigrés always described themselves as Greeks, never as Romans.

Yet abandonment of the traditional claims of the Byzantine emperor did not necessarily entail the loss of any wider conception of the common good. What the émigrés seem to have done is to have substituted for the role of the emperor, the universal claims of the papacy. A striking illustration of this transfer appears in the works of the historian Laonicos Chalcocondyles, who wrote in Latin-ruled Greece in the 1460s. Not only did he use the word "Hellenes" to describe the Byzantines, but he employed "Roman" as an adjective for all things papal.[44] The writings of the émigrés in Italy, most of whom had adopted Latin Christianity, were loud in their praises for the universal power of the papacy over all Christians. Manuel Chrysoloras wrote admiringly of how the rule of the pope stretched as far as England. Demetrius Cydones believed that what he called the "subjects" of the pope were devoted to the higher good, prosperous, virtuous and law-abiding Christians. The Church of Rome, he claimed, was "a storehouse of all wisdom, bringing forth companies of philosophers, surrounded by groups of theologians, adorned by monks of manifold virtue...".[45]

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[43] Johannes Burchard, *Diarium*, ed. L. Thuasne, 3 vols. (Paris, 1883-5), 1: 174, 281, 2: 425; Jonathan Harris, "A worthless prince? Andreas Palaeologus in Rome – 1464-1502", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 61 (1995) 537-54, at 552.

[44] Vryonis, "Byzantine cultural self-consciousness", pp. 8-9.

[45] Manuel Chrysoloras, *Epistola ad Joannem Imperatorem, Patrologia Graeca* 156: 23-54; H. Homeyer, "Zur 'Synkrisis' des Manuel Chrysoloras, einem Vergleich zwischen Rom und Konstantinopel", *Klio* 62 (1980) 525-34; Demetrius Cydones, *Apologia della propria fede*, in: G. Mercati, *Notizie di Procoro e Demetrio Cidone, Manuele Caleca e Teodoro Meliteniota* [Studi

This belief in the role of the pope as the leader of Christendom found practical expression in active involvement with the efforts of successive popes, particularly Pius II (1458-64), to organise a counter-attack to recover Constantinople after 1453. In the propaganda war waged to sell the proposed crusade to European monarchs, Byzantine émigrés were often used as envoys to foreign courts, perhaps because it was thought that their first-hand accounts of mistreatment of Christians would incline their audiences favourably. Once again Bessarion played an important role, serving as papal legate to Venice and Germany.[46] Dispossessed Byzantines toured European courts and parish churches, giving warning of the advance of the Turks, and wrote florid orations addressed to Christian rulers, urging them to free their suffering co-religionists in the East.[47]

The decision of the exiles to back the crusade says a great deal about their conviction that Christendom was essentially one, even if its leader was now the pope and not the Byzantine emperor. One only has to look at the major theme which runs through all their appeals to the conscience of their fellow Christians: the theme of the threat posed by a common enemy to all Christians, who should unite in defence of their faith. In Italy and Germany, Bessarion worked hard to persuade the

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e Testi 56] (Vatican City 1931), p. 373; Nicol, "Byzantine view", pp. 333-7; Kianka, "Apology", p. 67.

[46] R. Manselli, "Il Cardinale Bessarione contro il pericolo turco e l'Italia", *Miscellanea Francescana* 73 (1973) 314-26; E. Meuthen, "Zum Itinerar der deutschen Legation Bessarions (1460-1)", *Quellen und Forschungen aus Italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 37 (1957) 328-33; P.K. Enepekides, "Die Wiener Legation des Kardinals Bessarion in den Jahren, 1460-1", *Miscellanea Marciana di Studi Bessarionei* (Padua 1976), pp. 69-82; Günther Schuhmann, "Kardinal Bessarion in Nürnberg", *Jahrbuch für Fränkische Landesforschung* 34-5 (1975) 447-65; Antonio Coccia, "Bessarione e I discorsi ai principi", *Bessarione* 7 (1989) 213-39.

[47] *Collectanea Trapezuntiana*, ed. John Monfasani (Binghampton, N.Y. 1984), pp. 422-33; Michael J. McGann, "A call to arms: Michael Marullus and Charles VIII", *Byzantinische Forschungen* 16 (1991) 341-59; J. Whittaker, "Janus Lascaris at the Court of Charles V", *Θησαυρίσματα* 14 (1977) 76-109; Harris, *Greek Emigres*, p. 106; Jonathan Harris, "Publicising the Crusade: English bishops and the Jubilee Indulgence of 1455", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 50 (1999) 23-37, at 31-6.

princes and city states to sink their differences and unite. In July 1453 he urged the Doge of Venice to set an example so that other rulers "would act for the common good, for the Christian religion, and for the glory of Christ...".[48]

Another good example is the address of Franculios Servopoulos, a Byzantine émigré in the service of Pope Pius II, to the English court at Westminster in March 1459. We have no exact record of what was said at the meeting, but a French herald who was present recorded that Servopoulos had spoken on three points: "the one for the faith, the second for peace among Christians, the third that all by one common assent should succour the faith and drive back the infidels...".[49]

The sad truth was, of course, that, in appealing to the unity of Christendom, Bessarion, Servopoulos and others were invoking a concept which was rapidly declining in Western Europe, as national interests came to take precedence.[50] Any participation by England, France and Burgundy in an anti-Turkish crusade was rendered impossible by their mutual antagonism.[51] Yet in its appeal to a wider common identity, their activity is in stark contrast to the narrower basis of George Amiroutzes' letter.

This article began by asking whether the members of the Byzantine ruling classes who abandoned Constantinople in the first half of the fifteenth century were also turning their backs on their political and cultural identity. As Anthony Bryer has shown, as the old order crumbled it became difficult for them to

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[48] Full text in Vast, *Cardinal Bessarion*, Appendix III, pp. 454-6, at p. 455: " ... de communi salute, de christianâ religione, de Christi gloria agatur...". Translation in James B. Ross and Mary M. McLaughlin (edd.), *The Portable Renaissance Reader* (New York 1953), pp. 70-73, at p. 72. Summary in N. Iorga, *Notes et extraits pour servir à l'histoire des croisades au XVe siècle*, 6 vols. (Paris and Bucharest 1899-1916), 2: 518.

[49] *Letters and Papers illustrative of the wars of the English in France during the reign of Henry VI*, ed. J. Stevenson, Rolls Series: Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores 22, 2 vols. (London 1861-64), 1: 368; Harris, *Greek Emigres*, pp. 106-8.

[50] See Dennis Hay, *Europe. The emergence of an idea*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh 1968), pp. 61-4; Bernard Guenée, *States and Rulers in Later Medieval Europe*, trans. Juliet Vale (Oxford 1985), pp. 6-11.

[51] M.-R. Thielemans, *Bourgogne et Angleterre* (Brussels 1986), pp. 465-9.

define themselves in quite the same way, so that local marks of identity became more important. Yet what is more open to question is the idea that they abandoned all wider conceptions of their identity in favour of narrow ones. In their cultural and political perceptions, with a few minor adjustments, they preserved all three inclusive elements of their traditional identity, Bryer's Ruler, Religion, and Culture, even when it probably would have been to their advantage to abandon them.

Royal Holloway
University of London

C.P. Cavafy: Byzantine historian?*

Anthony Hirst

"Many poets are just poets. Porphyras, for example, is just a poet. Not Palamas. He has written some short stories. As for me, I am a poet-historian." This is Cavafy, holding forth in the Grammata bookshop in Alexandria, at some point in the last decade of his life; his words as recorded by Lechonitis (1977: 19-20). Cavafy continues, "I could never have written a novel or a play; but I hear inside me a hundred-and-twenty-five voices telling me that I could have written history. But now it's too late."

"Poet historian" translates ποιητὴς ἱστορικός, where ἱστορικός might be construed as "historical", rather than "historian", and the phrase translated "historical poet", on the analogy of "historical novelist". There can be little doubt, though, that in the context Cavafy meant "poet-historian", both poet and historian, since Porphyras who is "just a poet" is contrasted, first, with Palamas, who is a poet and short-story writer, and then with Cavafy himself, who is a "poet-historian". But it seems that Cavafy claims to be only a potential historian, for he implies that he had not written history: "I could have written history. But now it's too late." And making a similar remark on another occasion (again in the Grammata bookshop) he was more specific about this: "I had two propensities. To make poems and to write history. I didn't write history and it's too late now." [1]

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* This paper is based on a broader investigation of Cavafy's Byzantine poems undertaken as Hannah Seeger Davis Post-Doctoral Research Fellow in Hellenic Studies at Princeton University, 1999/2000. Earlier versions of the paper were read at The Queen's University of Belfast, King's College London, and at the Universities of Cambridge, Oxford and Princeton; in its present form it has benefited from the comments of the audience in each of these places.

[1] Recorded by Eftychia Zelita (who ran the bookshop) on 8 April 1929; quoted by Malanos in Lechonitis 1977: 20.

We may be thankful that Cavafy chose to "make poems" rather than to "write history", but we may wonder whether he wasn't, perhaps, deceiving us a little here, whether he didn't, after all, write history, but in his poems. This would go some way towards explaining the paradox of the "poet-historian" who wrote poetry but not history.

Roughly half of all Cavafy's poems are set in the remote past, or make substantive allusions to historical persons or events. And the potential ambiguity of the phrase ποιητὴς ἱστορικός prompts us to ask whether, in his historical poems, Cavafy writes like a historian or like a historical novelist. There are, certainly, poems in which he gives us historical fiction – imaginary characters placed in specific historical contexts. Many examples could be given, including Byzantine ones.

Cavafy's concern with historical accuracy in his poems is well documented;[2] and I think we can assume that he did not want to write, even in his poems of historical fiction, anything which simply could *not* have been the case, in other words, that he respected the facts of history. But sometimes it is where the facts are lacking that the opportunity for poetry arises. The classic case in Cavafy's work is the poem "Caesarion". Addressing the doomed young king across two millennia, which imagination reduces to the width of his room, the poet says,

> In history a few
> lines only are to be found concerning you,
> and so more freely did I shape you in my mind.
> [...]
> And so completely did I imagine you
> That late last night [...]
> [...]
> I thought you came into my room.[3]

I spoke carelessly of the *facts* of history, and here Cavafy corrects me, for history consists of words, not facts: "in history" there are only a few "lines" about Caesarion. Beyond the

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[2] See, for several examples, Bowersock 1981: 94-8.

[3] All translations of Cavafy's poetry are my own.

physical (archaeological) remains of the past, we have only the *words* of history. History is a matter of interpretation, a series of competing constructs which historiographers presents to us, constructs which we selectively assimilate, and simplify, or elaborate, as we combine them. Professional historians are obliged to assimilate as comprehensively as they can, to weigh the often contradictory words of history, and to make their new constructions answer to what they judge to be the balance of the evidence. And so we must ask whether there are poems in which Cavafy engages with the words of history in the manner of a historian, poems in which he makes his own contribution to historiography, thereby justifying his self-description as "poet-historian". Here, though, I am concerned only with Cavafy's possible contribution to Byzantine history, his credentials as a Byzantine historian, and only in the context of three poems, all concerned with members of the Comnenian dynasty: "Manuel Comnenus", "Anna Comnena" and "Anna Dalassena".

Before proceeding, let me note one significant way in which the poet has greater freedom than the historian: it is in the matter of voice, in the identity of the speaking persona. When we read a work of history, we assume (and we must be able to assume) that, where the author is not explicitly quoting or paraphrasing another text, what we have in front of us are the author's considered opinions; we must be able to assume, in other words, that the voice is the voice of the person named as author on the title page. The poet, though, even the "poet-historian", is not bound by the same conventions. He is not obliged to announce his quotations or enclose them in quotation marks (though sometimes Cavafy does so). He need not declare his sources (though again Cavafy sometimes does so). And more importantly, we cannot assume that the voice in a poem, and the opinions it expresses, are the voice and opinions of the author. The critical convention of referring to the speaker or voice in a poem as "the poet", sometimes with a capital P, acknowledges this dilemma. There are poems such as "Caesarion" where the self-referentiality ("my art gives to your face / a dreamlike appealing loveliness") makes it difficult to distance the speaker at all from the author, C.P. Cavafy. Then again, there are many poems in which the speaker is quite explicitly differentiated from the author. Take Cavafy's poem "A Byzantine nobleman, exiled,

composing verses": though the text is an unframed monologue, the title tells us who is speaking. "Manuel Comnenus", the first poem I want to consider in detail, proves to be something of a puzzle in this respect; and the question of voice also arises in the discussion of the other two poems.

Here is "Manuel Comnenus", first drafted in 1905, but not published until 1916, in a translation that sticks closely to the Greek and has little pretension to poetry:

> The emperor Lord Manuel Comnenus
> one melancholy day in September
> sensed death nearby. The astrologers
> (the paid ones) of the court were blathering
> that he would still live for many more years.
> But while they were speaking, he
> remembers old pious customs
> and from the monks' cells orders
> ecclesiastical garments to be brought,
> and he puts them on and rejoices that he presents
> the modest aspect of a priest or monk.
>
> Happy all those who believe
> and like the emperor Lord Manuel meet their end
> dressed in their faith most modestly.

The only possible ultimate source for this poem is the chronicle of Nicetas Choniates, and my analysis will demonstrate that Cavafy worked directly from the Byzantine text.

The poem gives us the impression of a man in calm control of events: the emperor ignores the astrologers' assurances that he has many more years to live, orders ecclesiastical garments and dies a dignified, pious and contented death. But what Choniates stresses is the extent to which the emperor *was* influenced by the astrologers, and in consequence ignored the evidence of his declining health, ignored the Patriarch's advice to find a suitable protector for his son (ten years old at the time), and made no provision for the monastic garb customary for a dying emperor. When, in the bathhouse, he finally realized his life was draining away like the water, "he briefly discussed his son Alexios with those in attendance, and foreseeing the events that would follow his death, he intermixed his words with lament-

ations". When the emperor then "asked for the monastic habit", nothing could be found in time but "a black threadbare cloak". It was much too short, and "tattered", and it "left the knees bare"; and those who saw the emperor dressed in it were moved to reflect on the "wretchedness of the body".[4]

The impression one gets from Choniates is of the sudden and undignified end of a foolish old man, whose vanity and credulity had allowed death to catch him unprepared, a man overtaken by events, not in control of them as Cavafy's emperor appears to be. No one reading Choniates' account in place of Cavafy's would be likely to conclude, "Happy all those who meet their end like the emperor Manuel".

Cavafy must have known that some of his readers would resort to Choniates; and a survey of critical comments on the poem shows that many of them have indeed done so. What, then, is the poet-historian doing writing a poem which, when compared to its source, appears to be untenable as history? It appears, in fact, to belong to the popular Byzantine genre of hagiography. And yet, according to Lechonitis (1977: 32), Cavafy described this poem as ἐντελῶς ἱστορικόν ("entirely historical").

