

TEMES

Encounters with Modernity: Greek Historiography Since 1974

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If we were to discuss only one theme in mainstream historiography since 1974, this would be the way in which “modernity” has been conceptualized and, at the same time, criticized and contested. If mainstream historiography has to do with modernity, modern Greek historiography has to do with modernization. This encounter with modernity, in one form or another, is a common feature of Postcolonial theories. However, in contrast to these theories, where the principal aim is the critique of the concept of modernization, in Greek scholarship modernity, modernization (and Westernization) have far more positive meanings.

In the last quarter of the 20th century, Greek society has entered a new phase. With the fall of the dictatorship in 1974 ended a long period of political turmoil, cleavage, and serious restriction to intellectual life. Thus, the past twenty-five years have not simply been a new phase of development for Greek historical studies. In this period the community of historians and the framework of historiographical research were formed. Like other national historiographies that take shape at the intersection between international developments in the discipline and the political and

social realities of the particular society, the course of Greek historical studies has shown both convergences and divergences from mainstream historiographical trends.

1. Landmarks and generations

Since 1974 there has been a great proliferation of publications dealing with modern Greek history. The output of historical books reached its greatest volume in the middle of the 1980s and has been maintained since then. In this period, we can point to a number of landmarks in the development of historiography. In 1971, the publication of the *History of the Greek Nation* (Athens, 15 vols) started. The volumes which deal with the modern period were published between 1974 and 1978. The whole work was intended as a substitute for Paparrigopoulos' 19th-century *History of the Greek Nation* as the standard historical narrative. In 1971 the historical review *Mnimon* appeared as a forum for a young generation of historians, and the journal *Ta Istorika* appeared in 1983, as the proliferation in the publishing of history books was beginning. During the 80s, historical research was supported by the large state banks as well as by research programs maintained by the Greek government. Finally, in 1990 the journal *Istor*, and then in 1999 the journal *Historein* (with English as its working language) appeared.

If we were to classify modern Greek history by generations, we could talk of four generations in the historical output of this period. First, the generation of the "Fathers" (Dimaras and Svoronos) created trends and schools of thought. Second was the generation of their students, known as the "generation of the 60s", (represented by *Ta Istorika*), then the generation immediately after the junta (associated with the journals *Mnimon* and *Sinchrona Themata*), and most recently the generation of the 90s (*Istor* and *Historein*). These four generations are interesting for the themes they have addressed, particularly regarding their approaches to the pattern of modernization, as well as for their methodology. The first and second generations were engaged chiefly with the history of the Ottoman period, while the third and fourth, have focused mainly on 19th and 20th-century history. That is, the history of the modern Greek state has been the concern of the generations which began to publish after the end of the dictatorship in 1974. Of course, the theory, methodology and style of writing do not always

correspond to generational divisions. The historiographical traditions, the trends, and the schools of thought straddle two or sometimes three generations.

The studies which relate to modern Greek history do not themselves have a long history. The first chair in Modern History at the University of Athens was established only in 1937. Modern Greek history was regarded largely as a continuation of Byzantine studies and did not extend beyond the years of the Greek Revolution. The first serious works which dealt with modern history appeared just on the eve of or in the aftermath of World War II. However, the postwar period was not favorable for the development of research. Even the suspicion that a certain historical work might dispute the official version of history was enough to incur legal consequences for the author. Thus, in 1955, when Nicolas Svoronos published his *Histoire de la Grece Moderne* in Paris, he was deprived of citizenship. It took more than 20 years after the end of the War for modern Greek history to be incorporated into the national narrative. What have been the most important historiographical schools in this period?

2. The School of the Greek Enlightenment

The school of historical thought with the greatest influence is connected with Dimaras and deals with the history of the Greek Enlightenment. Dimaras belonged to the literary generation of the 1930s which introduced modernist poetry to Greece and renewed the literary canon and aesthetics. He invented the term “Modern Greek Enlightenment” in the midst of the Civil War in 1945 with the aim of revising older interpretative frameworks for “Turkokratia”. *Even more, this concept and the schema of history it implied overrode the interpretative framework established by Demoticism for cultural history, as the opposition between the demotic and the learned tradition.* The concept of the Enlightenment also confronted the warring ideological frameworks of the Right and the Left. It resisted the ethnocentric and romantic view of the National Revival, supported by the Right, but also, the idea that the national revolution remained incomplete as a result of the defeat of bourgeois and popular social forces, maintained by the Left. This concept constituted an interpretative break which created a paradigm shift across a widespread area of modern Greek history and created a corresponding community of scholars. With the invention of Enlightenment, Europeanized Greek society acquired noble ancestors and

was connected with a framework of modernist values. At the same time Greek history began to breathe to the rhythm of European society. It was incorporated, even if on the periphery, within one of Europe's great moments.

