

THE GREEK UNIFICATION AND THE ITALIAN RISORGIMENTO COMPARED*

Whereas the Italians achieved political unity in just over two decades, it took the Greeks well over a century to attain a unity which is still incomplete; and whereas Rome fell relatively easily into the hands of anti-clerical Italians (whose reverence was for the classical rather than for the medieval city) the new Rome, Constantinople, never came the way of the Greeks, who had for their Patriarchate a great veneration. On two occasions, the Greeks might perhaps have acquired their Holy City—first in 1922, when, if instead of sending forces against Kemalist Angora, they had mounted from Eastern Thrace an offensive against the Chataldja lines together with an offensive from Ismid,¹ and again in 1923 when, after the disaster in Asia Minor, they had succeeded in reorganising their army in Western Thrace, the Kemalists at that time being in great confusion and their military forces in decline. But on both occasions the Greeks, themselves divided were hesitant, and they ended by accepting the dictation of France, Great Britain and Italy. These powers let it be known that, even if a Greek army entered Constantinople, it would not be allowed to stay there. They themselves had not sufficient forces at the Straits to impede the Greeks; but they could easily have bombarded Piraeus. Whether they would have done so is a matter for conjecture. The point, is, however, that the Greeks even the most adventurous, decided to respect the wishes of the Western Powers.

In 1922 and 1923, as at many other times, the European political situation was unfavourable to Greece. But when Rome fell to the Italians, everything was in their favour. The French troops of occupation had left Rome to fight

* This is a slightly longer version of a lecture which was given by Douglas Dakin on 11 March 1969 in Greek at the School of Philosophy of the University of Thessaloniki, on the occasion of his receiving an honorary doctorate.

1. Cf. however D. Walder, *The Chanak Affair*, London, 1969. D. Walder, who has an unrivalled knowledge of the military aspect of the Near East crises of 1922-3 infers that the Greeks could not have got to Constantinople. Much depends on the importance one attaches to British military reports on the State of the Greek army.

the Prussians on the Rhine, only to be defeated at the battle of Sedan. Fortune had smiled (as it had often smiled) upon the Italians, and all they had to do was to overcome a feeble Papal army—a victory which cost them only 49 casualties. Once in Rome they were to stay. Rome thus became the capital of a state of 27 million Italians—indeed of nearly all of those who spoke the Italian tongue, there being outside its confines only the Italians of Switzerland, of the Trentino, of the Italian communities of the Eastern Adriatic coast, and the Italian immigrants scattered throughout the world.

The great and speedy achievement of Italian unification owed much to the skilful diplomacy of Cavour and his successors, to the sympathies of France and Great Britain, to their rivalries, and to the policies pursued by Bismarck. This achievement cost the Italians between 1848 and 1870 not more than 6,000 lives. By way of contrast, the Greek wars of liberation, extending over the period 1770 to 1923, took a very heavy toll of a population which just before the final phases of these struggles (say in the year 1912) amounted to under two and one-half millions. Moreover, when at length Greece succeeded in acquiring territories which contained in 1913 some four and one-half million inhabitants and in 1923 somewhere near seven millions, her very existence was at least twice in jeopardy—first during the period of World War I and then again during the 1940s. On both these occasions the sacrifices were enormous. They constituted, as it were, a surcharge on the costs of liberation. Whereas one counts the bill of the Italian Risorgimento in terms of thousands, that of the Greek liberation must be reckoned in hundreds of thousands. Even though one were to regard Italy's entry into World War I as the embarkation on a final war of liberation of the Italians in the Trentino and the Adriatic (the cost is sometimes reckoned as nearly 700,000), the disparity remains considerable. It is doubtful however whether one should regard Italy's participation in the 1914-18 war as a war of liberation. Italy had acquired great power status. She was out not merely to liberate Italian populations but to acquire better frontiers and expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean. For Greece however the 1914-18 war was a continuation of the Balkan Wars. Her aim was to regain territories previously won and, in the event of an allied victory, to acquire Eastern Thrace, the Greek islands of the Aegean, and to liberate, if it were feasible, Greek populations remaining within the Turkish Empire.