Though many commentators have noted the discrepancy between Cavafy's and Choniates' accounts of the death of Manuel Comnenus, none has offered a satisfactory account of it. Discussion has focused instead on the last three lines of the poem, the comment which seems to stand outside the narrative. There has been a long-running debate about whether Cavafy is being ironic here, considering that Manuel Comnenus was better known for his lechery than his piety.[5] Only readers ignorant of Choniates and totally uninformed about the emperor Manuel are likely to read the last three lines of the poem as a sincere and pious tribute to a pious emperor. Christidis has suggested (1958: 61) that these lines express the envy of a non-believer; and

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[4] Choniates' account of the emperor's death is brief, and I give only a single set of references to cover these and subsequent quotations: CFHB 11: I, 220-2; tr. Magoulias 1984: 124-5. Quotations in English are from Magoulias' translation unless otherwise noted.

[5] For the views of several parties to the debate, see Haas 1996: 436-9. See also Hirst 1995: 44, 46-7.

according to Savidis (in Cavafy 1991: I, 146), their "tone depends on whether or not we accept Cavafy's devotion to Christian Orthodox religion". Elsewhere Savidis put it rather differently (1985-7: I, 23), suggesting that "the question, in the end, is whether or not one accepts that the cassock makes the priest", and he adds that he believes Cavafy did accept it. There have been a number of readings in this vein, all proposing that Cavafy is here acknowledging the importance of conformity to the socially sanctioned outward forms of religion.

All the interpretations I have mentioned are, in my view, attempts to solve a false problem: they follow from the mistaken assumption that the voice in the poem is Cavafy's.

Let us look more closely at the relation between the poem and its source. Choniates' account of the death of Manuel Comnenus contains three principal statements about the emperor's death. Choniates introduces the subject by informing us that "the emperor first took ill before the month of March in the then current thirteenth indiction" – before March 1180, that is; and, after referring to the resolution of a doctrinal dispute in May, he adds, ὁ δὲ αὐτοκράτωρ ἐπιστάντος τοῦ Σεπτεμβρίου τὸ ζῆν ἐξεμέτρησεν, "the emperor, when September had come, reached the end of his life" (my translation). The first three lines of the poem follow the three-part grammatical form and semantic progression of this statement: subject (the emperor); adverbial phrase ending with the word September; and predicate referring to the emperor's death:

> Ὁ βασιλεὺς κὺρ Μανουὴλ ὁ Κομνηνὸς
> μιὰ μέρα μελαγχολικὴ τοῦ Σεπτεμβρίου
> αἰσθάνθηκε τὸν θάνατο κοντά.

In the third line, however, Cavafy adopts the spatial metaphor of Choniates' second statement, οὐ παρεδέχετο ὁπωσοῦν ὡς ἤγγικεν τὸ τελευτᾶν, but he reverses its meaning: Choniates' "he would in no way accept that the end had approached" (my translation) becomes "he sensed death nearby". And yet, what Cavafy is articulating is the situation of Choniates' third statement, his account of that moment, in September, when the emperor finally "realized" (γνούς), in the bathhouse, "that his hopes of life had been erased and were flowing away like the

water and that the appointed day was now inescapable" (my translation). Cavafy's aorist verb αἰσθάνθηκε ("he sensed") corresponds to Choniates' aorist participle γνούς, each denoting the act or moment of realization rather than a state of knowing. Clearly, Cavafy has thoroughly absorbed Choniates' three statements and, through a radical and extremely skilful condensation, combined them in a single sentence.

Cavafy's second sentence, "The astrologers / (the paid ones) of the court were blathering / that he would still live for many more years", also integrates separate statements from Choniates. The first is that the emperor was convinced that "another fourteen years of life were to be given him" (my translation). The astrologers, who have not yet been mentioned, are obviously the source of this conviction, for the second relevant statement is that the astrologers "boldly told [the emperor] that he would soon recover from his illness and shamelessly predicted that he would level foreign cities to the ground".

It is in the poem's third sentence, with its switch from past tense to present, that Cavafy's divergence from Choniates becomes unmistakable. It is now evident that the time span has been dramatically compressed, the events of several months in Choniates reduced to that "one melancholy day in September". The third sentence begins, "But while they were speaking, he / remembers old pious customs / and from the monks' cells orders ecclesiastical garments to be brought". In Choniates there is no suggestion that the astrologers were speaking at the time that the emperor realized he was dying and asked for the monastic habit; and Cavafy's version of the emperor's request and his description of what ensued are very different from those of Choniates. The phrase "from the monk's cells" is rather odd; and it would have been redundant had Cavafy stuck more closely to Choniates' μοναδικὸν σχῆμα ("monastic habit") instead of substituting the less precise ἐκκλησιαστικὰ ἐνδύματα ("ecclesiastical garments"). This latter phrase tacitly acknowledges, perhaps, that what was actually provided was not the monastic habit, but just a ragged short black cloak; while the former, "from the monks' cells", pointedly deviates from its equivalent in Choniates, where the black cloak was procured ὁθενοῦν, "from somewhere or other" (my translation), an expression which

betrays the haste and confusion of the moment. The poem begins to look like a deliberate cover-up.

That the emperor remembered the old pious custom is merely implicit in Choniates; and it is Choniates himself who recalls, and draws our attention to, the piety involved in the custom. The black cloak is brought, the attendants remove the emperor's soft imperial garments and dress him "in the coarse garment of the life in God transforming him into a spiritual soldier with a more divine helmet and a more pious breastplate". Cavafy undoubtedly recognized that Choniates was alluding to St Paul's metaphor of the "armour of God" (Eph. 6.13), for where Choniates speaks of a "more pious breastplate", St Paul speaks of Christians "having dressed themselves in the breastplate of faith", ἐνδυσάμενοι θώρακα πίστεως (I Thess. 5.8), while Cavafy refers to those who die like the emperor, ντυμένοι μὲς στὴν πίστι των, "dressed in their faith".

Choniates' purpose in his scriptural digression is not, I think, to accord the emperor Manuel the proper deathbed pieties, setting aside for a moment his critical stance towards him, for the tone is, surely, ironical. He draws out the symbolism and the supposed spiritual efficacy of the change to the monastic garb in order to provide a sharp contrast with the emperor's actual appearance and its effect on those around him: "the tattered garment, which neither reached to the feet nor covered the whole body, left the knees bare so that no one who witnessed the scene remained without fear as he reflected on human frailty at the end of life and the wretchedness of the body". And it is here that Cavafy's deviation from Choniates is most marked, for in the poem the emperor actually "rejoices" at his appearance.

Manuel's appearance is characterized as σεμνήν, translated above as "modest". This is one of the few instances where Cavafy's actual vocabulary leads us back to Choniates, who speaks metaphorically of the emperor dressed θώρακι σεμνοτέρῳ ("in a more pious breastplate"). It is striking that a word which appears in the source in the comparative turns up in the poem in the other two degrees: in the absolute σεμνήν, and prominently, as the last word of the poem, in the superlative, as the adverb σεμνότατα. As Diana Haas points out (1996: 432), σεμνός has changed its meaning since Byzantine times. Then it meant "awe-inspiring", "dignified" or "pious"; now its usual meaning is

"humble" or "modest". But Haas is rash, I think, to insist that in Cavafy it is used in its modern sense. Cavafy uses σεμνήν and σεμνότατα in precisely the context in which Choniates uses σεμνοτέρῳ. Choniates speaks of the "more pious breastplate"; Cavafy speaks first of the emperor's appearance in ecclesiastical garments as σεμνήν, and secondly of those who like the emperor Manuel meet their end "dressed in their faith" σεμνότατα. We must at least allow the possibility that the word borrowed from Choniates has brought with it its Byzantine meaning. And I shall shortly advance a positive reason for reading ὄψι σεμνήν and σεμνότατα as "pious appearance" and "most piously". However, the tension which must remain between the Byzantine and modern meanings reflects the ironic contrast in Choniates between the emperor's supposedly "more pious" garb and his distressingly humble appearance in the tattered cloak.

In the past I suggested that the problem of the last three lines of the poem would disappear if we thought of them as spoken by some courtier or cleric close to the emperor.[6] Now, though, I am inclined to see the whole poem as a dramatic monologue; and I am prepared to suggest the identity of the speaker.

There is an important sub-plot in Choniates which is not, on the face of it, reflected at all in Cavafy's poem, but which might, nonetheless, provide the key to the poem. I have already referred in passing to the Patriarch; let us now look more closely at his role in the story.

During the early stages of Manuel's final illness, Patriarch Theodosius advised him "to search for someone who would steadfastly cleave to his son, the successor to the throne". The emperor evidently ignored this advice until it was too late, but when he realized he was dying "he briefly discussed his son Alexius with those in attendance", and his son was the focus of his sudden but now ineffectual concern about what would happen after his death. Following this implicit acknowledgement of the wisdom of the Patriarch's earlier advice, the Patriarch himself appears on the scene (if indeed he was not already among those in attendance), and gets the dying emperor to sign a renunciation of astrology:

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[6] Hirst 1995: 47; 1998: 111.

> Αλλὰ καὶ περὶ τῆς ἀστρονομίας ὑποθήκη τοῦ πατριάρχου βραχύν τινα χάρτην ὑπεσημήνατο πρὸς τὴν ἐναντίαν δόξαν μεθαρμοσθείς.

Manuel then asks for the monastic habit, is dressed in the nearest approximation that can be found in the little time available, and dies (more or less) as a Christian emperor should.

The Patriarch is the one character in the drama, as Choniates presents it, who might be supposed to feel some satisfaction in the circumstances and the manner of the emperor's death. His satisfaction would have been tempered by his continuing anxieties about securing the succession, but, nevertheless, he had at the very last minute achieved a significant victory, vanquishing the astrologers and reclaiming the emperor for the church. And we learn from Choniates' account of the brief and chaotic reign of Manuel's son Alexius II that Manuel, presumably on his deathbed, had entrusted both his son and the state to the Patriarch.[7]

If it seems too bold to say that the speaker in the poem *is* the Patriarch, let us at least allow that the voice in the poem presents the drama from the Patriarch's perspective. In Choniates we see the astrologers and the Patriarch competing for the emperor's attention. In Cavafy, though, it is the emperor himself who provides the opposite pole to the astrologers, while the Patriarch is not mentioned at all. The poem passes over in silence the fact that almost to the end the emperor remained under the influence of the astrologers, implying instead that he had never paid them much attention. From the triumphant Patriarch's point of view there would be little point in rehearsing the sorry events of the previous months. Contempt for the astrologers is confined to the verb "were blathering" and the epithet "paid", which alludes to what would have irked the Patriarch most about them – their receipt of imperial patronage.

The poem's supposedly problematic second paragraph, which contrasts so sharply with the distress of those who witnessed the emperor's death in Choniates, would do nicely as an expression of Patriarchal satisfaction. And if we now detect a certain clerical smugness in these lines, this may be entirely ap-

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[7] CFHB XI: I, 253-4, tr. Magoulias 1984: 142.

propriate; furthermore we now have good reason to give the last word its Byzantine meaning: "Happy all those who believe / and like the emperor Lord Manuel end their life / dressed in their faith *most piously*."

Viewed in this way, the end of the poem is no longer problematic. Its meaning does not depend on whether we accept, with Savidis, Cavafy's adherence to orthodox Christianity or to the view that the cassock makes the priest. Nor need we argue with Christidis about whether these lines betray the envy of a non-believer. Cavafy's own views on religion in general or the efficacy of deathbed repentance in particular – whatever those views were – are not at issue in the poem, which is, as Cavafy said, ἐντελῶς ἱστορικόν ("entirely historical"), in the sense that it articulates a point of view which belongs within the historical situation it describes. And it is entirely historical in a further sense, since it operates entirely from within Choniates' text, being constructed almost entirely out of elements of that text, paraphrasing and condensing statements made or implied by Choniates. At the same time, though, through a change of perspective, it presents an account of the death of Manuel Comnenus which is, on the face of it, radically at variance with the source.

Cavafy could have reiterated Choniates' fine irony in juxtaposing the intended effect of donning the monastic habit with the emperor's actual pathetic appearance in the tattered cloak. I am sure that Cavafy appreciated this irony (and I would hazard a guess that this was the germ of the poem), but he saw, I imagine, the possibility of a more original approach, developing a perspective latent within Choniates' narrative, that of the Patriarch, who would certainly have wanted to gloss over the realities of the dying emperor's appearance and distress. It was vital to the Patriarch's interest that the emperor died "dressed in [his] faith most piously". Had the Patriarch read Choniates' account the next morning in, let us suppose, the Constantinople *Daily Mail*, he would have been appalled, and would have done his best to have it suppressed. The poem *is* hagiography, but the hagiographer is not Cavafy.

In creating this poem through a selective but extremely fine-grained reworking of Choniates, Cavafy emerges as a skilful poet; but, in exploiting a perspective merely implicit in

Choniates, he reveals himself to be at the same time a historian, drawing out the implications of a Byzantine text. One can now reread Choniates' account of the death of Manuel Comnenus paying more attention to the role of the Patriarch, who indeed figures more prominently in the pages that follow.

Had Cavafy been writing history as a historian, he would have been obliged to tell us what he was doing. As a poet, and a difficult modernist poet at that, he can leave us to find out. The clues are there.

* * *

We move on now – *on* in the chronological sequence of Cavafy's poems, but *back* in historical time – from the death of Manuel Comnenus to the writings of his aunt, Anna Comnena. Cavafy's poem "Anna Comnena" was first drafted in August 1917, just over a year after the publication of "Manuel Comnenus", but printed for the first time only in December 1920.

The first of its three paragraphs is a couplet with a potentially subversive rhyme:

> Στὸν πρόλογο τῆς Ἀλεξιάδος της θρηνεῖ,
> γιὰ τὴν χηρεία της ἡ Ἄννα Κομνηνή.

There is no other rhyme in the poem; and this is tongue-in-cheek poeticism, for the opening couplet conveys the poem's most prosaic statement:

> In the Preface to her *Alexiad*
> Anna Comnena laments her widowhood.

In the second paragraph Cavafy strings together some phrases associated with Anna's expression of her grief, mixing quotation and paraphrase:

> Her soul is in turmoil. "And
> with floods of tears," she tells us, "I bathe
> "my eyes..... Alas for the storm-waves" of her life,
> "alas for the reversals." Grief burns her
> "to the bones and marrow and the rending of the soul".

