

and made the world seem to extend no further than the nearby islands just visible, but the author does not indulge in detailed descriptions of terrain, which might become boring digressions. In dealing with people, who are after all at the center of things, Mr Levi presents quite a detailed picture. With some characters he gives a historical sketch, but does not usually do so with the less important figures. He gives a picture of Greeks in general and in particular by illustrating what they do and say and how they react to certain things: the many incidents throughout the book add up to give quite a detailed picture: nor are any of the incidents boring. Thus we are given a lively picture of the many facets of Greece, its people, and its rich history.

It is also noticeable that the author presents different situations. Apart from presenting individual incidents with their various feelings—which is done well for example in the incident when the author fumbled over some political issue about which the Greeks were rather touchy and used the wrong word which was potentially explosive, in which the tension is admirably built up—the book seems to fall into three general periods: before, during, and after the Colonels. The first is perhaps the happiest, and in this section of the book everything proceeds calmly, the author makes friends, has no political involvement, and is unharrassed, and he finds time to give plenty of historical and other digressions. The second, and worst period, under the Colonels, is spent largely in Athens (which the author disliked), there is considerable harassment and disappointment, several people die, more conversation is used (indicating a shift from the settled feeling presented by the largely narrative sections), and there are less digressions into the past and more concentration on the happenings of the present. The last section also has fewer digressions than the first, and in fact often refers back to events in the first period; the author now has a wife and son, and he refers to changes in Greece. The atmosphere is somewhat nostalgic, and fresh (the actions are described briefly and crisply, and he has made a new start with his wife, as Greece had after the Colonels); things seem now to be settling down, and the author says he becomes more interested in such things as flowers, and he devotes some space to *Kronos and his hill*, the sort of timeless guardian; it is rather like Pausanias, who, the author said previously, as middle age drew on became more interested in birds and gods of healing.

In conclusion then, Peter Levi has written a highly readable and fascinating account of Greece, enriched by historical allusion and his observations and insights into the Greek people, all deriving from deep personal affection and experience.

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Steven Runciman, Sir, *Mistra: Byzantine Capital of the Peloponnese*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1980, pp. 160.

This is a book about a city which acted as a provincial capital for the latter part of the Byzantine Empire and the period of the *Tourkokratia*; its beginning and end are marked by important historical events for Greece as a whole: the foundation of the Latin Empire in 1204 (Mistra was not in fact founded till later, but the two events are closely linked), and the city's sacking and final ruin by Ibrahim Pasha in 1824 during the Greek War of Independence. It is a book about a city, but in fact the subtitle gives a closer idea of what is dealt with: it is not so much an account such as one might meet in a guide book, as a history of whatever involved the city in the period; in other words, it is a history of the Peloponnese

(including relations with Constantinople, the capital, and any external events with a bearing) seen from the viewpoint of Mistra.

The book which Sir Steven dedicates to the 'Proedros and the citizens of Mistra in gratitude', is divided into twelve chapters with an epilogue, bibliographical note, genealogical table and enriched with interesting illustrations. The first chapter of the book gives the setting. After a brief but helpful geographical description, we are given a short historical sketch of the Vale of Sparta up to 1204 when the Chamateroi family was prominent in Sparta, and Leo Chamateros was *proedros* of Laconia. The Latins in 1204 captured Constantinople, and divided the empire between themselves. In the ensuing confusion, the Greek despots tried to maintain their positions, and one such local lord (of Methone) seeking to extend his domain, invited Geoffrey of Villehardouin to help; the latter noted the Greeks' weakness, and with some help conquered the Morea and settled at Sparta (though keeping Andravida as administrative capital). Latin rule and church were established, and relatively peaceful time followed; Geoffrey died in 1218, and was followed by his first son Geoffrey II, who died suddenly in 1246, and was succeeded by his brother William, who was keen to strengthen his hold over Laconia, and hence as part of his strategy established a fort against the wild slavic tribes of the Taygetus on the hill of Myzithra in 1249. In 1259, William fought against and was captured by Michael Paleologus, the Byzantine Emperor, who released him in exchange for the forts of Monemvasia Maina and Myzithra (of which Mistra is the shortened form). It was as a result of this that Mistra grew from a fort to a town, for the Greeks of Sparta, treated as second class citizens by the Franks, preferred to live at nearby Mistra under Greek rule.

There followed various wars between the Franks and Greeks, then the plans of King Charles of Anjou to re-establish the Latin Empire, which if carried out would have destroyed Greek rule in the Morea. As it was, the Franks became more isolated and the way opened for the Greeks to re-establish themselves completely. We pass through the despotates of Manuel and Theodore I, during which time the Turks enter the scene more and more, and then onto Theodore II, who along with his brothers Constantine and Thomas (among which three the Peloponnese was divided) cast out the last of the Frankish lords. Relations with the Turks grew more precarious, varying from peace (achieved by various stratagems) to aggression and incursions (such as that of Turakham Bey in 1423). In 1449 Constantine was crowned Emperor at Mistra by the Metropolitan of Lacedaemonia away from the uniate Patriarch of Constantinople, and thus took upon himself the defence of what remained of the Empire against a Sultan determined to take the capital. The year 1453 saw the Sultan emerge as victor.

Life under the infidel is presented as being not unbearable; there were hardships, such as the child tax, the *paidomazoma*, being treated as second-class citizens and the general condescension of the Turks, but taxes were lower, and the Greeks did not suffer the religious hatred of the Latins who regarded them as heretics. The short period at the turn of the seventeenth century when the Venetians conquered and ruled Morea seems to have brought back all the hardships of the Latin Empire, and the Greeks were glad to welcome back the Turks. It was about this time that western visitors started coming to Greece, and the author devotes some space to their exploits.

The book concludes with the Greek War of Independence, which sprang out of the growth of the same love for nationalism and freedom, *Eleftheria*, which stirred the French Revolution. During the Greek struggle for independence, Mistra was destroyed utterly by Ibrahim Pasha, and still remains in ruin.

The period covered falls into two halves, before and after the capture of the Empire by the Turks, and the author includes two chapters in his book at this dividing point which provide a break from the chronological and annalistic narrative which occupies most of the book. One is about the lay out of the town and has some interesting observations about architecture of the secular and ecclesiastical buildings, and about the art-work of the churches. The other chapter deals with the cultural figures of Mistra, mostly being concerned with the philosopher Plethon, obliged to leave the capital for his heterodox ideas, who was a great influence on Italy and its nascent renaissance. This chapter is probably the most illuminating of the book in so far as presentation of real people is concerned: it is more biographical and more detailed than the rest of the book, and is thus more of a window on to real life. The book is short, and it covers a long period, so it is necessarily not complex, but basically simple narrative of the events, descriptive rather than analytical. There are two unfortunate results of this: we do not have enough detail to get beyond an impersonal assessment of the characters involved (though it must be stated that the author has done as much as possible to reduce this effect), and secondly, the compression of this long period of history into such a short space results in a complexity of names and events which requires a totally attentive mind to absorb; it is probable that this complexity will be considerably less for someone already versed in Byzantine history.

On the other hand, it is to the author's credit that this complexity is balanced by a very lucid style of writing; the book is basically descriptive narrative, and the straight forward and unpretentious style is well suited to this, and it also backs up the unemotional and unbiased attitude that the author successfully seeks to present throughout.

Finally, it may be mentioned that this book is well endowed by excellent maps and superb illustrations, mostly of Mistra, which add an extra element of enjoyment and instruction to the narrative account.

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