Throughout her struggle for political unity Italy had the advantage of having a large population concentrated on a terrain which was a geographical unity—a terrain bounded on three sides by the sea and to the North by the Alps. The Greeks (if we here to define them as Orthodox Christians speaking

Greek as their mother tongue)² were not nearly so numerous; what is more, they were scattered unevenly over the Ottoman Empire; and, in some regions, were out-numbered by other peoples—by Slavs, Albanians, Jews, Armenians and the various kinds of Turks.³ Only in the Peloponnesus, in Continental Greece as far as the line Jannina - Thessaloniki, and in the Islands were the Greeks a clear majority. In all these regions they did not however exceed two millions.⁴ In Macedonia, except in the more southerly and coastal regions, they were to be found in strength chiefly in the townships which they shared with Turks and other peoples, or in certain villages scattered among Slav-speaking villages and Moslem communities. In Thrace they were again to be found in strength in the towns and they enjoyed a predominance in the coastal areas. In Constantinople (in the City itself and the surrounding province) they numbered 300,000 in a total population of 880,000. Again in strength in the towns on the Black Sea, they were to be found also in large settlements in Asia Minor, their total number here being in the region of 1,800,000. They formed substantial colonies in the Danubian principalities, in Bulgaria, in Egypt, Palestine and North Africa. Outside the Ottoman Empire there were substantial Greek trading communities in Odessa, Buda-Pesth, Vienna, Leghorn, Marseilles and London. In the year 1800, there were some 400,000 Greeks in the Hapsburg territories.

The Greeks first achieved political independence in regions where they were 800,000 strong and in a majority. These regions were of the Peloponnesus, Continental Greece as far as the Arta-Volos line, and the nearby islands of the Aegean, the Cyclades. The Western or Ionian Islands were not included. These seven islands had been established by the Congress of Vienna (1815) as a theoretically independent state under the protection of Great Britain. Until 1797 they had been under Venetian domination; and there was no question here of expelling the Turk. Had they been independent in fact as well as in theory, had they been more compact, richer and more densely populated, they might have become, the 'Piedmont' of Greece. As it was, however, Greece had no 'Piedmont' with which to begin her unification—no 'Piedmont' to make alliances with other States, no Piedmontese bureaucracy and diplo-

2. This was not necessarily a Greek definition, but in this context it has validity, since Greek unification was achieved mainly by Greek-speaking Hellenes.

3. There were also the Vlachs; but these were usually bilingual and frequently more "Greek" than other Greeks.

4. Finlay's estimate (*History*, VI, 2) for 1821 is somewhere near the mark; one million in the Balkans; one million in Crete, Cyclades, Ionian Islands and Constantinople; one and a half millions in Asia Minor, Cyprus and the Danubian Principalities.

matic service, no well-equipped and well-supplied regular army. True, by 1832, if not before, those regions of Greece which had freed themselves had fashioned the bare rudiments of a western state; and it is therefore not unreasonable to describe the early Greek kingdom as the 'Piedmont of Greece'.

Otto's little kingdom had, as a salient of Greek nationalism, one advantage over Piedmont: its Hellenism was much more intense than was the *Italianità* of the dominions of the House of Savoy. Those dominions until the acquisition of Sardinia and Genoa, had been predominantly French-speaking; and for two decades during the Napoleonic Wars, they had been a colony of France. Nevertheless after the Vienna Settlement of 1815 the kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont had much to offer to the Italian nationalists: its anti-Austrian foreign policy, much facilitated by the resurgence of France, found considerable support in adjacent regions where *Italianità*, in all its various forms, began to think in terms of getting rid of Austrian rule. But for the Greek 'Piedmont', that is to say, the kingdom of Otto, circumstances were much less favourable. Russia, except for brief periods, did not pursue an aggressive anti-Turkish policy; and when she did she invariably met with opposition from other great powers. Moreover, although Holy Russia was ever mindful of the Greek Patriarchal Church, the Tsar and his ministers had no consistent, and certainly no altruistic, aim of encouraging the pretensions of the government of Athens. In the event of collapse of the Ottoman buffer state, Russia was likely to favour the establishment, not of new Byzantium, but of client states or autonomies dominated by brother Slavs. Such states would necessarily impede the advance of Hellenism: any Greek expansion outside Crete, the Eastern Islands and the mainland of Asia Minor must be to the North, into regions where Slavs and Albanians had pretensions. Thus, there was no 'Lombardy', no 'Tuscany', and no 'Madena', to be acquired by Greece, unless it were Thessaly and Southern Epirus, both of which were obtained in 1881. These two acquisitions of moderate extent were indeed gained with relative ease; but beyond Thessaly lay the illusive prize of Macedonia. Here the Slavs and Albanians had long been pressing; and in 1878 the province seemed almost to be within the grasp of Bulgaria, whose liberation Russia had assisted. Macedonia was certainly no 'Naples'. Nor indeed was Crete. In both these regions the Turks could concentrate large military forces. True, the Turkish troops lacked the efficiency of the Austrian army, but, in virtue of their numbers, they were more than a match for the Greeks, who being without allies (like the Italians in 1848) met their 'Custoza' at Domoko in 1897. Not until 1912 was the Greek 'Piedmont' (by then in uneasy alliance with the Slavs and vastly improved in military organization) able to inflict