Cavafy has mined several passages in Anna's Preface for these phrases, but it will be enough to give, in Elizabeth Dawes' translation, the passage which is chiefly at issue in the poem:

> Verily, my grief for my Caesar and his unexpected death have touched my inmost soul, and the wound has pierced to the profoundest depths of my being. All previous misfortunes compared with this insatiable calamity I count literally as a single small drop compared with the Atlantic Ocean [...]: they were, methinks, but prelude to this, mere smoke and heat to forewarn me of this fiery furnace and indescribable blaze; the small daily sparks foretold this terrible conflagration. Oh! thou fire which, though unfed, dost reduce my heart to ashes! Thou burnest and art ever kept alight in secret, yet dost not consume. Though thou scorchest my heart thou givest me the outward semblance of being unburnt, though thy fingers of fire have gripped me to the marrow of my bones, and to the dividing of my soul.[8]

In the face of this, Cavafy's laconic "Grief burns her" is both witty and malicious; yet at the same time it is almost charitable to the imperial historian, drawing a veil over the real extravagance of her language. Had he wanted to, Cavafy could have made a much stronger case against the excesses of Anna's style and sentiments. But he has not finished with this passage. In the third and final paragraph of the poem comes what one might have described as a direct attack on Anna Comnena, but for the presence of one word which puts all the rest in doubt. That word is μοιάζει ("appears to be"):

> Ὅμως ἡ ἀλήθεια μοιάζει...
>
> But the truth appears to be that only one grave
> sorrow did this power-loving woman know;
> one profound regret was all
> (though she may not admit it) this arrogant Greek lady had,
> that she did not manage, for all her cleverness,
> to obtain the empire; but it was seized
> almost from within her grasp by the impetuous John.

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[8] *Alexiad* Praef. 4 (CSHB: I, 10), tr. Dawes 1928: 4.

Although Cavafy is no longer quoting Anna here, obviously he is still engaging with her words, for Anna has told us, in no uncertain terms, what she considered the most significant grief of her life: compared to the loss of her husband, all other sorrows were as a drop to an ocean, a spark to a conflagration. And Cavafy does not directly contradict her. He does not say the truth *is* otherwise, only that the truth *appears to be* otherwise. This word μοιάζει signals a historian's guarded judgement; and it introduces what is, essentially, the less guarded judgement of another historian, Charles Diehl.[9]

According to Timos Malanos (1957: 344), Cavafy's "Anna Comnena" was "written after reading the monograph of Charles Diehl" and there is every reason to suppose that Malanos is right. He is referring to Diehl's "Anne Comnène" included in the second series of *Figures Byzantines*, published in 1908.

Diehl voices his reservation about Anna's veracity in the context of the very passage from her Preface which is at issue in Cavafy's poem. He says that "The death of Bryennius [Anna's husband] was, *if she is to be believed*, the great tragedy of her life"[10] (my emphasis). This is fairly mild; but some three pages later Diehl comes to a conclusion that is altogether incompatible with Anna's assertion about her grief for her husband: "for Anna Comnena the birth of a brother was the great misfortune of her life."[11] Here we are fairly close to Cavafy's poem, which suggests that Anna's only deep sorrow was that she did not obtain the Empire, which was taken from her "by the impetuous John", that is, the same younger brother Diehl refers to, who became emperor on the death of their father Alexius in 1118.

Anna Comnena was, as Diehl supposes she saw it, twice deprived of the throne. Born in 1083, she was the eldest child of Alexius Comnenus, who had assumed the throne two years before, and in her infancy she was betrothed to Constantine Ducas. Constantine was the son of Michael VII, deposed by

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[9] Beaton suggests (1983: 39) that Gibbon's judgement is in question here. Gibbon (1994: III, 69) and Paparrigopoulos (1925: IVb, 29) both cast doubt, in general terms, on Anna's veracity, but my analysis shows that it is primarily Diehl whose views are implicated in the poem.

[10] Diehl 1908: 36, tr. Bell & de Kerpely 1963: 183.

[11] Diehl 1908: 39, tr. Bell & de Kerpely 1963: 185.

Nicephorus Botaneiates, who was in turn deposed by Alexius. At first Alexius acknowledged Constantine's right of succession, and thus as a small child Anna had every expectation of eventually becoming empress. But in 1088 her brother John was born, and three years later, when Anna was eight, Alexius changed the succession, making John his heir in place of Constantine, thus destroying his daughter's hopes. In 1094, before the marriage of Anna and Constantine had been celebrated, Constantine died; and in 1097 Anna married Nicephorus Bryennius.

Anna's mother, Irene, preferred her son-in-law to her own son John, and "the two women", as Diehl tells us, "resolved to oust the legitimate heir", and "soon, thanks to [their] intrigues, Bryennius was all-powerful at the palace".[12] However, they never succeeded in persuading Alexius to make Bryennius his heir, and while Alexius was dying John had himself proclaimed emperor. Despite the urging of Anna and Irene, Bryennius refused to challenge his brother-in-law. This is how Diehl sums up the situation after the death of Alexius:

> Anna's plots had failed: her brother was emperor. For the proud princess this was a terrible and unexpected blow. For many years she had lived in the hope of inheriting the Empire. She considered the throne legitimately and essentially hers, she thought herself superior to her detested younger brother. Now all her dreams had crumbled. The audacity of John Comnenus and the hesitancy of Bryennius had overturned at a single stroke the whole edifice of intricate schemes so cleverly constructed by Anna and Irene.[13]

In this passage there are a number of phrases closely related to expressions in Cavafy's poem. "The proud princess" ("l'orgueilleuse princesse") is reflected in Cavafy's ἡ ἀγέρωχη αὐτὴ Γραικιά ("this proud" or "haughty Greek Lady"); the "edifice of intricate schemes so cleverly constructed" ("l'édifice de machinations si savamment construit") is reflected in Cavafy's ὅλην τὴν δεξιότητά της ("all her dexterity" or "cleverness"), despite which she did not manage to obtain the empire; and "Anna's plots had failed" ("les intrigues d'Anne avaient échouées") is

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[12] Diehl 1908: 40, tr. Bell & de Kerpely 1963: 186.
[13] Diehl 1908: 43-4, tr. Bell & de Kerpely 1963: 189.

reflected in Cavafy's δὲν κατάφερε ("she did not manage" or "did not succeed").

Diehl's phrase "the audacity of John Comnenus" might be related to Cavafy's phrase, "the impetuous John", but for both authors the ultimate source here is Choniates, as we shall see.

Cavafy's phrase μιὰ λύπη μόνην καιρίαν ("only one grave sorrow") recalls and challenges Anna's assertion that in comparison to her grief at the death of Bryennius all her other misfortunes were as a drop to an ocean, but in its form this phrase echoes a phrase of Diehl's: "ce rêve unique et tenace" ("this one tenacious dream"). The context in Diehl makes the connection clear:

> It was because she believed herself qualified to reign, by right of seniority, that as long as Alexius lived she plotted, agitated, and used all her influence to push forward her husband [...] with the aim of recovering the power that she considered herself unjustly deprived of. This was the constant goal of her ambition, the justification for all her acts; this one tenacious dream filled her whole existence – and explains it – up until the day when, having finally failed to attain her goal, she understood that she had, at the same time, wrecked her life.[14]

Cavafy simply adjusts the perspective. Diehl writes here from the earlier perspective, before the final frustration of Anna's "goal" and "dream"; while Cavafy, viewing the situation from a later perspective, speaks not of her "dream, unique and enduring" but of her "grief, unique and grave".

The perspective, in another and broader sense, is still that of Charles Diehl, since the basic statement in the third paragraph of Cavafy's poem – that Anna's only grave sorrow was that she failed to gain the empire - reflects Diehl's opinion. But, whereas in Diehl's text this view is expressed in a forthright and unqualified manner, Cavafy sets a question mark against it with the introductory phrase: "the truth appears to be that...". Cavafy, in effect, presents a paraphrase of Diehl's view, not as the truth, but as the view which the balance of the evidence favours.

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[14] Diehl 1908: 39, tr. Bell & de Kerpely 1963: 185.

To be sure, Cavafy's poem suggests, and suggests quite strongly, that Anna was not being truthful when she declared that her grief for Bryennius far outweighed all the other sorrows of her life; but with "the truth appears to be", the poem retains an element of ambiguity. But there is a more radical ambiguity in the tension between two particular words - both of them adjectives: φίλαρχη ("power loving") applied to Anna, and προπετής ("impetuous") applied to her brother John. Both are derived from Paparrigopoulos' discussion of the reign of Alexius in his *History of the Greek Nation.*

Paparrigopoulos says (1925: IVb, 109) that Anna "was distinguished not only by her education but also by her lust for power" (the Greek word is φιλαρχία). Then, merely echoing Choniates, Paparrigopoulos goes on to say that the empress Irene "basely slandered" her son John, describing him to Alexius as "impetuous and dissolute" (προπετῆ καὶ ἀκόλαστον). The two expressions are contextualized in radically different ways. "Distinguished by her lust for power" is Paparrigopoulos' own opinion of Anna, part of an unframed statement; but "impetuous and dissolute" is the empress Irene's opinion of her son, as related by Choniates, who characterizes it as slander (CFHB 11: I, 5). In Cavafy, however, "power loving woman" and "insolent John" are part of the same sentence.

The last three lines of the poem are a form of reported speech: they give us the content of Anna's supposed thoughts, the content of her one regret as Diehl sees it. However, by including Irene's word προπετής, which undoubtedly represents Anna's view as much as her mother's, but giving no indication that this is a quotation, Cavafy subverts what is essentially Diehl's view. In effect, he gives Anna the last word.

This is the technique of a poet, and a modernist technique – comparable, in its small way, to the multiple perspectives in Picasso portraits, or the collage of voices in Eliot's *The Waste Land* or Pound's *Cantos.* And yet in Cavafy's "Anna Comnena" the result of this poetic strategy is to draw attention to a problem in historiography: the incompatibility between Anna's *Alexiad* and Choniates' *History,* as it emerges in the writings of a more recent historian.

What we have in Cavafy's "Anna Comnena" is a text which locates itself within a historical debate and, though it seems to

lean in one direction, does not finally come down on that side, but remains suspended in its own unresolved tension; and in consequence is able to go on reverberating in our minds, justifying its existence as a poem.

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In turning to the third poem, "Anna Dalassena", we again move both forwards and backwards: forwards in Cavafy's career (the poem was published in 1927), back in history, to 1081, to the beginning of the main period of Comnenian rule. There had been the earlier, brief and isolated reign of Isaac I Comnenus who was proclaimed emperor in 1057, but abdicated two years later. Isaac had tried to persuade his brother John to accept the throne, but John refused, to the great and enduring frustration of his ambitious wife, Anna Dalassena, who, like her granddaughter Anna Comnena, appears to have felt herself cheated of empire. There are many parallels in their lives; but there is one all-important difference: Anna Dalassena ultimately achieved her ambition, when, in February 1081, her sons, in league with the Palaeologi, deposed Nicephorus Botaneiates, and her third son Alexius became emperor. Some months later, as he was about to depart on what was likely to be a protracted military campaign, Alexius transferred full imperial authority to his mother. And it is the edict, the χρυσόβουλλον or Golden Bull, by which the transfer was effected, which is the starting point of Cavafy's poem "Anna Dalassena".

It is a poem which has clearly perplexed many readers. "Is it a poem or a joke?" exclaimed an exasperated Palamas. Ftyaras made some comment about the poem's simplicity. "No," rejoined Palamas, "the simplicity is nothing more than meagreness" (Ftyaras 1983: 545). Even Christidis, who provides us with a splendidly innocent reading, finds it lacking. Cavafy, he says (1957: 55-6),

> makes a respectful obeisance before the noble, aristocratic lady. It is impossible, however, for us to get a picture of Anna Dalassena from this poem. We have, we might say, a few words, carved on a tombstone, which summarize in general terms the virtues of the deceased. [...] In this condensed poem we do not find that

> indefinable something which would give it the stamp of superior quality [...]. We admire the "very clever Lady Anna Dalassena", we are clearly put in mind of her greatness, but it is not possible for us to grasp the breadth of her character.

Christidis at least knows what he wants from the poem; as does Nasos Vayenas. Asked to select Cavafy's "weakest poem", Vayenas (1983: 400) picked "Anna Dalassena". He finds that it is "purely historical", and like Palamas and Malanos (1957: 229) before him, considers it scarcely poetry. He contrasts it unfavourably with other poems in which the poet is "so moved by the historical episodes" that "their historicity recedes" and we feel that "the actions have been transferred to our own historical moment, and enacted in front of us". In "Anna Dalassena", he says, "no such thing happens; and thus the temperature of the verse is low and the final result feeble."

We now know what does *not* happen in Cavafy's "Anna Dalassena": the character of the empress is not adequately conveyed; and the historical episode is not brought to life. But perhaps something else is going on. The poem does not really refer to a historical *episode*, or to anything that could be described as an action, except perhaps the *issuing* of the Golden Bull. Nor, despite its title, is it really a poem about a historical personage. It is, rather, a poem about a text[15] – not, however, the text which it appears to be about.

On the surface "Anna Dalassena" is indeed a simple poem. It tells us that in the Golden Bull which Alexius Comnenus issued to honour his mother, whom the speaker describes as "very clever" and "remarkable in her works and ways", there are many encomiastic expressions. "Here", the speaker says, "let us transpose from them one sentence, beautiful and noble"; and then the speaker (here revealed to be not so much a speaker as a writer) sets down the "beautiful and noble sentence", which is for us, the readers, the last line of the poem:

> Οὐ τὸ ἐμὸν ἢ τὸ σὸν, τὸ ψυχρὸν τοῦτο ῥῆμα, ἐρρήθη.

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[15] Compare Jusdanis 1987: 125.

Literally: "Not the mine or the thine, that cold word, was spoken"; more idiomatically: "Neither of those cold words 'mine' and 'thine' was spoken."

The sentence is described as "beautiful" and "noble". This is an ethical as well as an aesthetic judgement. This sentence suggests, certainly, a generous and unselfish relationship between two people, a relationship that might well be described as "noble", but a relationship not uncommon between family members. In the Golden Bull it illustrates the emperor's assessment of his relationship with his mother. "It is well known," he says, "that one soul animated us, physically separated though we were, and by the grace of Christ that happy state has persisted to this day." The "beautiful sentence" follows. It is not, in fact, a complete sentence, but only the first part of a sentence which continues: "and a matter of still greater import is that her prayers, of great frequency throughout her life, have reached the ears of the Lord and have raised me to my present position of sovereign."[16]

The Greek adjective εὐγενικός has roughly the same range of meanings as the English "noble". In Cavafy's poem, the feminine form εὐγενική is rhymed, quite pointedly I suggest, with a *noble* (in the sociological sense) family name, Δαλασσηνή. It is all very well, we might reflect, for members of a rich and powerful family to hold all things in common.