The Enlightenment School was not only concerned with themes related to the period of Enlightenment, but also with a specific method; not History of ideas but History of Consciousness, or the history of intellectual evidence of change. The students of Dimaras turned in many directions: to the history of the book and of *mentalités*, to the history of literature, to the history of *Logioi*, but also of popular literature, and of the introduction of scientific ideas to Greek society. In parallel, the *topos* of the Enlightenment was examined by researchers who had followed other courses, far from the influence and the method of Dimaras. Adherents of this school turned their attention to Greek romanticism and national ideology of the 19th century. Dimaras's conceptualisation of history both presupposes and reinforces the notion of a dichotomy between the inertia of the masses and the intellectual vibrancy of the elites. This framework alluded to that of the Annales School, which characterized social change as the clash of a modernist elite and the inactive masses, as renewal and tradition. It also created an underlying schema of continuity for the ideological conflicts of Greek society. This framework was consumed, enriched and expanded over time by a series of interrelated concepts: renewal, Europeanisation, Westernization, rationalization, modernization on one side; inertia, conservatism, anti-westernism on the other. This dichotomy has in various ways penetrated intellectual, political and economic history from the 18th to the 20th century.

3. The Marxist View

Besides Dimaras, another strong influence on modern Greek studies comes from the work and presence of Nikos Svoronos. He moved the discussion from the nation to the society, and with his work emphasized the economic and social forces, particularly in modern economic activities, which were evident in the 18th century. This thematic shift was already important and it reoriented historical studies from the political events of the Greek Revolution to the social realities in the period which preceded it. However, his influence on the wider public is chiefly due to his *Histoire de la Grece Moderne*. If in the Enlightenment School the schema of history

was the modernist elite versus the inert masses, the schema of Marxist history, inspired by Svoronos, was “society and people” versus “State” and the “mechanisms of local and foreign power”.

4. The New History

In the late 70s and early 80s, a process of exchange began between the Enlightenment School and the Marxist current, despite their appreciable differences both in historical framework and in method. This process was expressed in the demand for the “renewal” of historical studies, and it created what was called “New History”. Asdrachas, Iliou, Panagiotopoulos, Dertilis and Kremmidas, i.e. the second generation, constituted the leading figures of the “New History”. There is no clear definition for what the term “New History” specifically meant or what it included. Usually it is defined in opposition to “traditional history”. If “traditional history” was considered part of the Humanities, the “New History” was placed within the Social Sciences. If the former was characterized in practice as only interested in documents and susceptible to historical myths, the latter was interested in the “*Histoire-probleme*”, the history of the average person and society as a whole. In short, for many who took their first steps at this time, i.e., the generation of *Mnimon*, “New History” meant Dimaras plus Svoronos, the Annales school plus Marxism.

New History set up a particular historiographical tradition, inscribed in the wider current of social history, which dominated the international field of historical studies in the period from 1960 to 1980. In the Greek case, a specific feature of New History was its preoccupation with “the ideological use of history”. So, the historians of this generation understood their historiographical task to be a discharge of “ideological myths” from history. However, with this conception the slide to positivism was easy. It also served as an obstacle in the reception of historiographical currents connected with the “linguistic turn” and the postmodernism of the 1980s and 1990s. As long as the task of historians was to rescue reality from ideology, it was difficult for them to accept different versions of reality and even its disappearance into the linguistic games or regimes of discourses.

Two generations shared the New History: the generation of the 60s (with its journal *Ta Istorika*) and the generation of the seventies

(represented by the journal *Mnimon*). From the end of the 70s and throughout the 80s there was widespread enthusiasm for the New History. The term “Renewal of History”, which the new historians used, was not restricted to historiography, but in a period of political optimism it meant that the New History constituted a cultural challenge that had the power to renew society. Interest and activity in history began to hold broader appeal. While traditionally, graduates of Philosophical Schools had turned to history, at this time the history profession drew graduates not only from the social but also from other sciences.