heavy defeats in Macedonia and Epirus upon the somewhat disorganised Turkish forces. But even then the extent of territory overrun hardly matched Greek aspirations. Not only were the Serbians in possession of soil claimed by Greece, but the Bulgarians were in occupation of Thrace and Eastern Macedonia. These same Bulgarians were pressing hard on Thessaloniki, which the Greeks had entered only in the nick of time; and they had managed, having displayed great courage and endurance, to reach the outer defences of Constantinople at Chataldja. So confident was their king, Ferdinand, that he would conquer the Holy City, that he had ordered a mosaic to be made, depicting himself riding a white charger to the doors of St. Sophia. But for once fortune smiled upon the Greeks. The Bulgarians, decimated by cholera, were halted by the Turks. Later, in the hour of their disappointment they were foolish enough to attack the Greeks and Serbians, who, seizing the initiative and being indirectly assisted by the Roumanians and the Turks, defeated their former ally and together walked off with most of the spoils.

Whereas a few skirmishes had sufficed for the Italians to acquire Umbria, the Marches, and the Two Sicilies, battles on a very considerable scale had been fought by the Balkan Allies of 1912 against the Turks. For the Greeks moreover there had been war upon the sea. Their task was much more difficult than that of the Italians, who had merely to ferry a thousand men across the Straits of Messina. Again when after the first world war the Greeks advanced into Asia Minor, they became engaged in large-scale military and naval operations. There was no one else to fight their battles for them: there was nothing comparable to Königgrätz (Sadowa) which presented Venetia to united Italy.

At no time during their Risorgimento did the Italians have to face military problems of the same order as those with which the Greeks were constantly confronted. Once the lesson of Custoza had been learned the Piedmontese managed to avoid military effort on a scale involving such great sacrifices in men and materials as those which the Hellenes were called upon to make. True, for the Italians there were always great risks. At any moment the 22 million Italians forming the kingdom of 1861 might have found themselves at war with their erstwhile ally France, or with Austria seeking for revenge. But owing to the favourable European diplomatic situation and to the correct appreciation of its nuances by Cavour and his successors, external threats to Italian unification did not materialise.

The main obstacles to Italian unification were internal. Each of the provinces eventually incorporated in united Italy had its own historical traditions, its own system of law and land tenure, its own coinage and customs bar-

riers, and its own dialect not easily understood by the inhabitants of other provinces. The south was backward, poor and squalid. Lombardy, the home of industrious peasants, was a garden studded with flourishing cities and townships. The Grand Duchy of Tuscany was a traditional home of culture with an outlook vastly different from that of other regions. Turin was a northern-type city, not very distinguishable from Paris.

In all the provinces, as in the provinces and states of Germany, local patriotism was strong. Consequently, despite the existence of a common Italian literary language and a national consciousness, the positive urge to unification was not, except upon the part of individuals and groups, either intense or singleminded. The first Napoleon, while momentarily imposing on the Italian peninsula a uniform system of law and a uniformity of heavy taxation, had not created political unity; nor had he inspired a longing for it. And when at length the idea of unity found some support, the variants of the idea and the diversity of the aims of its supporters were considerable.

The idea itself derived from many sources—from the European Enlightenment, from the commercial ambitions of the growing middle classes, from historical and literary sentimentality, from the example of the Greeks and of the Latin Americans, from a love of conspiracy, from economic discontent and from sheer politics. The supporters stressed, each one according to his fancy, or his class, or to his position, some particular aspect of the idea. Hence the plans put forward were numerous, the actions proposed conflicting, but in the end a divided yet energetic minority (the majority consisted of conservatives of all classes and of the lower orders which were ignorant and apathetic) managed somehow to achieve, if not a common aim, at least a centralised, united Italy which (largely owing to the part played by Piedmont) was a constitutional monarchy, the constitution being that which Carlo Alberto had granted to his subjects in 1848.