Did Cavafy realize that this beautiful sentence was not original to Alexius? I think that by the late 1920s Cavafy's reading in Byzantine literature was wide enough to make it likely that he did. The core of the sentence, " 'mine' and 'thine', those cold words", comes from a sermon of John Chrysostom on St Philogonius. Echoes of it turn up again in Saints' lives and monastic foundation documents, and by the twelfth century it had perhaps become proverbial; but it was used primarily in reference to communal monastic life.[17] Its appropriation by a rich and noble family may be a further dimension in the irony implicit in the rhyming of εὐγενική with Δαλασσηνή.

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[16] *Alexiad* 3.6 (CSHB: I, 157), tr. Dawes 1928: 83.

[17] PG 48: 749a; compare Noret 1982: 138 and Petit 1900: 73. I am indebted to Dirk Krausmüller (Queen's University of Belfast) for identifying the allusion in the Bull and providing these references.

So much for ethics, for the nobility of sentiment, but what about aesthetics? Is the sentence "beautiful" considered as a line of verse – for this is what, in Cavafy's hands, it has become – or does it suffer, rather, from an *excess* of poetic effects? It is certainly a most extraordinary sentence. This line transposed from the Golden Bull contains a triple internal rhyme occurring at regular intervals: οὐ τὸ ἐμόν | ἢ τὸ σόν | τὸ ψυχρόν, and another internal rhyme between the initial Οὐ τὸ and τοῦτο. Add to these the fourfold repetition of the unstressed syllable το, and the striking alliteration in the last two words, ρῆμα, ἐρρήθη. Last but not least, this line is an accentual dactylic hexameter.[18] It is hardly surprising that this sentence caught the eye of so sensitive and ingenious a craftsman as Cavafy; but is he really holding it up for us to admire, as a poetic *objet trouvé* ? There is, I think, no immediate answer. Our answer must depend on how we interpret the poem as a whole.

In order to get a clearer idea of what Cavafy is up to in this poem we need to examine in some detail its relation to its source, which proves to be not merely, indeed not primarily, the Golden Bull itself, but the pages of the *Alexiad* which surround the Bull, for the Bull has only survived because Anna Comnena inserted the text of it into her account of her father's reign.

There is something a little offhand about the poem's statement that "in the Golden Bull [...] there are *various* encomiastic expressions" (διάφορα ἐγκωμιαστικά); and in fact there are not very many of them. Alexius refers to Anna Dalassena as his "saintly mother", his "saintly and most deeply honoured mother", and his "holy mother",[19] but apart from these essentially conventional expressions the praise is all implicit – in the descriptions of her devotion to her son, her abilities and her experience – as indeed it is merely implicit in the sample Cavafy inserts in his poem. The real encomium of Anna Dalassena is found not in the Bull itself but in the pages which Anna Comnena devotes to her grandmother immediately

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[18] As both David Holton and Peter Mackridge observed when they heard earlier versions of this paper.

[19] Ἡ ἡγιασμένη μήτηρ (*Alexiad* 3.6; CSHB: 157), τῇ ἡγιασμένῃ καὶ πανεντιμοτάτῃ μητρί (ibid.: 158) and ἡ ἁγία μήτηρ (ibid.: 159), tr. Dawes 1928: 83-4.

after the text of the Bull. And, what is more, Alexius' praise of his mother is more explicit, as we shall see, in the opinions attributed to him by his daughter than in the Golden Bull itself.

Anna herself uses the adjective ἐγκωμιαστικός which in Cavafy's "Anna Dalassena" characterizes elements in the Bull, but she uses it denote to something which a historian, and specifically she herself, should avoid:

> Another person might yield here to the conventional manner of panegyric [*lit.* to encomiastic rules: νόμοις ἐγκωμιαστικοῖς], and laud the birthplace of this wonderful mother, and trace her descent from the Dalassenian Hadrians and Charons, and then embark on the ocean of her ancestors' achievements - but as I am writing history, it is not correct to deduce her character from her descent and ancestors, but from her disposition and virtue [...].[20]

While Anna does not dwell on her grandmother's provenance or ancestry, she certainly oversteps the boundaries between history and encomium, for she continues: "To return once again to my grandmother, she was a very great honour, not only to women, but to men too, and was an ornament to the human race." A few lines later we read that "in sobriety of conduct she as far outshone the celebrated women of old, as the sun outshines the stars"; and then that "her character as outwardly manifested was such as to be revered by angels, and dreaded by the very demons."[21] Anna has already made the exaggerated and slightly absurd claim that her grandmother "was so clever in business and so skilful in guiding a state, and setting it in order, that she was capable of not only administering the Roman Empire, but any other of all the countries the sun shines upon."[22]

My purpose in citing these passages goes beyond the wish to demonstrate that Cavafy could have found the concept of ἐγκωμιαστικά ("encomiastic phrases") – and indeed the word itself – in the *Alexiad*, or that ἐγκωμιαστικά are more plentiful in the text of the *Alexiad* which surrounds the Golden Bull than in

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[20] *Alexiad* 3.8 (CSHB: I, 163), tr. Dawes 1928: 86.
[21] *Alexiad* 3.8 (CSHB: I, 163-4), tr. Dawes 1928: 86-7.
[22] *Alexiad* 3.7 (CSHB: I, 160-61), tr. Dawes 1928: 85.

the Bull itself, for in these passages (and others to be adduced) we can find the source of almost everything in Cavafy's poem.

What the poem tells us about the dowager empress is that she was λίαν νοήμονα ("very clever") and ἀξιόλογη στὰ ἔργα της, στὰ ἤθη ("remarkable in her works and ways"). These two phrases summarize a whole constellation of epithets and statements in the *Alexiad*.

Before she introduces the Golden Bull, Anna relates that Alexius sometimes said of his mother that "without her intellect and judgement the affairs of the empire would founder",[23] and Anna herself says of her grandmother that "besides being clever she had in very truth a kingly mind".[24] After giving the text of the Bull, Anna refers again and again to her grandmother's intellect. She was "clever in business" and "skilful in guiding a state", "a woman of wide experience" who "knew the nature of many things"; she was "very keen in noting what should be done and clever in carrying it out".[25] Alexius, Anna tells us, "was convinced" that "in knowledge and comprehension of affairs" his mother "far surpassed all men of the time."[26] Anna herself, in her final comments before she leaves the subject of her grandmother, speaks of Anna Dalassena's "absolute superiority of intellect" (τὸ ἀκροφυέστατον τοῦ φρονήματος).[27] Given the plethora of testimony in the *Alexiad* to Anna Dalassena's mental powers, and especially the several synonyms of "clever" applied to her – φρενήρης, δεξιοτάτη, εὐμήχανος, ὀξυτάτη, δεινή – Cavafy's line "the very clever Lady Anna Dalassena" seems positively insolent in its brevity.

But what of the next line, "remarkable in her works and ways"? Significantly, Anna Comnena also deals first with her grandmother's intellect and her experience and ability in statecraft, in *Alexiad*, Book 3, Chapter 7; and then, in the first half of Chapter 8, she turns to her character and virtuous deeds. We have already seen some of the extravagant generalizations about her character: she was "an ornament to the human race";

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[23] *Alexiad* 3.6 (CSHB: I, 155), my translation.
[24] *Alexiad* 3.6 (CSHB: I, 156), tr. Dawes 1928: 82.
[25] *Alexiad* 3.7 (CSHB: I, 160-61), tr. Dawes 1928: 85.
[26] *Alexiad* 3.7 (CSHB: I, 162), tr. Dawes 1928: 86.
[27] *Alexiad* 3.8 (CSHB: I, 165), my translation.

"her character as outwardly manifested was such as to be revered by the angels". Furthermore, "in [her] undertakings and ideas" she would have "cast into the shade" all "those of old times of either sex distinguished for virtue".[28] With the phrase, "in [her] undertakings and ideas", τοῖς ἐπιχειρήμασι καὶ τοῖς ἐνθυμήμασι,[29] we are close to Cavafy's phrase, "in her works and ways", στὰ ἔργα της, στὰ ἤθη. "Remarkable in her works and ways" according to Cavafy's poem; and outshining, according to the *Alexiad*, all the great men and women of antiquity who were famed for their ἀρετή – not "virtue" in a narrow sense but excellence of every kind. "Remarkable" indeed! As with "very clever", we must suspect a studied and subversive understatement on Cavafy's part.

The earlier poem "Anna Comnena" involves an unmistakable, if equivocal, attack on the integrity of the author of the *Alexiad* when she "laments her widowhood" in extravagant and histrionic terms. In "Anna Dalassena" there is no explicit comment on the same author's equally extravagant praises of her grandmother, but we do know from other poems something of Cavafy's attitude to praise and flattery of royalty. Take "Caesarion", for example. The vision of the beautiful and doomed young king which visits the middle-aged poet in his dimly lit room one night in the winter of 1914, is not what concerns us here. It is what leads up to this vision which may help us to see what the same poet is doing, some years later, when he composes "Anna Dalassena".

There is a parallel between what happens in the first two paragraphs of "Caesarion" and what happens in "Anna Dalassena", a parallel obscured, at first sight, by the autobiographical style of "Caesarion": "Partly to verify a date [...] last night I picked up a collection of inscriptions." But the poet found, that "the abundant praises and the flatteries were all the same". His response (boredom) is clearly implied: "When I'd

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[28] *Alexiad* 3.8 (CSHB: I, 165), tr. Dawes 1928: 87 (modified).

[29] There is a third term, in a different category and ludicrously redundant: καὶ ταῖς πρὸς ἄλλους συγκρίσεσιν, "and in comparisons with others". Dawes slightly improves the sense by a loose translation: "for her actions, ideas, and conduct, as compared with others".

managed to verify the date,[30] I would have put the book aside"; but then he comes across the one thing (apart from the date he needed) which is of value to him in the book, "a reference, brief and insignificant, to King Caesarion", which "immediately attracted [his] attention". The speaker in "Anna Dalassena" has also been reading. Clearly, though he does not tell us, he has been reading the *Alexiad* of Anna Comnena; and, since he has obviously been reading the part which contains the text of the Golden Bull, he will have come across a great deal of repetitive praise and flattery, not of several Ptolemaic kings and queens but of one Byzantine empress, Anna Dalassena. He gives no explicit indication of having read Anna Comnena's encomium to her grandmother, but it is, as we have seen, cogently, if flippantly, summarized in the lines "the very clever Lady Anna Dalassena, remarkable in her works and ways". Although the speaker refers to the "various encomiastic expressions" in the Golden Bull, this summary, as we have seen, is firmly grounded in the encomiastic passages of the *Alexiad*, rather than in the very few encomiastic phrases in the Bull itself; and the very terseness of the summary implies a dismissive and impatient attitude towards the prolixity and excesses of the original. But then, as in "Caesarion", there is the one thing that attracts the speaker's attention; and again it is a verbal object, not "a reference, brief and insignificant" but "a sentence, beautiful and noble". Whereas in "Caesarion" the "reference" is the spark that kindles the poet's imagination to recreate the long-dead youthful king with an erotic immediacy, "Anna Dalassena" does not take us beyond the "sentence". The speaker simply presents it and leaves it to resonate.

The underlying perspective, though, is that of "Caesarion", of the sceptical poet, bored with the praise of royalty; but the motions that the speaker/writer goes through in "Anna Dalassena" are those of author of the *Alexiad*. We have already seen that the parenthetic description of Anna Dalassena

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[30] This translation, which agrees with those of Beaton (1983: 32-3) and Ricks (in *Modern Poetry in Translation* n.s. 13 [1998] 10), has been challenged, but it is hard to see what Cavafy could have meant by "to verify an epoch", still less how one could succeed in doing so at a particular point in time: Όταν κατόρθωσα τὴν ἐποχὴ νὰ ἐξακριβώσω.

in lines 3-4 is grounded in the *Alexiad*. If we abstract that, what is left of the first five lines is this:

> In the Golden Bull which Alexius Comnenus issued
> to honour his mother conspicuously
> there are various encomiastic expressions.

Everything here can be traced back to the *Alexiad*. The concept of ἐγκωμιαστικά has already been shown to derive from Anna, and we know of this particular Golden Bull of Alexius Comnenus only because she included it in the *Alexiad*. All that remains to be accounted for is the second line, "to honour his mother conspicuously".

To characterize the Bull as being issued "to honour" Alexius' mother is a little strange. The purpose of the Bull was not to honour Anna Dalassena, though it certainly does that, but to transfer to her the entire responsibility for the management of the Empire. The focus on honour, though, derives from Anna Comnena. Having set down the text of the Golden Bull, she says,

> These, then, were the words of the Golden Bull. And one might marvel at my father the emperor for the honour to his mother they convey [...].[31]

Cavafy's expression νὰ τιμήσει τὴν μητέρα του ("to honour his mother") is simply a reworking of Anna's phrase τῆς εἰς τὴν μητέρα τιμῆς ("for the honour to his mother"). The voice is essentially Anna's.

We can also find in Anna, the idea that the Golden Bull honoured Alexius' mother ἐπιφανῶς, "conspicuously". Before she comes to the text of the Golden Bull, Anna has already spoken in general terms of her father's wish "that his mother rather than himself should take the helm of state".[32] When the Norman threat to the empire obliged Alexius to leave the capital, he was able to realize his ambition. As Anna recounts,

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[31] *Alexiad* 3.7 (CSHB: I, 160), my translation.
[32] *Alexiad* 3.6 (CSHB: I, 156), tr. Dawes 1928: 82.

> Now, bringing out into the light the scheme dear to his soul, he transferred the governance of the empire to his mother and to her alone, and by means of a Golden Bull made his intentions manifest to all. [33]

We have two parallel phrases here which are condensed, I suggest, in Cavafy's adverb ἐπιφανῶς: the first is εἰς φῶς [...] ἐξάγων ("bringing out into the light"), and the second, εἰς προῦπτον πᾶσι κατέστησεν ("made manifest to all").

It is now clear that at least in lines 1-5 of "Anna Dalassena" we are dealing with a reworking of selected expressions from the *Alexiad*. The voice is and is not that of Anna Comnena; it is and is not Cavafy's. It is Cavafy debunking Anna, far more subtly and effectively than in the poem explicitly devoted to her. In "Anna Comnena" he quoted and then questioned the truth of Anna's words. Here, without mentioning her at all, he assumes her voice, he mimics her; and the mimicry is a mockery – an outrageous parody, whose extreme condensation collapses three chapters of the *Alexiad* into a few words, deflating the younger Anna's extended and extravagant praise of her grandmother.

But what of the remaining three lines of the poem, or rather lines 6 and 7 which introduce the "beautiful sentence" of the last line:

> here let us transpose from them
> one sentence, beautiful and noble [...].