5. The modernization debate

The central modernization debate developed on the ground of political and economic history. During and in the aftermath of the Dictatorship, intellectuals, particularly those outside Greece, turned to the study of the development of the political system; they sought to determine what had impeded the democratic development of the country. The watershed study for this period was John Petropoulos’ *Politics and Statecraft in the Kingdom of Greece*. The author belonged to the group of Greek-American scholars (together with L.Stavrianos and G.B.Leontaritis) who had absorbed the political and social theories circulating in the post-war American academy. However, this tradition of modern Greek historiography in America was not sustained, and interest in Greek affairs has tended more to social anthropology.

In Greece, Petropoulos’ book created a whole tradition of political history, which employed basic categories originating from social anthropology and modernization theory. The concept of clientelism became the fundamental component in the interpretation of political behavior and of the relations of society and state, with several variations: class vagueness and ambiguity, absence of social conflict, autonomy of politics, clash of westernized and underdog culture, the transition of the clientelist system from oligarchic parliamentarism to mass democracy combined with populism. This debate created a field in which history intersected with political science and sociology on the ground of modernization theory. Underlying this discussion, however, was a subtext. Greek society was described as “*what it is not*” and its analysis presupposed comparison with an ideal (Western) type, as implied

by universalist modernization theory. Consequently, the analysis concerned the divergences and the differences; the *negativity*. This framework overturned the Marxist schema of Svoronos in which the fundamental conflict was between state and society. In the new schema, the causes of backwardness were shifted into the society. The result of this analysis was the discourse on populism by the modernist intellectuals of the 1980s and its dissemination from historiography to political discourse.

During the 80s, economic history was popular in Greece. The questions of economic history were common to those of political history and linked with the problem of the modernization in Greece: why was there no industry in Greece? What are the causes of Greek backwardness? The explanations were pursued through issues such as the monetarisation of the economy, usury, the quality and allocation of investments, the availability of a labour force, the obstructive role of small agriculture, the formation of the domestic market, the proportion of foreign loans, the role of domestic and diaspora capital, and the time and pace of incorporation into the international economy. The blueprint of the questions and framework of the debate was offered by George Dertilis, who presented a cohesive interpretative framework of Modern Greek History. Emphasis was given to a system of adjustments and equilibrium created by a society of small landholders, with easy mobility and without differentiation of roles, which ultimately impeded the great changes demanded by industrialization.

The central question which economic history poses is akin to the question asked by the School of the Greek Enlightenment and by political historians about the modernization of Greece: Why Greek backwardness? The question can only lead to a history of absences, to the comparison of a model and its shadow, and certainly with the terms, the methods and the underlying value system of the model. From this view, the three great currents of historiography of this period *kept pace in the formulation of a negative question and in the localization of the basic dilemma of Greek society with the terms tradition or modernity. Clearly, the view was dictated by the second part of the dilemma.*

Even if these studies exercised a great influence on historical studies as well as on social and political scientists, the principal problem was how to deal with the sixty-year period of ruptures and intense political and social

cleavage in Greek society, from the *National Schism (Dichasmos)* through the civil war and to the Junta. This period could not be adequately explained within a theoretical framework of modernization which reduced problems to clientelism and the transplantation of institutions. So, political historiography developed from two different perspectives and methods. For the first period, that of the long 19th c., the studies revolved around issues of the function of institutions, the establishment of the state, and clientelist links. For the second period of ruptures, the 20th century, a separate problematic emerged. From an analysis of political parties we passed to the problematic of several levels of social--cultural cleavages and partisanship (*parataxeis*). In the same way the focus changed to the functions of the state. For the first period, social analysis of the state and the elites was given primacy; for the second, the changes of institutions and to the processes of political identification were made central.

6. The Trauma of modernity

It is perhaps ironic that the moment Greek history entered world history and became part of an international problem, (the period of WWII and the Civil War), was also one of the most traumatic moments for Greek history and memory. In academic historiography the appropriation of this period sprang mainly from the generation of the 1970s, in the form of PhD theses outside Greece. It was a political historiography which broke the ice from the Cold War, and from this viewpoint it was part of a more general, international revisionist climate of the end of the Cold War. Here the role of MGSA was crucial, organising the first conference in 1978 in Washington. This conference dealt with the conflict during the German occupation as the culmination of a crisis which had been smoldering since the establishment of the Greek state. But in Greece there was a hesitation to incorporate the period of resistance and the civil war as a whole. This problem of periodization had mainly to do with the psychology of the Left. At a time when it was incorporating itself into the political and academic system, it sought to place the history of the Resistance within national history. In this process, the Civil War constituted an “anomaly”. Still, the first conference on the Civil War took place in Copenhagen in 1984, with the programmatic statement that historical analysis of the Civil War could contribute to the reconciliation which was underway at that time in Greece.