The Greek liberation movement in its ideological and internal aspects, while displaying some of the characteristics of the Italian Risorgimento, was, in several ways, very different. True, there was the same diversity of ideological origins. Like the Italians, the Greeks were heirs to the European Enlightenment; they were spectators of the French Revolution; and, even more than the Italians, they placed some hope in the call to the oppressed peoples to throw off their shackles. Although they had never come under the heel of Napoleon, Napoleon's name was a legend among them, and was all the more respectable for being a legend only. Again, the Greek middle classes were growing at an ever increasing pace. Social and economic discontent was rife. Like the Italians, the Greeks had a long history of conspiracy behind them.

Within the limits that their thralldom prescribed, they enjoyed a kind of political life in which intrigue and finesse were to be reckoned as virtues. They had a picture of and some illusions concerning their pre-Christian past: like the Italians they had learned from the travellers to have respect for and even pride in, their classical ruins; and they had experienced a literary renaissance. They spoke a language which was closer to ancient Greek than the Italian dialects were to Latin. Indeed, where language was concerned they had some advantage over the Italian Nationalists. The Greek demotic language was fairly uniform. The small Greek trader from Constantinople or Smyrna, the Greek sailor from the islands, the Greek *métayer* from Macedonia or Thessaly had no difficulty in conversing with a tradesman in Attica or a peasant farmer in the Morea.

The uniformity of the Greek language had been in part preserved by the Greek Church which had survived the downfall of the Byzantine Empire. The Greek liturgy was conducted in a language which was much more intelligible to the Greek peasant than was the Latin of the Roman Church to the unlettered Italian. Moreover, everywhere in the Greek homelands within the Ottoman Empire, the Greek Church had maintained schools where even the Slav-speaking Orthodox could acquire a knowledge of Greek, which was the cultural and the commercial language of the Levant. Indeed, the long use of Greek for trading purposes was perhaps of even more importance than the influence of the Church in preserving lingual uniformity. Through trade, the Greek communities, the majority of which were in coastal areas, had kept in touch with one another. The comings and goings of the Greek traders made the Greek less a provincial than the Italian. Whether the Greek came from Smyrna or Jannina, from Candia or Thessaloniki, he was above all a Greek. The Italian on the other hand was first and foremost a Venetian, a Neapolitan, a Tuscan, Sicilian, or Sardinian. He did not trade primarily with other Italians. Each Italian trading state had its own national trade. Between each Italian State there was a relatively little trade; and two of them, Genoa and Venice had overseas Empires. By way of contrast the Greek traders handled much of the internal trade of a large dominion; they handled also through their ships and through their communities in other countries a large proportion of its external trade. One may say indeed that Greece had a commercial Empire before she had a nation state. Because the Greeks lived and traded within the confines of a large political unit and under the rule of a common oppressor they had acquired prior to their unification a form of unity which had been denied to the provinces of the Italian peninsula.

The Italians, although for the most part under foreign rulers, had expe-

rienced no common oppressor of alien faith. Only for a brief period in modern times, only during the time of Napoleon, had the whole of Italy been overrun and even then no attempt had been made to create a single state. In the Greek lands, however, the Christian peoples had been ruled for centuries by men of different faith. But what is equally important is that the Turks, from the very outset had tolerated the existence of the Greek Orthodox Church and had even given it a privileged position within the Empire. This Church, which included non-Greek-speaking Christians, formed a kind of theocracy, the hierarchy of which in its upper ranks was Greek, the bishops, whatever their racial origins, thinking of themselves as Greek. True, there existed nationalist and separatist tendencies within the Church, especially among the lower clergy; and these movements were to assume considerable importance when, during the nineteenth century, the Slav-speaking regions began to develop a nationalist outlook. But the very existence of this theocracy preserved for the Greeks, and eventually for the Slavs, their national identity. Indeed so closely knit was the national existence of the Greeks with their Church that in their liberation movement there was no hostility to the Greek Patriarchate comparable to that which the Italians displayed towards the Papacy. True, there were conflicts. On the one hand, men like Rhegas and Koraës were anti-clerical, as were some of the Phanariots and westernised Greeks. On the other hand, most of the higher clergy disapproved of the activities of the Etairists; and the Patriarch himself opposed the movement towards a Greek national, autonomous Church within liberated Greece. Such a Church was eventually established by the Bavarian Regency. But this action was regretted by most Greeks, even by those within the Kingdom. Here nevertheless was one of the great problems of the whole Greek liberation—a problem vastly different from the Roman question, which was chiefly question of whether the Pope needed to retain, in order to fulfil his spiritual duties in the world at large, a temporal power extending over the whole Roman City and its environs. The Greek problem was less simple: it could be argued with some force that the aims of Hellenism might be better served by preserving intact the Ottoman Empire, in order that the Patriarchate might, as the survivor of the Byzantine Empire, become the precursor of the new. This ideal (it is one form of the Greek *Megale Idea*) conflicted with the nationalist idea of gathering in the Orthodox, Slavs as well as Greeks, into a national Kingdom ruled from Athens, or even from Constantinople itself. As time went on, the development and reorientation of Serbian nationalism (the Serbs had formed a *de facto* independent state nearly two decades before the Greeks), together with ethnic-linguistic nationalism in Roumania and Bulgaria, rendered the