This too may be seen as a parody of Anna's own procedure in the *Alexiad*. Between her first reference to the Golden Bull, as the means by which Alexius "made his intentions manifest", and her transcription of the text, she inserts an aside on the duties of the historian, in which she indicates that she is not transcribing the text of the Bull exactly as she had it in front of her, but omitting "the embellishments of the scribe". [34]

Whatever these embellishments may have been, Anna's omissions were probably minor. But Cavafy, taking up the idea of omission, still, as it were, playing at being Anna, transcribing

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[33] *Alexiad* 3.6 (CSHB: I, 156), my translation.
[34] *Alexiad* 3.6 (CSHB: I, 156-7), my translation.

as she herself transcribes, performs what is from the historian's point of view a *reductio ad absurdum*, not only ignoring the substance of the Golden Bull (the transfer of power), but dispensing with the entire text of the Bull, except for the single sentence which has caught his imagination as a poet (and which in any case is not original in the Bull, but derives ultimately from Chrysostom). He has, we might say, cut through the Golden Bullshit to reveal the single pearl in the dungheap of imperial flattery and pomposity. From all those pages of the *Alexiad* (Book 3, Chapters 6-8) that sentence of eleven words, οὐ τὸ ἐμὸν ἢ τὸ σόν, τὸ ψυχρὸν τοῦτο ῥῆμα ἐρρήθη, is, it seems, for Cavafy, all that is worth preserving. Perhaps not a pearl of great price, but an intriguing one; and there it lies, in its new setting, this miniature poem finalized around New Year 1927, which proved to be Cavafy's final poetic (and brilliantly ironic) comment on Byzantium.

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I think that what emerges from the examination of these three short poems in relation to their sources amply justifies Cavafy's claim to be a poet-historian. But in the light of these poems we must insist on the hyphen, for the poet-historian is a hybrid. As poet-historian, Cavafy flouts the expectations which both his contemporaries and later critics have of poetry; and, while, in the careful scrutiny of sources and the weighing of evidence, he maintains a historian's standards, in his reconstructions of history and his critiques of historiography he moves beyond the modes of expression legitimate for a professional historian. Cavafy the poet-historian extends the range of both poetry and history. And some of the resulting poems will only yield their riches of wit and sophistication when we approach them not merely as attentive readers of poetry, but also as equally if not more attentive readers of history.

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Princeton University

Cavafy in America

David Ricks

The title of this paper might provoke some quizzical expressions: I had better begin with the reassuring, or disappointing, fact that I have no biographical surprises to spring. The present topic is not "Cavafy: the American years" (as it might be, "Rimbaud in Cyprus"). Yet there have been noteworthy forms of poetic commerce between Cavafy and American verse, as I hope to show.

These transactions run in both directions. There is certainly one American poet to whom, as we shall see, Cavafy appears to owe something. (It is a grievous deficiency in Cavafy scholarship, when we compare it to the resources that we possess for modern poets in other languages, that no annotated edition exists to provide brief details of his literary borrowings.[1]) But the ways in which Cavafy has in turn been read by American poets also deserve our attention. The ideological polarities and interpretative vagaries of the responses to Cavafy's *œuvre* are, to be sure, of interest in themselves.[2] But this is especially true where they take the form of new poems of lasting value. Such poems are, of course, few; yet a survey of the whole field of consciously post-Cavafian poetry can tell us, in a way that we cannot other-

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References to Cavafy's collected poems (Κ.Π Καβάφης, *Ποιήματα* (ed. G.P. Savidis, 2 vols., Athens 1981) are made by the letter C followed by volume and page number.

[1] Sadly, such editions of modern Greek poets are few and far between, though the late G.P. Savidis's edition of K.G. Karyotakis, *Τα ποιήματα (1913-1928)* (Athens 1992) goes some way to supplying a model, albeit with only brief annotation.

[2] Not, it has to be said, of overwhelming interest; but, for example, the debate summarized in Vassilis Lambropoulos, "The violent power of knowledge: the struggle of critical discourses for domination over Cavafy's 'Young Men of Sidon, AD 400'", *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 10 (1983) 149-66, has piquant moments.

wise learn, something about what it was that the Alexandrian poet "brought to Art".

Such is the conception behind Nasos Vayenas's recent anthology, *In Conversation with Cavafy*, which weighs in at well over three hundred pages.[3] This volume presents in Greek translations, with brief introductions for countries in which poetic interest in Cavafy has taken a sustained form, poems from all over the world which make some kind of open reference or homage to the Greek poet or his work or, often, the two together. The overall picture it presents is a striking one. Not only has the influence of Cavafy's poetry diffused itself even further than that of Borges and Pessoa, he has become to his successors a pre-eminent icon of the poet, and this despite an uneventful life such as a Mayakovski or a Mandelstam were tragically not granted to lead.[4] And from Edmund Keeley's selection of sixteen poems from the United States since 1963, it is clear that Cavafy has enjoyed something of a vogue among his fellow-practitioners across the Atlantic for years.[5]

There's a surprise here. We think of Cavafy, on his own authority, as a "poet of old age"; but we also think of him as being, *par excellence*, a poet of the Old World. Indeed, when the United States is fleetingly mentioned in a poem by Cavafy, it is only to evoke the greatest possible and most painful kind of separation. "Before time could change them" begins:

> They were extremely sad at their parting.
> It wasn't what they wanted; it was the circumstances.
> The need to make a living led one of the two
> to go off far away – New York or Canada.[6]

All this might seem to suggest that Cavafy saw little to take from America, and that, in turn, modern American poets might find few enough affinities with him. But this is not the case. A

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[3] Nasos Vayenas (ed.), *Συνομιλώντας με τον Καβάφη* (Thessaloniki 2000).
[4] Ibid., pp.19-35.
[5] Ibid., pp. 129-59. In this paper I have deliberately confined myself largely to poems which fall outside Keeley's selection. Regrettably, the anthology does not contain the originals of the poems, but the index of references on p. 367 may be employed.
[6] C 2.39.

comparison with Cavafy's relation to poetry from the British Isles will be illuminating here.[7]

Perhaps the most decisive factor which has led to Cavafy's so taking root in English letters has been the fact that, following a conscious and highly fruitful strategy (in many ways, a strategy which suited him better than the following of Eliot suited Seferis), Cavafy drew in his poetry on the work of many English poets, and above all that of Browning.[8] In Cavafy's historical poems, as a consequence, the English reader recognizes as familiar a voice with the ring of Browning – a learned and ironic voice which does not eschew the quiet pleasures of pedantry. (Indeed, this fact is of no little assistance to the English translator of Cavafy.[9]) It is also true, however, that Cavafy's erotic poems have no particularly strong predecessors in nineteenth-century English poetry: while undoubtedly important for Cavafy, William [Johnson] Cory's *Ionica* (1860) or Oscar Wilde's poems of Greek love are pallid by comparison.[10] It is no surprise, then, that English-language versions of Cavafy's sensual poems are often unsatisfying.[11] Yet an American predecessor of Cavafy, Whitman, may be seen as one of his inspirations.

The presence of Whitman in Greece is a diverse one, even if mention of him is likely to take our minds first to the wild Sixties atmosphere of Lefteris Poulios's "American bar in Athens", to the erotic fever of Andreas Embiricos, to the drum

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[7] A selection (again, in Greek translation) in Vayenas, *Συνομιλώντας με τον Καβάφη*, pp. 243-65 ; forthcoming discussion by me in "Ο Βρετανικός Καβάφης", *Πρακτικά της Η' Επιστημονικής Συνάντησης του Τομέα ΜΝΕΣ* (Thessaloniki 2001).

[8] The point was made polemically by Glafkos Alithersis, *Το πρόβλημα του Καβάφη* (Alexandria 1934), and developed significantly by Edmund Keeley, "Constantine Cavafy and George Seferis and their relation to poetry in English", DPhil thesis, Oxford 1952; some further remarks are to be found in Ricks, "Ο Βρετανικός Καβάφης".

[9] If I may speak from personal experience: see the versions in *Modern Poetry in Translation* n.s. 13 (1998) 9-12.

[10] On the Wilde connection see Sarah Ekdawi, "The erotic poems of C.P. Cavafy", *Κάμπος* 1 (1993),23-46; Cory, who lies behind Cavafy's "Ionic" (*Ποιήματα*, 1.53), requires further investigation.

[11] So I argued in "Cavafy translated", *Κάμπος* 1 (1993) 85-110; later versions have done little to change my mind.

taps of Nikos Engonopoulos, or to the pantheistic free verse of Sikelianos's *Consciousnesses.*[12] Yet, despite their radical differences of form and temperament, there is no doubt that there is some connection between the bearded American prophet and the stiff-collared Alexandrian. Poetic affinities do not always come where they are expected: they may even provoke a degree of unease in the younger poet who must concede the affinity. A celebrated case, one pertinent to our argument: Hopkins's recognition (1882) that "I always knew in my heart Walt Whitman's mind to be more like my own than any other man's living. As he is a very great scoundrel this is not a pleasant confession."[13]

The first scholar to discern Cavafy's affinities to Whitman was Edmund Keeley in his doctoral thesis of 1952; oddly, Keeley later retreated from what he seems to have felt to be an over-imaginative comparison, and Whitman takes up no more than a footnote in *Cavafy's Alexandria,* where his "vague indirect eroticism" is seen as having little connection with the Greek poet's work.[14] Yet surely Cavafy will have been familiar with the figure, and indeed the work, of Whitman, whose fame in England, and indeed in France, grew apace from the 1860s.[15] From the outset, devotees of "Greek love" found in Whitman's poetry a homoerotic vein quite without smut or prurience, and the self-taught American came to find his name invoked by Hellenists as, so to speak, a natural exponent of the Hellenic spirit: John Addington Symonds, for example, that tireless advocate of Greek love, rejoices in the rebirth of Platonic ideals in the robust frames

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[12] Lefteris Poulios, "Αμέρικαν Μπαρ στην Αθήνα", *Ποιήματα 1,2* (Athens 1975), pp. 71-2; Andreas Embiricos, "Οι Μπεάτοι ή της μη συμμορφώσεως οι Άγιοι", *Οκτάνα* (Athens 1980), pp. 101-3; Nikos Engonopoulos, epigraph to the collection *Η επιστροφή των πουλιών, Ποιήματα,* vol. 2 (Athens 1977), p. 37. For earlier bibliography see G.K. Katsimbalis, *Ελληνική Βιβλιογραφία Ουώλτ Ουίτμαν* (2nd ed., Athens 1963).

[13] Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges,* ed. Claude Colleer Abbott (Oxford 1970), p. 154; see also pp. 311-16 for George Saintsbury's review (1874) of *Leaves of Grass.*

[14] Edmund Keeley, *Cavafy's Alexandria* (revised edition, Princeton 1996), p. 206, n. 115.

[15] Harold Blodgett, *Walt Whitman in England* (Ithaca, NY 1934).

of the youths who populate the Utopian American's poems.[16] As Cavafy concludes a poem of slumming: "The mind turned to Plato's Charmides."[17]

And indeed Whitman is not always so far from the Cavafian brand of sensualism, in particular in his sequence – significantly with a Greek title – *Calamus*. (It invokes the pen, of course, with the autoerotic implications often close to the surface in Cavafy.) Whitman's scenes give us an idea why the erotic Cavafy has lodged so firmly in the American poetic mind: it's not so easy to say why, but the authentic proto-Cavafian touch is to be seen in, for example, "A Glimpse" (1860) where the scene is much like that of "At the café entrance" or "There to remain":

> A glimpse through an interstice caught,
> Of a crowd of workmen and drivers in a bar-room around the stove late of a winter night, and I unremark'd seated in a corner,
> Of a youth who loves me and whom I love, silently approaching and setting himself near, that he may hold me by the hand,
> A long while amid the noises of coming and going, of drinking and oath and smutty jest,
> There we too, content, happy in being together, speaking little, perhaps not a word.[18]

If this is the scene on a small scale, Cavafy's larger setting of a sensual Alexandria itself owes something to Whitman's mythologized Manhattan (again, significantly associated with a Greek word):

> CITY OF ORGIES
>
> City of orgies, walks and joys,
> City whom that I have lived and sung in your midst will one day make you illustrious,

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[16] John Addington Symonds, *Walt Whitman. A study* (London 1893), pp. 67-86; for the wider climate see Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca, NY 1994). Charmides is named in connection with Whitman by Saintsbury: see n. 13 above.

[17] C 1.76.

[18] Walt Whitman, *The Complete Poems* (ed. Francis Murphy) (Harmondsworth 1975), p. 163; cf. C 1.54, 2.8.

> Not the pageants of you, not your shifting tableaux, your spectacles repay me,
> Nor the interminable rows of your houses, nor the ships at the wharves,
> Nor the processions in the streets, nor the bright windows with the goods in them,
> Nor to converse with learned persons, or bear my share in the soirée or feast,
> Not these, but as I pass o Manhattan, your frequent and swift flash of eyes offering me love,
> Offering response to my own – these repay me,
> Lovers, continual lovers only repay me.[19]

Looking for the proto-Cavafian touch here, our eye lights not so much on the processions or spectacles, or the diverse street life, or the looks of desire, as on the respect for learning: "Nor to converse with learned persons" seems to prefigure "Ithaca" in this ingredient of its Utopianism.[20]

But the differences of scale and style between the two poets should not prevent us from noting just how much Whitman – before Cavafy, and surely impressing him with this – is a poet not just of self-confession but of self-concealment. The germinal role this may have played in the poetry of Cavafy is intimated in the last part of "When I read the book" (1867), which even deploys a Cavafian kind of parenthesis to brace the poet against his putative misreaders:

> (As if any man really knew aught of my life,
> Why even I myself I often think know little or nothing my real life,
> Only a a few hints, a few faint clews and indirections
> I seek for my own use to trace out here.)[21]

This self-preoccupation, intense and at the same time tentative, is surely connected with Cavafy, and above all in such a poem as the unpublished "Hidden":

> From what I did and what I thought
> let them not seek to find just who I was.

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[19] Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, p. 158.
[20] C 1.24.
[21] Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, p. 43.