During 70s and 80s, most studies were based on the Anglo-American archives and concerned foreign intervention. The first complete study of the occupation period, which laid the foundation of the historiography of the period, was written by Hagen Fleischer, and the second by Mark Mazower. In this second study we have a turning away from the history of organizations and events to the everyday experience of occupation. This turn from political to social history, was more pronounced in the 90s, with the books by Margaritis on the social origins of the Resistance, by Van Boeschoten on oral history, and others.

The study of everyday experience and memory has shown how fluid the line was between the Resistance and the Civil War, and has provoked a revision of earlier interpretations, although we do not yet have a complete study and a social history of the second part of this period, that is of the Civil War.

To sum up, in the historiography of the 40s, the basic pattern of Modern Greek Historiography was repeated. It was developed from outside Greece to inside, from political and diplomatic to social history. But the History of the 40s was less incorporated within the main explanatory frameworks of Greek Historiography. The historiographical patterns of the school of Enlightenment and the modernization debate remain without connections to this period.

7. Historiography in the 90s

During the 1990s the main trend of historical studies has been to move away from debates on modernization, as well as to abandon explanatory schemas for the whole course of Greek society. The turn to social history is more obvious, and even to cultural history. If in the 80s social and political theory were the interlocutors of history, in this decade social anthropology has been more influential.

During the 80s, discussions about modernization pointed out the ambiguity and the irrelevance of class terms in describing Greek society and considered the lack of labour force availability as one of the obstructive constants of industrialization. Consequently it discouraged studies and marginalised interest in the old social history on the labour movement or the formation and behavior of the Greek working class. Emphasis was given more to socialist ideas and the relationship between socialist

intellectuals and Demoticism. Only in the 1990s did works appear dealing with the relationship between the working class and the state, and the origins of the welfare state in Greece.

Neither popular culture nor the everyday life of the popular classes has attracted the interest of Greek historians. Popular masses have been considered anti-modern and in opposition to modernity. The best works in early modern Greek social history were produced as part of the *Annales* school and dealt with demography, famines and plagues, and diet. The social history of the 19th and 20th centuries has been occupied extensively with youth and education, and urban history. Gender history has also appeared, as a dimension of contemporary social history, and feminism in Greece has likewise been influenced by a historical approach.

A new field in the 1990s is the study of nationalism, national ideology and identity. Already in the 1980s, a keen interest in the construction of national ideology and in the comparison of Greek nationalism with other national movements, such as those in Italy and Serbia, had developed as an extension of the study of Enlightenment and 19th-century history. In the 1990s this interest became more systematic. New historians, under the influence of theories of nationalism (Hobsbawm, Anderson, etc.) began to study Greek nationalism. If in the previous decade the main object of these studies was Modern Greece, in the 1990s the object is the Greek Orthodox population in the Ottoman Empire in the long 19th century. The three main studies in this field refer to the structure of communal organization of the Greeks of Asia Minor, to the way in which the national identity of the Greek Orthodox in Constantinople was formed connecting it with community stratification and cultural strategies, and finally to the transformation of the millet system and the nationalization of the Greek-Orthodox population in Asia Minor.

The turn to the study of national identity and ideology was a reaction to the strong nationalism within Greek society, especially from the beginning of the 1990s, due to the Macedonian issue and Greek-Turkish differences. Within this framework, the study of the minorities that live in Greece has also begun. A group of studies dealing with the Jewish presence in Greece and particularly the Holocaust has appeared, while a second concerning the stereotypes held by Greeks of the others, especially of the

Slavo-macedonian minorities within Greece has come out. In this field the contribution of social anthropology has been profound. Finally, new approaches to the Greek Diaspora have appeared. Post-war emigration to Western Europe and Australia is just now beginning to be an object of historical analysis, as is the Greek Diaspora in the former Soviet Union. Finally, there has been a shift in the study of the USA Greek Diaspora towards diasporic identity.

8. Institutionalization

The works discussed here constitute scholarly historiography, although in Greece the boundaries of the community of historians are not clear cut. At the same time, scholarly historiography does not coincide with academic historiography. Only since the 1980s has the historical community become fully included in the university campus. A discussion of the reception of this historiography and the public use of History in Greece would require a separate and very different analysis, in which the term modernity would have a more ambiguous meaning, and the interest in history would have more to do with imagined compensation to an identity suffering from modernity.