narrower, nationalist Hellenism of Athens more practical politics than the Ecumenical Hellenism of the Patriarchate and its supporters. This was certainly true of the regions where the Slavs were pressing. But in Asia Minor, where there were thousands of Greeks, there was no challenge from the Slavs. Here then was a dilemma. Either these Asia Minor Greeks must remain, along with those in Constantinople, a privileged theocracy within the Turkish Empire (being hostages, as it were, for the good conduct of the Greek nationalist state), or Greece must expand into Asia Minor, and endeavour to unite European and Asiatic Greece by gaining control of Constantinople and the Straits.

Although the two forms of Hellenism were basically antagonistic to one another, the conflict was predominantly theoretical. In practice Constantinople and Athens were able to arrive at working arrangements. Not that these arrangements resulted from a Greek propensity for compromise and moderation: they were the results of the restraints imposed upon the nationalists of Athens by the sheer physical difficulties of embarking upon a policy of expansion—the sparsity, dispersal, and poverty of the Greek people, the consequent weakness of their military forces, and, above all, the pressure from the European powers which, from their various standpoints, worked towards the preservation of the Turkish Empire and which consequently laid restraining hands on Greece. So great indeed were the difficulties when viewed from Athens in the way of an expansive policy, that it is not surprising that many otherwise realistic Greeks sought refuge in the dreams of reaching Byzantium, not by force of arms, but by hellenising the Turkish Empire.

Apart from these obstacles to unification there existed for the Greeks, as for the Italians, other difficulties which were also a legacy of the past. For the Italians, the legacy consisted of that self-sufficient provincialism, which to many had more to offer than national unity: for the Greeks the legacy was one of deep-rooted hostility to secular and central institutions. This produced a political instability which in part explained the failure, of or at least the delay in, providing the means for the uninterrupted pursuit of Hellenism. Whether indeed a more constant pursuit would have made much difference to the result (so unfavourable were external circumstances) is a matter for speculation. What however is perfectly clear is that more stable government enabled Greece to fight successfully, and reap great benefits from the Balkan Wars. What is also perfectly clear is that the feuds in Greek political life engendered during the first world war produced the greatest disaster in Greek history since the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Just when the promised land seemed to be in sight, the Greeks, divided politically, were unable

either to manoeuvre on the complex diplomatic front or to produce a sufficient military effort that would have left nothing to chance. The Italians, too, owing to their political divisions were to suffer many military and diplomatic defeats, but on each occasion there was less at stake.

But Greece, as on all occasions, bore her cross bravely. She gathered in her children, not by conquering the soil on which for centuries they had laboured, but by receiving them—a million or more—within the then existing national homeland. No nation has achieved so much as Greece on this occasion. With the help of friendly powers and of the League of Nations, she transformed the moment of disaster into her finest hour. For her many sacrifices she was to reap great rewards. The new populations brought with them, if very little money or possessions, intelligence and skills. The process of assimilation was—and never can be—all plain sailing; but eventually the two populations—the indigenous Greeks and the Greeks from other homelands—eventually settled down. After all they had a common language, a common religion, a common heritage of great antiquity. In a sense they were more alike than were the Sicilians to the northern Italians. Together they transformed Macedonia and Western Thrace. They made, and are still making, of Northern Greece a ‘Lombardy’ and ‘Tuscany’—a garden, a land of cities, and a centre of culture and learning of which the University of Thessaloniki, the Society of Macedonian Studies, and the Institute for Balkan Studies are shining examples.

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