There was an obstacle transforming
my actions and my mode of life.
There was an obstacle preventing me
time and again when I was on the point of speaking.
My most unnoticed actions
and of my writings those which were most veiled –
there only will they get a sense of me.
In any case, perhaps it's hardly worth
the time and trouble of learning about me.
Later – in a society made more perfect –
someone else made like me
will surely make his appearance and act freely.[22]

* * *

Cavafy, then, bears certain affinities with Whitman which at the very least deserve closer exploration. And just as the Greek poet seems to value and develop the very American idea of poetry as a matter of an improvisatory search for the self, so too have American poets repeatedly taken up such threads from Cavafy when they seemed somehow to be present there more freshly than in any source in their own literature. But it appears that, poetically speaking, the good ship Cavafy first arrived on American shores on a date we can give precisely, 1941, and that when it did so it was through an English poet who was to become an American.[23]

W.H. Auden had known something of the poetry of Cavafy since the 1920s when as an Oxford undergraduate he was introduced to the Greek poet's work in versions by the great Hellenist R.M. Dawkins.[24] Dawkins's translations were never published, and it is easy to imagine the somewhat conspiratorial air that a gathering of a select few to read the works of the Greek poet on

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[22] K.P. Kavafis, *Ανέκδοτα ποιήματα (1882-1923)*, ed. G.P. Savidis (Athens 1982), p. 151.

[23] By contrast – how it would have irritated Cavafy! – a large selection from Palamas's work had by then been translated in American editions; for a list, see Dia M.L. Philippides, *CENSUS of Modern Greek Literature* (New Haven 1988), p. 149.

[24] W.H. Auden, "C.P. Cavafy", in his: *Forewords and Afterwords* (London 1979), pp. 333-4 (333).

Greek love would have had.[25] But Cavafy's influence was not confined to such circles: notably, in 1924 a translation of "Ithaca" appeared in T.S. Eliot's review, *The Criterion*.[26] It is to that poem, which had clearly been lodged in his mind, that Auden replied with a poem of his own seventeen years later. For reasons which remain the subject of dispute, the English poet had taken the decision to leave "the little coign" in which he found himself and to exile himself in the larger possibilities of America. When he embarked for America, Auden evidently "carried within his soul" the Cavafian "Ithaca" and made a memorable re-writing of it in his poem "Atlantis".[27] The poem sets out just like its Cavafian model: "Being set on the idea/Of getting to Atlantis...", and it loses no opportunity in making its first landing, at the start of stanza 2, at a distinctively, and slyly identified, Cavafian destination which again invokes "Ithaca" (and, behind that, Whitman's "City of Orgies", as we have seen):

> Should storms, as may well happen,
> Drive you to anchor a week
> In some old harbour-city
> Of Ionia, then speak
> With her witty scholars...[28]

From that point the poem moves on, in each of its first six stanzas, to a different destination: barbaric Thrace, sensual

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[25] Perhaps for this reason, the first poem in English to pay tribute to Cavafy [William Plomer, "To the Greek poet C.P. Cavafy, On his *Ποιήματα (1908-1914)*", *The Fivefold Screen* (London 1932), p. 57], indeed in the Greek poet's lifetime, makes no allusion, even a veiled one, to homosexuality. A vivid, though partisan, description of the social climate is to be found in Richard Davenport-Hines, *Sex, death and punishment* (London 1990).

[26] *The Criterion* 2 (July 1924) 431-2.

[27] W.H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London 1976), pp. 245-6. See the discussion by Mendelson, *Later Auden* (London 1999), pp. 166-7, who argues that Auden first knew the poem from a French translation by Marguerite Yourcenar, whom he had met in New York. It seems to me unlikely that Auden had not encountered the poem earlier; but in any case his seizing on the poem to mark his own passage to a new country is evident.

[28] Ionia is most vividly evoked in "Orophernes" (C 1.33-4).

Carthage or Corinth, frozen tundras, and finally a mountain peak from which Atlantis – evidently some kind of hinterland rather than an island – may be seen. Auden has taken care to make his destinations, and the *Weltanschauung* associated with each, deviate from Cavafy's: Ionia promotes scepticism; Thrace a *nostalgie de la boue*; Carthage and Corinth an Epicurean stance; the frozen wastes the Stoicism of a Captain Scott. The final destination is, however, a poetic vision not un-Cavafian in its formulation. Even if the addressee collapses at the last col, having seen Atlantis gleaming below, but unable to descend, he is told that he

> should still be proud
> Even to have been allowed
> Just to peep at Atlantis
> In a poetic vision.

The Cavafian echo is two-fold. First, to a poem to which Auden later paid tribute, "The first rung".[29] There the apprentice poet Eumenes worries about reaching the first stage of poetry and is, seemingly, consoled by Theocritus with the admonition that where he has reached is already something of which to be proud.[30] Furthermore, Cavafy pervasively develops the idea of poetry's consisting of, and needing to console itself with simply being, evanescent "moments of vision".[31] At this point in Auden's poem, the apprentice poet is quietly told to "Give thanks and lie down in peace,/ Having seen your salvation." The echo of Luke 2.29 is again significantly Cavafian, and Auden knows it: just as it was characteristic of an Eliot in early middle age to adopt the

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[29] Auden, *Forewords and Afterwords*, p. 337.

[30] C 1.101; the poem may be more slippery than it appears: David Holton, "Cavafy and the art of self-deception", *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 5 (1989) 143-62 (153).

[31] This is of course the title of a volume by Cavafy's great contemporary Hardy (1917); for the Paterian origins of Cavafy's poetic visions see S.D. Kapsalis, "'Privileged moments': Cavafy's autobiographical inventions", *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 10 (1983) 67-88.

voice of Simeon, so the adoption of an older voice was integral to Cavafy's vision of his poetic self.[32]

But, as the last stanza of Auden's poem makes clear, what we have here is more than a merely artistic Nunc Dimittis, and it is here that the English poet newly arrived in America diverges most radically from the Cavafian model that has haunted him:

> All the little household gods
> Have started crying, but say
> Good-bye now and put to sea.
> Farewell, dear friend, farewell: may
> Hermes, master of the roads
> And the four dwarf Kabiri
> Protect and serve you always;
> And may the Ancient of Days
> Provide for all you must do
> His invisible guidance,
> Lifting up, friend, upon you
> The light of his countenance.

This final stanza is not necessary for the development of the poem, which could more naturally and symmetrically end with stanza 6, and would have done so as a very free version of Cavafy's "Ithaca". But Auden sought something rather different. With characteristic ingenuity Auden sets his final stanza on its path with an evident echo of "The footsteps", in which the "little household gods" anticipate the fall of Nero; he follows this up with the scene, again a Roman one, of "The God abandoning Antony".[33] Yet, having embraced the Lares, Hermes and the Kabeiroi, Auden then moves on to a Jehovah who is notable for his absence in Cavafy's published poetry. The ending of the poem, which first appeared in a periodical of Christian orientation, is indicative of Auden's recent return to the Anglo-Catholicism in which he had been reared. In other words, the seemingly casual but in fact consistent exploratory stance of Cavafy's "Ithaca" has been used by Auden as a stalking-horse,

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[32] T.S. Eliot, "A Song for Simeon" [1928], *Collected Poems, 1909-1962* (London 1963), pp. 111-12. Cavafy's physical appearance is dwelt on by many of his poetic successors, cf. Vayenas, *Συνομιλώντας με τον Καβάφη*.

[33] C 1.38, 1.20.

just one of several stances; all of which are in the end quietly subsumed and transcended by an ending which is, it may be feared, somewhat redolent of the hymnal.

If "Atlantis" is both the most celebrated and the most elaborate of Auden's encounters with Cavafy – and a Cavafian inspiration forms, as with many poets, a guide to an important rite of passage for a successor – that does not mean that Auden turned away from the Greek poet in his American period, even if a couple of the most adroit cases of allusion are glancing in their nature and only speculatively identified by the critic. Just as Cavafy's historical poems in the wake of the First World War and the Asia Minor Campaign, without overtly alluding to either, formed an important commentary on these events, so too Auden's reactions to the terrible decade of the 1940s have recourse to Cavafian motifs. In "Under Sirius", for example, the overarching Christian worldview is most un-Cavafian, yet the figure of the late poet Fortunatus, hoping against hope for personal and collective salvation in – even, through – the decline of the Roman empire, may seem to echo the predicament of the late Hellenistic poet Phernazes in the poem "Darius". The lines which reveal the affinity are characteristically adroit:

> And you yourself with a head-cold and upset stomach,
> Lying in bed till noon,
> Your bills unpaid, you much advertised
> Epic not begun...[34]

It is the fact that the genre is that so unhappily essayed by Phernazes (and derided by Cavafy) that clinches the similarity.[35]

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[34] Auden, *Collected Poems*, pp. 417-18; C 2.18-19.

[35] In Cavafy's mind will have been Palamas's *Η Φλογέρα του Βασιλιά* (1910), a highly intelligent poet's cherished yet all but unreadable epic. For contrasts of the handling of Byzantine themes in the two poets see Panagiotis A. Agapitos, "Byzantium in the poetry of Kostis Palamas and C.P. Cavafy", *Κάμπος* 2 (1994) 1-20 and Anthony Hirst, "Two cheers for Byzantium: equivocal attitudes in the poetry of Palamas and Cavafy", in: David Ricks and Paul Magdalino (edd.), *Byzantium and the Modern Greek identity* (Aldershot 1998), pp. 105-17.

A further, yet more speculative case, one of Auden's finest poems, is "The Fall of Rome", of which the dénouement, while different in form and tone, fits the template of Cavafy's "Nero's deadline":

> Altogether elsewhere, vast
> Herds of reindeer move across
> Miles and miles of golden moss,
> Silently and very fast.[36]

Though Cavafy would probably have given his smiling assent to Auden's celebrated admission that "poetry makes nothing happen", Auden himself was clearly impressed by the idea, given vivid formulation in Cavafy, that the true poet sees whatever impends, however insignificant or far away it may seem.[37]

The last example I shall take from Auden, one from the latter part of his career (1968) returns us to a more wholesale borrowing from Cavafy: though the poem is not to my mind an entirely satisfying one, the strategy of its making is quint-essentially Cavafian and might with profit be pursued by other poets who wish to stand on his shoulders. Indeed, the first part of "Rois Fainéants" tracks "Alexandrian Kings" so closely that we might properly say that the poem not only imitates Cavafy in a general sense but belongs to that classic genre of "imitation" whereby Johnson's *London*, for example, moves Juvenal's first Satire from first-century Rome to eighteenth-century London.[38] (Or indeed as Edgar Lee Masters, using the same edition of the *Palatine Anthology* as Cavafy, and in the very same decade, produced his *Spoon River Anthology* of Greek sepulchral motifs transported to middle America.)[39] This art of re-creation is one followed by Cavafy in many ingenious and unobtrusive cases: to

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[36] Auden, *Collected Poems*, pp. 257-8.

[37] Auden, *Collected Poems*, p. 197; C 1.17.

[38] Ibid., pp. 603-4; C 1.71.

[39] Both poets used J.W. Mackail's bilingual *Select Epigrams from the Greek Anthology* (London 1890): see Valerie Caires, "Originality and eroticism: Constantine Cavafy and the Alexandrian epigram", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 6 (1980) 131-56, and Leonard Unger (ed.), *American Writers*, Supp. 1, Part 2 (New York 1979), p. 461.

take just two, both "Philhellene" and "Tomb of Lysias the Grammarian" are very compressed versions of Browning, shifted from the older poet's favourite locale and period, the Italy of the Renaissance, to Cavafy's familiar territory of the Hellenistic East. The borrowings are indisputable but deliciously covert.[40] So the strategy of "Rois Fainéants", irrespective of the reworked subject matter, is an authentically Cavafian one: the scene is shifted to the opposite end of Europe, and by the greater part of a millennium, from the end of one dynasty at the hands of the Roman Empire to that of the end of the Merovingian dynasty which will be supplanted by the Holy Roman Empire. And both poets present the death-throes of an older culture not in the generalities of a Spengler or a Toynbee, but from ground level.

The first part of "Rois Fainéants" ends, as I have said, at the same point as the Cavafian model, albeit with a markedly less urbane populace:

> So from dawn to dusk they made their triumphal progression,
> While war-horns dindled the heavens, silken banners
> Flapped in the wind, and the rapt tribes shouted away.

But in the second part of his poem Auden markedly – and in my view incautiously – deviates from the unspoken violence of Cavafy's poem, which never tells us that the princelings will meet their end. The last line in particular is an odd one: all the virtues of Cavafian obliqueness seem to have been sacrificed.

> But when darkness fell and their special outing was ended,
> Off they were packed again to their secluded manors,
> Closely watched day and night to prevent the danger
> Of their escaping or talking too much to a stranger,
> With nothing to do but affix their seals to charters
> They had never been taught to read, and supplied with plenty
> Of beef and beer and girls from which, as was intended,
> They died young, most before they were twenty.

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[40] C 1.37, 1.43; cf. two poems from Browning's *Men and Women* (1855), "The Bishop orders his tomb at Saint Praxed's Church" and "A Grammarian's Funeral, shortly after the revival of learning in Europe" respectively.

May we not justly call them political martyrs?

* * *

However that may be, Auden brought the poetry of the United States to a sustained encounter with the work of Cavafy, and this even before the first translation of Cavafy's collected poems (by John Mavrogordato, 1951) had appeared. Interestingly, however, I have found no marks of Cavafy in the poetry of the Fifties to which Auden stood as so widely influential a mentor. The spur to a renewed encounter with Cavafy on the part of poets in America seems to have been made by Auden, as a patron this time, in his preface to Rae Dalven's new translation of 1961 (still in print) – though the American edition of Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* must also have had a role to play.[41] Before coming on to some of the American poets, it may be worth a glance at two admirers of both Auden and Cavafy who found themselves political exiles in America and thus peculiarly attuned to a strain which receives memorable expression in Cavafy.[42]

The Nobel Prize-winners, the Polish-Lithuanian Czesław Miłosz and the Russian Jew Joseph Brodsky both found themselves in America, "in exile, versifying", as the Cavafian title has it – and much preoccupied with what Cavafy had to say about the poet in these straits.[43] In his powerful lectures published as *The Witness of Poetry*, Miłosz brings his discussion to an end with a consideration of Cavafy's Phernazes, not least in the light of what such a poet (the real one and the fictional one) has to tell us about a world of shifting empires and changing borders – a Lithuanian can never forget that the Jagiellonian Empire was, like Byzantium, a great one.[44] Carrying these throughts a stage further, in a poem written not much later (1986) Miłosz seems to reproach himself with falling for the same

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[41] See Rae Dalven, "An unsought for calling: my life as a translator from Modern Greek", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 8.2 (1990) 307-16.

[42] See most fully the unpublished poem, "Exiles" (1914; a more idiomatic English title would be "Over the water"): *Ανέκδοτα ποιήματα*, pp. 163-5.

[43] C 2.21.

