

Book Reviews

M. E. Varvounis, *Daily life and traditional religious observances in Thrace during the 14th century. The testimony of the Chronicle of Ephraim of Ainos*, published by the Cultural Association of Komotini - Centre for Thracian Studies, Komotini 1998, Supplement Thracian Year-book no 3, pp. 116.

Mr M. E. Varvounis has been busy for years with aspects of Thracian folklore; his position as assistant professor at the Democritan University of Thrace in any case keeps him constantly in touch with the folklore, social activities and culture of Thrace. His recently-published book, detailed above, is based on the Chronicle of Ephraim of Ainos (14th century) from which he derives themes that relate to the everyday life and religious conduct of the inhabitants of Thrace during the fourteenth century; naturally he examines these with an awareness of parallel manifestations in contemporary Greek society. After his Prologue and a copious list of the abbreviations he uses in his book, the author adds information about the writer of the Chronicle of Ephraim of Ainos and about the researchers who have for a long time been working on it. The themes which occupy Mr Varvounis relate to that era so critical to the fortunes of Byzantium, the disturbed period during which, while Byzantium slowly dies, its society nevertheless exhibits distinctly its modern Greek characteristics. And certainly in terms of folklore and of social behaviour during that period, it is Thrace that the Chronicle of Ephraim chiefly reflects.

The first section of Mr Varvounis' book is entitled *The Problems of Society* and in it he studies the nature of patrimony, the life of the vine-growers, hunting practices, the understanding of the art of war; in addition he examines final speeches in dramatic works that make reference to mythology and to the social ideology of the 14th century, the position of monks, the use of proverbial phrases, the way placenames are ascribed, the position of women, the cohesion of the family, solidarity between siblings. These are some of the themes Mr Varvounis derives from the Chronicle of Ephraim which, rich in detail, offers him the opportunity to locate still more elements of Byzantine social structure within its pages: respect towards elders (sometimes mocking), homosexuality (reprehensible from every point of view in Byzantine society), popular and other spectacles and games, folk medicine, practical doctors, epidemics, healing through magic, different methods of healing, inspection and

other similar social mechanisms, all these are examined in the same section of the book, always with the Chronicle of Ephraim as a base but also in combination with the analogous and rather similar phenomena that we encounter in Neohellenism.

The second chapter is entitled Aspects of the Science of Folklore in respect of Customs. Here the author deals with the customs surrounding death, respect for the last wishes of the dying and faithful execution of the last will and testament, the mourning of the relatives and the memorial services, national traditions concerning the sacred cloth, the icons untouched by human hand, the churches' provision for the forgiveness of sins, the presence and help of the Mother of Christ at military ventures and the worship of the warrior saints. Other themes that appear in the Chronicle and are pinpointed by the author are the intervention of Divine Providence in human affairs, help given by icons to the faithful and their duty to endow the wonderworking icons with gold and silver. Worship of relics, the value of virginity, the belief in divine justice, in miracles, in prophesies and dreams, are all to be found in the Chronicle of Ephraim, and the writer here discusses also the problem of clairvoyance, astrology and necromancy as well as the methods of practising these in Byzantine society, always making comparisons with corresponding practices in the modern Greek world.

The third chapter is dedicated to Discourse and in it Mr Varvounis gives his attention to the proverbs he has located in the Chronicle of Ephraim and discusses the nature of rhetoric in ancient times, the rhetoric of the fathers of the Church, the Byzantine orator-writers (Synesios of Kyreneia, Michael Glykas, Euthymios Malakis, Michael Psellos, Eustathios of Thessaloniki and Michael Choniatis). The writer divides the chapter into two parts: the first concerns the proverbs which Ephraim derives from classical writers, while the second details the proverbs of the people. He successfully undertakes to locate the ancient origin of every proverb, each being mentioned either by classical, post-classical or Byzantine writers or by the people. In the same spirit he is moved to assess Ephraim's references to the popular traditions of the Byzantine era such as, for example, belief in the existence of dragons, monsters, hidden treasures which are found with the help of saints, and the provenance of divine gifts from the sky; he also examines the meaning of the double-headed eagle as a symbol of power and a sign of divine will, the punishment of infidel enemies, and other similar themes encountered in the hagiographic texts.

In short, in this book by Mr M. E. Varvounis we have another useful implement for the study of Byzantine society in the 14th century which at the

same time constitutes a valuable source for the history of Byzantine Thrace, for the simple reason that the Chronicle of Ephraim of Ainos gives voice to a host of insights into ordinary life in the Thracian area at this time; it is also significant that comparable ideas, manners and customs, conduct and religious life still continue in exactly the same way in the wider modern Greek area, giving incontrovertible evidence of our race's direct progression from ancient times until the present day. Mr Varvounis has demonstrated this continuity by means of his science, folklore, just as, much earlier, did Dr Anastasios Georgiades-Lefkias of Philippoupolis with his book *A refutation of the commonly accepted beliefs and written works maintaining that no one now living in Greece is a descendant of the ancient Greeks*, Athens 1843; the book is written in ancient Greek and also in Latin. We remind the reader that with this book Anastasios Georgiades-Lefkias answered the accusation of Jakob Fallmerayer who had cast doubt on the continuity of Greek civilisation. For this same reason Mr Varvounis' book too has worth and significance in that by means of the Chronicle of Ephraim of Ainos it shows the progress of our race in Thrace through the tripartite schema of unity, Antiquity - Byzantium - Neohellenism.

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Ioannis D. Psaras, *Από τη Θεσσαλονίκη στη Βενετία. Ιστορία της οικογένειας Νιννή (17ος-20ός αι.). Συμβολή στη μελέτη του παροικιακού ελληνισμού* [From Thessaloniki to Venice: The History of the Ninnis Family (17th-20th cent.). A Contribution to the Study of Greeks Abroad], Thessaloniki 1997, published by the Society for Macedonian Studies, pp. 407.

The writer has been a Professor of Modern History in the University of Thessaloniki for some years and has published a number of studies in scientific journals. He is best known, however, for his monographs in Venetian rule on Tinos at the time of the Cretan War (1645-1669; Ph. D. thesis, 1985), on the institution of the civil guard in Venice's Greek dominions (16th-18th cent.; 1988), and on Andros at the time of the Cretan War (1993).

His latest book focuses on a different time and place. It deals with the presence and activity (commercial, economic, social, and scientific) of a many-branched family in Thessaloniki, Venice, and the Veneto over a period of 300 years, from the end of the 17th to the end of the 20th century. It is the Ninnis family, whose origins lie in Thessaloniki.