

Book Reviews

Nicolas Cheetham, Sir, *Mediaeval Greece*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1981, pp. 341.

"Nostra autem respublica non unius esset ingenio, set multorum, nec una hominis vita, sed aliquot constituta seculis et aetatibus". What Cicero wrote about Rome in his *De Republica*, is applicable in the case of Greece. Yet in the long history of Greece the Mediaeval era is unfortunately neglected. Although there have been many scholarly studies covering the history of Classical and Byzantine Greece, there has been a curious and indeed unfortunate lack of scholarship covering Mediaeval Greece. This book by Sir Nicolas Cheetham will fill the historical gap for its chosen period; and the author is well equipped to write it. In the introduction of the book the author states his purpose in writing the book. "For most people the Greek Middle Ages are a blank. This book seeks to fill the gap and present the main features of the story without entangling the reader in a too fearsome labyrinth of names, dates and events. To a certain extent the very strangeness of the subject invites exactly that risk, and I can only apologise if the reader feels stuck like an armoured Frankish knight in the marshes of the Kephissos". After an introductory chapter, there are fourteen chapters on the Death of Ancient Hellas, the Hellas re-Hellenized, the Coming of the Franks, the situation of Athens and Sparta, the Shadow of the Angevis, the Catalans, the Byzantine Reaction, a Florentine at Athens, the Defence of Hellas, the Last Years of Athens and Mistra, the Duchies of the Islands, the Venetian Epilogue, East and West, and Crete from 1204 to 1669. The bibliography is well chosen, and two good maps.

Mediaeval Greece is a small but excellent book presenting in an interesting and clear way the history of Mediaeval Greece. Sir Nicolas provides a sound and readable introduction to a subject which Greek and non-Greek scholars have not covered adequately, while the student of Greece and general reader is often ill-informed. With this book the student of Greek history need not to remain uninformed about Mediaeval Greece.

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John E. Rexine, *The Hellenic Spirit: Byzantine and post-Byzantine*, Belmont, Massachusetts: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1981, pp. 136.

The long history of Greece is a record of an extraordinary achievement of energy, *tharros*, or courage, tenacity and vitality. A record in which the *Ellenikon Pnevma*, or Hellenic Spirit, survived the passage of time serving as the eternal force and inspiration for all

epochs of Greek history. This is the theme which Professor John E. Rexine quite convincingly presents in this attractive book of modest length. As the author points out in the preface of the book, this is not a single study but a collection of essays written by him at "various times over a period of twenty-five years and published in a variety of journals, books and periodicals". The twelve well written and argued essays in the book range from a comparison of "Hebrew and Greek Thought and Culture", to "Classical Political Theory and the United States Constitution". Professor Rexine deals with topics such as "Mighty Arches Set in Heaven"; "The Religious Significance of Byzantine Sigillography"; "The Roman Bishop Liutprand and Constantinople"; "Mount Athos and Greek Orthodox Monasticism"; "A Survey of Recent Books on Mount Athos"; "The Church and Contemporary Greek Society"; "Dionysios Solomos: National Poet of Modern Greece"; "The Wall in Kostas Palamas and Robert Frost"; "The Classical Tradition in the Poetry of Georges Seferis"; and "Odysseus Elytis: Poet of the Aegean". The essays of Greece's two Nobel laureates are of particular interest.

Anyone who has so much as dipped into the world of Greece and its glorious history must be aware of the problems with which a collection of essays bristle in an effort to provide unity and harmony, a problem of some magnitude especially in dealing with the impact of the *Hellenic Spirit* on the Greek and non-Greek speaking world through history. This is a task which Professor Rexine has accomplished in this book with considerable success.

The world of Byzantium was fundamentally a religious one of mystical faith reflected in all phases of Byzantine history, art, architecture, literature and life in general. Religious in orientation and emphasis, art and architecture became the supreme expression of the culture of Byzantium. The Church as a spiritual institution played a major role in the preservation and transmission of ancient literature and thought. The *Hellenic Spirit* preserved during the Byzantine era was nurtured by the Church during the post-Byzantine period, the melancholy years of Ottoman occupation (1453-1821) of Greece. *Tourkokratia*, or Turkish rule, is a bridge between the Classical and Byzantine epochs and the world of Neohellenic period of the history of Greece. The post-Byzantine period witnessed the strong link between Orthodoxy and Hellenism. Orthodoxy helped preserve Hellenism and Hellenism was necessary for the survival of Orthodoxy. The strength, necessary adaptability, wisdom, dedication and determination of the Church saved Hellenism and Hellenism the Church. The spirituality of Orthodoxy and the patriotism of Hellenism are the forces which kept the Hellenic Spirit alive during the approximately four hundred years of cultural and political captivity of Greece.

The *Hellenic Spirit*, this important aspect of Hellenic identity and thought, this eternal inspiration and force, is clearly reflected in the world of art and letters of modern Greece. It is the strong force which unites all epochs of the long and glorious history of Greece. The *Hellenic Spirit*, as Professor John Rexine so ably defends in his essays, inspired individuals and influenced situations beyond the geographic limits of Greece. Through the ages the *Hellenic Spirit* became an international force for the cultural developments of others.

The *Hellenic Spirit: Byzantine and Post-Byzantine* is a book which will give much pleasure and profit to its readers.