[44] Czesław Miłosz, *The Witness of Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass. 1983), pp. 111-14.

dreams of an epic work which had tantalized Phernazes. "Tomorrow at the latest I'll start working on a great book/In which my century will appear as it really was", the poem "Preparation" begins, only to end ruefully with the sense of incapacity, the conquering of the poet's "arrogance and intoxication": "I haven't learned yet to speak as I should, calmly"'[45]

Brodsky was a devotee of both Auden and Cavafy, and his last years were occupied with translating Cavafy (presumably from Russian cribs) into Russian verse.[46] It would not be like Brodsky to allow too many direct Cavafian echoes into his poetry, but one example from his American period is illustrative, both of his preoccupation and of his very different tone. In "The Bust of Tiberius" (1981) we have (somewhat after the model of Auden's "Rois Fainéants") a poem founded on the structure and manner of a Cavafy poem, in this case "Orophernes" – with the difference that Brodsky, more bitter in his nature and more tending to expose the bestialities from which Cavafy averts his pen, chooses for his theme not the beautiful though failed young prince of Asia Minor but the repellent Roman emperor.[47]

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Not surprisingly, both of these émigré poets feel in their marrow the significance which Cavafy must have for the modern poet as citizen: like Seferis before them, they are ever mindful of "the statelet/of Commagene which went out like a little lamp", as Seferis expresses it in one of his poems which draws most richly on Cavafy.[48] The American-born poets, by contrast, seem for the most part to engage in conversation with the Cavafy of the sensual poems.

Here pride of place, for a sustained and informed interest in Cavafy taking up the baton passed from Auden, goes to the late James Merrill. A friend of Auden, he spent a total of many years

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[45] Miłosz, *Collected Poems, 1931-1987* (Harmondsworth 1988), p. 418.
[46] See also his essay, "Pendulum's song" in *Less than one* (New York 1986), pp. 53-68.
[47] Joseph Brodsky, *To Urania* (New York 1988), pp. 71-3.
[48] Giorgos Seferis, *Ποιήματα* (Athens 1982), p. 213.

in Greece: of all Cavafy's American successors it was Merrill, with his fluent Greek (he is in fact the only poet discussed here who read Cavafy in the original) and a metrical dexterity emulous of Auden, who was most likely to leave us poems truly in the Cavafian manner.[49] This is certainly achieved in his few Cavafy translations (including the short story, "In Broad Daylight"): the version of "On an Italian shore", if a touch more tricksy than the original, has great subtlety and lightness of touch.[50] Merrill's lightness in fact usually maintains him at a discreet distance from the Cavafian models, and seeing several titles "Days of..." the reader might be disappointed to find that the Cavafian affinities are few.[51] The opening lines of one such poem, however, show us just how crafty Merrill could be in setting out to dash the expectations of the reader expecting Cavafiana:

DAYS OF 1964

Houses, an embassy, a hospital,
Our neighborhood, sun-cured if trembling still
In pools of the night's rain. . .
Across that street that led to the centre of town
A steep hill kept one company part way
Or could be climbed in twenty minutes
For some literally breathtaking views,
Framed by umbrella pines, of city and sea.

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[49] On Merrill's interest in Greece (which went back to 1959), see the tribute by Rachel Hadas (herself the author of a Cavafian poem: see Vayenas, *Συνομιλώντας*, pp. 158-9) in *Poetry* 96.6 (September 1995) 334-8.

[50] James Merrill, translations of C.P. Cavafy: "On an Italian shore", *Grand Street* 6.2 (Winter 1987) 125; "In broad daylight", *Grand Street* 2.3 (Spring 1983) 99-107. See also his essay, "Unreal citizen", *Recitative: Prose by James Merrill* (San Francisco 1986), pp. 96-108.

[51] See e.g. "Days of 1935" in *Selected Poems* (Manchester 1996), pp. 72-81 (note also the poem's un-Cavafian length). An exception to the rule of discretion is a sprightly poem, "After Cavafy", *New York Review of Books* 41.13 (14 July 1994), an imitation of "Waiting for the Barbarians" as a satire on the American fear of Japanese commercial takeovers followed by disappointment as the Japanese sought European investment. The trouble is that the poem has dated badly: before long the Asian tigers turned bearish; whereas Cavafy's poem is endlessly adaptable in itself.

> Underfoot, cyclamen, autumn crocus grew
> Spangled with a fine sweat among the relics
> Of good times had by all. If not Olympus,
> An out-of-earshot, year-round hillside revel..[52]

The relaxed iambics and tribute to a sensual city might seem Cavafian, but the gap between the time recalled and the date of publication (1966) is much smaller than the gap is in Cavafy's "Days" poems (we shall contrast an example from Mark Doty later), and the al fresco setting of free love strikingly different from the confined spaces of Cavafy's erotic poems ("The tobacconist's window", perhaps with a debt to *Madame Bovary*, may serve as an example).[53] Merrill is well aware of this, as also of the fact that he takes a locale, Athens, disdained by Cavafy; and he seems in fact playfully to launch his poem with a cheeky allusion to Cavafy's bitterest rival, Palamas – in place of the ancient sculptures which fill the Attic soil with an Olympus which grows like wild flowers, Merrill presents us with the used prophylactics of courting couples on Lycabettus.[54]

Less circumspection is shown by another poet of an academic cast, Daryl Hine, whose poem about a unsatisfactory rough trade lover, "What's his face" (1975) begins with a playful allusion to "The God abandoning Antony": "The god that is leaving me perhaps has left/Already; bereft of his presence I breathe lighter."[55] The god in question is nameless, like that of Cavafy's powerful poem "One of their gods"; his mercurial appearances also recall the end of "Sculptor from Tyana" and the unofficial but aesthetically fulfilling shrine that the sculptor makes for a Hermes evidently modelled on a young lover; yet the lover's departure has smashed his image and left his shrine abandoned

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[52] Merrill, *Selected Poems*, pp. 58-9.

[53] C 1.85.

[54] The poem of Palamas, which Merrill is most likely to have picked up from C.A. Trypanis, *Medieval and Modern Greek Verse* (Oxford 1951), p. 182, is the sonnet to Athens from "Homelands" (1895): Kostis Palamas, *Ἅπαντα* (16 vols., Athens n.d.) 3.15. It should be noted that Palamas was an acute critic of Cavafy (see notably ibid. 12.173-4), who did not hesitate to call him (through gritted teeth) "a poet of considerable originality" (ibid., 14. 252).

[55] Daryl Hine, *Resident Alien* (New York 1975), p. 52.

as in the setting of "Ionic".[56] Like Auden's "Atlantis", then, Hine's poem knowingly draws on more than one Cavafian source; yet the poem's twenty-seven lines don't in the end add up to more than a rather laboured conceit: the power behind Cavafy's delicacy lost, what remains is fussiness.

That, however, is far from the worst desecration that can be visited on Cavafy's poetry by a successor. A particularly shameless example is to be found in Edmund Field, who goes so far as to preface his three decades-worth of collected poems with a tribute to Cavafy as, in a way, the "onlie begetter" of his own work: "When I discovered the poetry of Cavafy – almost immediately after I began writing – I recognized at once that this was my master."[57] Yet the poetic fruits are of the feeblest. One poem from 1992 is given the title, "Waiting for the Communists" and subtitled (just in case we didn't catch the reference) "after Cavafy's 'Waiting for the Barbarians'". The poem tracks the original closely, simply updating it to the post-1989 situation and concluding:

> Because it's evening and the communists haven't come.
> And some people just back from abroad say
> that there aren't any communists anymore, maybe never were.
>
> Oh my God, no communists? Now what's going to happen?
> You've got to admit they were the perfect solution.[58]

Auden ingeniously, if imperfectly, adapted "Rois Fainéants" by moving his Cavafy model to a later epoch: Field simply truncates that poem of Cavafy's which has most deeply impressed itself on public discourse by tying a poem which, for all its Roman furniture, is of all seasons to one circumstance, and by reducing Cavafy's irony and long view to sheer irresponsibility

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[56] C 1.73, 1.41, 1.53.

[57] Edward Field, *Counting myself lucky: New and selected poems* (San Francisco 1992), prefatory page.

[58] Ibid., pp. 22-3.

and moral blindness.[59] A Cavafian reading of politics is bound to be more interesting than a political reading of Cavafy.[60]

But worse, if anything, is the poem with which Field ends his collection, again by way of tribute to Cavafy, and indeed titled "After Cavafy".[61] It all too evidently rewrites "The first rung" from an old man's point of view: a tearful old poet complains to the Muse about the limited achievement of and recognition for his few slim volumes, and is consoled with the Muse's words which end the poem:

> Wipe your tears, old man.
> You have taken a step
> on the difficult ladder of poetry,
> and even getting to the first rung
> is an accomplishment the gods all praise.
> Feel good about that, with my blessings,
> for on this path,
> there is no failure.

It is a travesty to claim that this poem is, in any respect other than mere chronology, *after Cavafy*: the sentiments expressed are those not of the discerning and often mordant *maestro* but of the Muse as agony aunt.

A more thoughtful and deeply felt exploration and reworking of Cavafian themes has been made by a much-praised contemporary poet who has given us not simply individual poems of recognizably Cavafian inspiration but who, like Field, has set the Greek poet's seal on an entire volume. The book in question is Mark Doty's *My Alexandria*.[62] Its elegiac character is pronounced (the English edition's cover presents us with the toppled bust of a young man evocative of Hadrian's Antinous), and the scenes which the poet relates in highly confessional mode take place in Boston between 1981 and the time of writing. (The relative length of the retrospect is Cavafian in spirit.) One such

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[59] "Communist", unlike "barbarian", is an objective label, thus undermining the entire framework of Cavafy's poem.

[60] I follow here a line of thought that runs through Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (London 1995).

[61] Field, *Counting myself lucky*, p. 174.

[62] Boston 1995; I cite the English edition, London 1995.

poem which exploits a Cavafian model is "Days of 1981", narrating a fleeting affair in the past. The difference from the Cavafian setting, other than geographical, is crucial. Many are the Cavafian ephebes who have untimely deaths, but the causes (presumably consumption in many cases) are left somewhat vague. In Doty's poetry, by contrast, the 'wound from a frightful knife' is no longer old age but the scourge of AIDS. The lover recalled in the poem in question is some untalented sculptor (a self-mocking allusion to Cavafy's poems), and we have the strong sense that what the narrator "came to possess quite by chance" (Cavafy's "Days of 1903") was not eros alone but a lethal virus.[63] The shadow of a diagnosis comes to darken the whole collection.

This is a serious way to adapt Cavafy's motifs without doing them more violence than time itself has done them; and it seems a quite legitimate form of updating. There are, of course, dangers for any later poet in harnessing Cavafy to any poetic of his own, and the more openly this is done, the riskier the procedure. I can't help feeling this about a poem from the same book, "Chanteuse", in which the body of the text goes so far in its central section as to quote from Cavafy. Doty recalls the Boston of the past as an Alexandria he is now coming to lose, and he tries to stay himself against confusion by recalling the end of a Cavafy poem:

> Cavafy ends a poem
>
> of regret and desire – he had no other theme
> than memory's erotics, its ashen atmosphere –
> by going out onto a balcony
>
> *to change my thoughts at least*
> *by seeing something of this city I love,*
> *a little movement in the streets,*
>
> *in the shops.* That was all it took
> to console him, some token of Alexandria's
> anarchic life. How did it go on without him,

[63] Doty, *My Alexandria*, pp. 7-10; C 1.80, 1.92.

the city he'd transformed into feeling?[64]

The final allusion is evidently to "In the same space"; but more prominent, because italicized, is a recollection of "At eventide". In that poem the narrator reads and re-reads an old letter without finding solace, which is only brought by the reassuring bustle of the streets visible from the balcony: in Doty's response, the narrator is able to draw strength from reading Cavafy's poem as well as recalling the (transvestite) chanteuse who personifies Alexandria and its music heard for the last time in "The God abandoning Antony".[65]

The reservation that one has about this passage of Doty lies in the claim that Cavafy "had no other theme than memory's erotics". The parenthesis is verbose and pedantic compared with the Alexandrian's mastery of the timely bracket, and the statement demonstrably false. Admittedly, Doty's formulation is a careful if unlovely one ("memory's erotics" is not the same as "erotic memories"), but it does seem to present a Cavafy of just one mood or key. By contrast, it is one of the most attractive and elusive features of Cavafy's collected poems that they contain a whole range of moods and styles, by comparison with which the quiet and melancholy garrulousness of Doty will seem limited. And while Cavafy is an intense observer of both the personal and history – the latter being, as we have noted, rather neglected in the American reception of his work – his poems are slippery enough for it to be scarcely useful to think of them as personal history.

* * *

That Cavafy the historical poet has not been entirely ignored in America is, however, clear enough from the last post-Cavafian poem I shall examine here, which is also the most recent (and, as it happens, the only one to have been written by a woman). Caroline Kizer's poem, "The Oration" bears the subtitle, "after Cavafy": this might make one suspect that it uses a single poem as a stalking-horse and tracks it closely (as in two poems by

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[64] Doty, *My Alexandria*, pp. 21-5.
[65] C 2.81, 1.87.

Auden discussed earlier), yet no single model presents itself to the reader. In fact "after" here is really shorthand for *à la manière de*.[66] Cavafy's preoccupation with the transition from paganism to Christianity pervades his *œuvre*, not just for its interest as perhaps the grandest of historical themes, but also because the question of religious choice affords endless permutations in the processes of practical reasoning – or self-deception.[67]

The speaker of Caroline Kizer's poem begins by announcing that "The boldest thing I ever did was to save a savior." The poem falls into three parts: in the first, an orator, a man of means but of unspecified religious or ethnic background, pleads for the life of (a never-named) Christ and saves him even on the approach to Calvary, despite Christ's mutterings of reluctance. In the second section, the orator returns home with relief, only to learn later that Christ egged on the crowd against him once again by claiming to be the son of God and was crucified. The poem concludes thus:

> A violent thunderstorm woke me to a sky full of lightning
> So I rushed out in the rain, forgetting my cloak,
> And found him dead and alone except for a handful of women
> Weeping and carrying on. Well, it taught me a lesson,
> To mind my own business – Why, the crowd might have turned on me!
> Still, I have to be proud of my eloquence.
> It was the speech of my life.

Certainly Cavafian is the idea of taking an unfamiliar angle on a world-historical event: perhaps the neatest example is the pedlar of "In Alexandria, 31 BC".[68] But, though Cavafy was capable of quiet challenges to Christian piety, I doubt whether he would ever have taken a ground-level view of the Passion itself.[69] That said, "The Oration" does appear to have taken

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[66] *The Threepenny Review* 20.2 (Summer 1999) 26.

[67] The classic case is "Tomb of Ignatius" (C 1.77).

[68] C 2.41.

[69] For a rebuttal of an over-pious reading of Cavafy, see Hirst, "Two cheers for Byzantium", 111, and more fully, "C.P. Cavafy, Byzantine historian?", *Κάμπος* 8 (2000) 000-000. But, interestingly, direct challenge to Christianity was more in the line of Palamas: see Anthony Hirst, "The

cues from no fewer than three Cavafian models. (And such a drawing on several poems at once is a technique reminiscent of Cavafy in his astute borrowings from Browning.)

The first of these is the radical if imperfectly finished rewriting of *Hamlet* in the early unpublished poem, "King Claudius".[70] It was a brilliant stroke to rewrite the plot from the point of view of a loyal courtier of Claudius, for whom Hamlet – never named in the poem, as Christ is never named in "The Oration" – was simply a maniac; just as Christ, to this bystander, "was mad of course". There is a dry radicalism to Cavafy's treatment which Caroline Kizer has sought to emulate with reference to perhaps the only story better known than Hamlet's.[71]

A second unpublished poem which seems to set the terms of "The Oration" is the much later "Simeon" (1917), itself a riposte to Tennyson's "St Simeon Stylites".[72] "Simeon" presents us with substantially the same structure: a young man is engaged in a finicky literary discussion; then he admits to being indisposed, somehow shaken by the sight the previous day of Simeon atop his pillar; finally, he reverts to literary gossip. The effete speaker of "The Oration" too can't but return to a sense of his own rhetorical distinction. But the most tangible borrowing in "The Oration" is the group of women "weeping and carrying on" at the *Pietà*. The phrase of disdain exactly recalls that used by Myres's friend at his funeral in "Myres: Alexandria AD 340". Myres's

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appropriation of Biblical and liturgical language in the poetry of Palamas, Sikelianos and Elytis", PhD dissertation, King's College London 1999.

[70] Cavafy, *Ανέκδοτα ποιήματα*, pp. 113-19.

[71] Compare the *bon mot* of Oscar Wilde being viva'd in New Testament Greek and being told at some point in the Passion narrative that he can stop now: "Oh do let me go on... I want to see how it ends." (James Sutherland (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Literary Anecdotes* (Oxford 1975), p. 383.)

[72] The poem, together with Cavafy's note in English on it, is conveniently to be found in *Passions and Ancient Days* (tr. and ed. Edmund Keeley and G.P. Savidis) (New York 1971), pp. 501-3, 67-8; brief discussion in David Ricks, "Simpering Byzantines, Grecian goldsmiths, et al.: some appearances of Byzantium in English poetry", in: Robin Cormack and Elizabeth Jeffreys (edd.), *Through the Looking-Glass: Byzantium through British eyes* (Aldershot 2000), pp. 223-35 (225-7).

pagan friend enters the house of the dead Christian (by a vivid defamiliarization which Caroline Kizer has followed by putting the word "savior" in lower case, the word "Christian" is used obsessively in the poem) to find the womenfolk mourning and praying.[73]

To invoke "Symeon" and "Myres", however, is to prompt thoughts about some lost opportunities in "The Oration", some aspects of it which show it not to be of Cavafy's water. In the first place, the poem, by contrast with the Cavafian models, is a monologue which fails to exploit the dramatic possibilities of monologue, the pressing sense of an interlocutor's presence which is so astutely used by Cavafy (and by Browning before him) in his explorations of states of mind and forms of words which are crucially influenced by others.[74] Again, the opening line of "The Oration", "The boldest thing I ever did was to save a savior" is not actually needed for the setting and only sets out the poem's agenda too clearly – the same, interestingly, holds for Cavafy's early "King Claudius" – in a way which, again, dilutes the dramatic possibilities.[75] Above all, the subversiveness of the poem's attempt to find a different onlooker than the Gospel's centurion (Mt 27.45) who says with soldierly bluffness, "Truly this was the son of God" is less *unsettling* to the reader, less subversive in a far-reaching way, than the outcome of either "Simeon" or "Myres". At the end of both those poems, the reader really finds it hard to say what the future holds for the narrator – what conversions of heart, what backslidings. Myres's friend is gripped with the fear, a fear never quite spoken, that Christianity may be true, and it is the terror of separation in the next life as well as in this, that drives him from the house.

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[73] C 2.74-6.

[74] See classically Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience* (Chicago 1985; first published 1957).

[75] Furthermore, the lapse of time covered by the speaker's reminiscences isn't quite clear in "The Oration": the first line ("I ever did") suggests that the event lies far in the past and can be recollected in tranquillity; but the progress of Christianity would make it hard for the speaker not to know, or to affect not to know, the name of Jesus.

Here, then, has been a small sampling (a further fourteen poems of Cavafian inspiration are anthologized by Keeley) of what Cavafy brought to the art of American poetry, provoking new poems in a country which, through Whitman, had perhaps helped to stimulate some of his own.[76] It is probably fair to say – and it is said in no spirit of nationalism – that more of the various facets of Cavafy's work have been responded to by British poets (for these purposes, including Auden) than by their American peers; but Cavafy's status as a mentor to the American successor-poet is secure. What is more, the dissemination of his work has grown over the years to the point that it has touched the wider American culture. "Ithaca" has been read at umpteen commencement ceremonies, giving an ironic twist to Cavafy's line, "adolescents now say aloud his verses"; and the poem was indeed read – in a customized version! – at Jackie Onassis's funeral.[77]

Yet the assimilation of Cavafy by American poetry can never be complete, as the assimilation of great poets by later poets, even great ones, can never be complete. And I would like to end by reverting to an aspect too often neglected. One of the most important ways in which Cavafy might have a renovating effect on American poetry would be, not variations *on* his poetry – variations which we have seen to be of greatly varying force and scope – but translations *of* it. For it is not least through translations that we can see whether Cavafy's poetry is (in Pound's phrase) "news that stays news". It is heartening that the current US Poet Laureate, Robert Pinsky has included within the body of one of his collections a version of Cavafy's "An old man" – a strikingly faithful version, which preserves, and even tightens by a notch, the bleakly formal rhyme scheme of the original which shuts up the old man in its prison bars.[78] The justness of tone is evident from the opening lines:

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[76] See n. 5. Martin McKinsey's "In a large Cambridge bookstore: After Cavafy", *Point Tainaron* (Toronto 1997), pp. 27-8, takes itself less seriously than some of these poems, and is the better for it.

[77] C 1.49.

[78] Robert Pinsky, *The Want Bone* (New York 1990), p. 43.

> Back in a corner, alone in the clatter and babble
> An old man sits with his head bent over a table,
> And his newspaper in front of him, in the café.

The reader who turns to this version will find something which is unmistakably Cavafian without sacrificing anything of its Americanness – Cavafy in America indeed.

King's College London

The year 1999–2000 at Cambridge

Students

Thea Constantinides graduated with an upper second class degree in Modern and Medieval Languages, with a distinction in the Modern Greek Oral. Her Part II examinations included four papers on Modern Greek language, literature and history and a dissertation on the prose fiction of Kondylakis.

Michelle Malakouna has spent her year abroad studying at the University of Thessaloniki.

Seven students, out of a lively and highly motivated class of ten, successfully completed the examinations for the Certificate in Modern Greek. Four of them achieved Distinctions: Sam Campbell, Kirsi Lorentz, Alexander Stevens and Alice Wilson, and Karine Dauteuille was awarded a pass with Credit.

Two students were awarded a Diploma in Modern Greek, both with Credit: Jason König and Natalie Tchernetska. Both Jason and Natalie are completing PhDs in the Faculty of Classics; in the course of the year they were both elected to post-doctoral research fellowships.

Two new PhD students began their research in October 1999. Anastasios Kaplanis, a graduate of the University of Thessaloniki, holds the first A.G. Leventis Foundation scholarship for postgraduate study in Modern Greek. His research is concerned with an unpublished text by Ioakeim Kyprios which relates part of the history of the Veneto-Turkish War of 1645-1669. Efrosini Camatsos studied at Wesleyan University, Connecticut, and then completed a Master of Studies degree (with distinction) at Oxford before coming to Cambridge. She is working on the female narrative voice in Modern Greek fiction, 1930-1963.

Teaching and research staff

Ms Margarita Tsota continued for a second year as Language Assistant in Modern Greek, seconded by the Greek Ministry of Education. This year she was assisted by Antonis Dimopoulos, a

postgraduate student of the University of Thessaloniki. Mr Dimopoulos was the last in a series of twenty students from Thessaloniki who have spent a year studying in Cambridge and teaching Modern Greek classes. The Cambridge-Thessaloniki exchange scheme, which made these visits possible, was generously funded by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) from 1988 until this year. Efforts will now be made to seek new sources of funding, in the hope that the link with the University of Thessaloniki can be maintained.

Dr Dimitris Livanios continued as Georgakis Research Fellow in Modern Greek and Balkan History and Affiliated Lecturer in the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages. He taught courses in 19th- and 20th-century Greek history. Dr Jocelyn Pye, also an Affiliated Lecturer, taught a course in 20th-century prose fiction.

Visiting speakers

Ten lectures were given in the course of the year:

27 October. Dr Jonathan Harris (Royal Holloway, University of London): *Identity in exile: Byzantines in Renaissance Italy*

10 November. Professor Loukas Tsoukalis (LSE): *Greece: like any other European country? The politics and economics of adjustment*

24 November. Professor Nasos Vayenas (University of Athens): *The "globalisation" of Cavafy*

1 December. Professor Thanos Veremis (University of Athens): *The Balkans in transition*

26 January. Sir Michael Llewellyn Smith: *Greece, Britain and Europe: common points and contrasts*

2 February. Professor Margaret Alexiou (Harvard University): *Modes of fiction: historical and comparative approaches to Modern Greek prose (1860-1995)*

23 February. Dr Anthony Hirst (Princeton University): *C.P. Cavafy: Byzantine historian?*

1 March. Dr David Ricks (King's College London): *Cavafy in America*

15 March. Bruce Clark (*The Economist*): *Orthodoxy: a faith or a slogan?*

3 May. Dr Charles Stewart (University College, London): *Dreams of treasure as unconscious historicizations: evidence from Naxos and elsewhere*

Graduate Seminar
The Graduate Seminar met on eleven occasions. Papers were given by the following members of the seminar: Efrosini Camatsos, Stavroula Constantinou, Andonis Dimopoulos, Tassos Kaplanis, Jocelyn Pye and Seraphim Seferiades. Further papers were contributed by four invited speakers: Professor Peter Bien (Dartmouth College), Lia Brad-Chisacof (Bucharest), George Karamanolis (Oxford) and Pandelis Voutouris (University of Cyprus).

The SCOMGIU Graduate Research Colloquium
In 2000 it was Cambridge's turn to host the annual Research Colloquium of the Standing Committee on Modern Greek in the Universities. The Colloquium was held on 10 June at Pembroke College, with the overall theme of "Images, perceptions and representations in the Greek world (17th-20th centuries)". Ten papers were presented by graduate students from Birmingham, Cambridge, Edinburgh, King's College London, and Oxford. About 40 people attended, including visiting students from Ohio State University and Padua, and students from nine different institutions in the UK.

Activities of members of the Modern Greek Section
Dr David Holton spoke at the launch of the Greek edition of his co-authored grammar (see below), which took place in Athens in December 1999. In May 2000 he gave a paper at a conference on "Classical Antiquity and Modern Greek culture", held at the University of California, Los Angeles. He continues as Chairman of the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages. He has published:
(with P. Mackridge and I. Philippaki-Warburton) *Γραμματική της ελληνικής γλώσσας* (Athens: Patakis 1999).
"Η δομή του ποιήματος", in· Ἐρωτόκριτος – Ο ποιητής και η εποχή του", *Επτά Ημέρες*, εφημ. *Καθημερινή* (11.6.2000) 9-12.
"A history of neglect: Cypriot writing in the period of Venetian rule", *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 14/15 (1998/9) 81-96.

Dr Dimitris Livanios gave talks on the Macedonian Question at the European Institute of the London School of Economics and at the Hellenic Centre in London. In February he presented a paper

on the loyalties of Alexandros and Nikolaos Mavrogordatos at St Antony's College, Oxford. He also gave a paper entitled "Killing for the Nation, Nation of killers? Patterns of violence in the Balkans, 1821-1950" at a conference on "Cultures of killing" held in June at Birkbeck College, London, and in the same month he spoke on the diffusion of western ideas about nationalism in the Balkans at a conference on "Globalisation in historical perspective", which took place in Cambridge. He has published:

"'Conquering the souls': nationalism and Greek guerilla warfare in Ottoman Macedonia, 1904-1908", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 23 (1999) 195-221.

"Truth and ethnic truth in the Balkans, or How NATO 'helped' Milosević", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 13.1 (1999) 205-17.

Dr Jocelyn Pye gave papers on Plaskovitis's *Το φράγμα* to the Graduate Seminar in Oxford and on Loukis Akritas at King's College London. She has published:

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About the contributors

Bruce Clark has since April 1998 been international security correspondent at *The Economist*, with a special interest in Russia and Eastern Europe. He has been a foreign correspondent since leaving St John's College, Cambridge, where he graduated in Social and Political Sciences in 1979. He worked for Reuters news agency in Paris and Athens and joined *The Financial Times* in 1988, where he was European news editor for two years. Between 1990 and 1993 he reported from Moscow as a staff correspondent for *The Times*. On rejoining *The Financial Times* in 1994, he became diplomatic correspondent and reported extensively from London, Brussels and Washington. Since 1996 he has been a member of the congregation at the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of the Dormition and All Saints in London.

Jonathan Harris is lecturer in Byzantine History at Royal Holloway College, University of London. His recent publications include *Greek Emigres in the West, 1400-1520* (Camberley 1995); "Distortion, divine providence and genre in Nicetas Choniates's account of the collapse of Byzantium, 1180-1204", *Journal of Medieval History* 26 (2000) 19-31; and "The Grecian coffee house and political debate in London, 1688-1714", *The London Journal* 25 (2000) 1-13.

Anthony Hirst studied Theology and English at Cambridge (1963-66). After a career that included designing and making furniture, building contracting, and architectural design, he returned to university in 1992 to study ancient, Byzantine and modern Greek, obtaining a PhD in Modern Greek Literature at King's College London in 1999. After a year as a postdoctoral research fellow at Princeton University, he is now completing the book begun there, *Poetry and Empire: Cavafy's Byzantium*, and editing a volume of conference papers, *Alexandria and its Images*, for the Centre for Hellenic Studies. He has published several articles on Cavafy and other Greek authors.

David Ricks is Senior Lecturer in Modern Greek Studies at King's College London and editor, with M.B. Trapp, of *Dialogos: Hellenic Studies Review*. He is the author of *The Shade of Homer* (1989) and of studies on Byzantine heroic poetry; with Paul Magdalino, he co-edited the volume *Byzantium and the Modern Greek identity* (Ashgate 1998). He has written on many modern Greek poets, from Solomos and Kalvos to Anagnostakis and Ganas.