

Annals

VIEWS ON THE ORIGINS OF NEO-HELLENISM AND RELATED PROBLEMS

(In Response to Anthony Bryer)

The function of the 'learned critique' is to appraise a work and to assess its contribution to scholarship, and it is with this object that, in the twelve years since 1961, when Vol. I of my *History of Neo-Hellenism*¹ saw the light of publication—the first fruits of many years' study and research—my work has been discussed and reviewed in the usual international periodicals. Regardless of the language in which they are written, it is only natural that these reviews may disagree on this or that point; it may be that they indicate certain evidence which the author failed to take into account; or, indeed, they may do him an injustice by overlooking significant contributions he has made to scholarship. With a single exception, however,—that of Cyril Mango—practically all the reviews found agreement in acknowledging the author's extensive use of an international bibliography, his painstaking and systematic effort to master the vast material, the correctness of his method, the imperturbable historicity of his thought, his clear, lively presentation of events and, finally, his capacity for neutrality. A single quotation from the noted Byzantinist H. Hunger—in Bryer's terms, a 'Western', 'non-Greek' historian—will serve in illustration:

«Die Methode des Vf. (Vakalopoulos) in der Auswertung aller erreichbaren Quellen ist vorzüglich, sein Urteil wohlüberlegt und besonnen. So manche Kapitel dieses Buches, die für einen Griechen mit einer Fülle von Ressentiments beladen sein könnten, sind in nobler Manier 'sine ira et studio' geschrieben»².

The first volume aimed at searching out the roots and the determining characteristics of the modern Greek nation, together with an examination of the numerous other problems that arose as events unfolded. Studying the evidence, I came to realize that the hitherto conventional picture was as historically incongruous as it was incredible—that the 29th. of May 1453 saw the consummation of the Byzantine world and that next morning, on the 30th. of the month, a new world abruptly flew forth, the fledgling modern Greek nation, whose history begins from that date.

As early as last century, it is true, Paparegopoulos expressed doubts that Neo-hellenism did not begin until after 1453, inclining to the view that its beginnings ought to be located in the period after 1204. In structuring his own work, however, he followed the traditional division and treated the history of Neohellenism as that of the period after 1453; nor did he proceed to present his view systematically with supporting argumentation. The Greek byzantinists Amantos and Voyiatzidis gave expression to similar lines of thought, but they too stopped short of the attempt to found this view solidly on a systematic examination and study of the old and new evidence that historical research had adduced.

This became the starting-point for my own work: among other problems, to tackle two basic ones, the ethnic origins of the modern Greeks and the formation of the modern Greek nation. Long years in the service of late-Byzantine and modern Greek history gave me the

1. English Translation, *Origins of the Greek Nation*, published in 1970 in the Rutgers Byzantine Series.

2. *Historische Zeitschrift* XVII (1963), 450-451.

opportunity to gather the material, especially that which has come to light more recently, and to weigh its importance. This mass of valuable philological and archaeological evidence was sufficiently illuminating for me to formulate my own opinion: the new era began in Byzantium in the 9th.-10th. centuries when Greek studies received a new impetus, and particularly from 1204 on. I undertook to present this view in successive chapters supported by what I believe to be sound documentation.

It was not, therefore, an *a priori* idea that I tried to prop up by hook or by crook on nationalistic stilts—the intention that Anthony Bryer¹ ascribes to me, presenting me to his readers as he who «has long presented the most serious arguments against Jenkins' strictures». In relating that Jenkins' remarks drew a reply from me Bryer is mistaken, for it was G.G. Arnakis² who answered him; perhaps he means 'Mango's strictures'³, for I did in fact discuss and reject the latter's views in a study of my own⁴. The objectivity of my stance with regard to the problem of the origin of the modern Greek nation is not cast under suspicion by the critics. On the contrary, the late medievalist R. Janin, whose knowledge of Byzantine history and civilization few could approach, was prompted to pass the following commendatory judgement:

«Bakalopoulos loin d'éviter les questions qui paraissent irritantes à certains de ses compatriotes toujours prêts à défendre des thèses périmées, il les aborde de front et utilise avec sagacité des documents parfois contradictoires pour en dégager la vérité»⁵.

Bryer is influenced by the Jenkins-Mango line, however, to hand down a dissenting verdict on my posture towards this problem in the following descriptive terms: «He (Vacalopoulos) is asking more of his probable medieval ancestors than any Western nationalist could demand of his»⁶. He makes a few other observations in his review which on the whole, I decided, did not call for a reply on my part; there did not seem any need for one. Everyone is free to express his own opinion, whatever it might be.

But when Bryer renewed his criticisms of my work and presented them in considerably expanded form with intensified vehemence in the columns of a specialist periodical of international standing, such as «Byzantinoslavica»⁷, I felt it was high time—before he proceeds, perhaps, to a third, even more vehement review—to break my silence and reply to his censures, to clarify things for him and to put fellow scholars in the picture. Bryer saw himself as champion of a new sally (following Mango, not Jenkins), and fired the typical shot not only at my position on the origin of the modern Greek nation but at my whole work generally: «Given Vacalopoulos' strictures it is not surprising that critics of the neo-Hellenic thesis, such as the late Professor R. Jenkins and Professor C. Mango, have had no difficulty in picking holes in it». This is what Bryer imagines, what he would like to believe; and by ironical turn of consequence, his effort adds up to nothing more than hole-picking. I ask the reader of the journal, however, to examine the texts of our works (especially those of Mango and Vacalopoulos) and judge for himself whether in fact holes were made in my study or, as we say in Greece, 'in the water'.

1. Encounter 10 (1971), 3.

2. «Byzantium and Greece», Balkan Studies IV (1963), 379-400.

3. Cf. Cyril Mango, «Byzantinism and Romantic Hellenism», Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 28(1965), 29-43.

4. «Byzantinism and Hellenism», Balkan Studies, IX (1968), 102-126.

5. REB 26 (1968), 256.

6. Encounter 10 (1971), 78.

7. Byzantinoslavica 33 (1972), fasc. 2, p. 244-246.

I shall not, therefore, proceed here to a second exposition of my views on the origin and awakening of the modern Greek nation, which I have documented with extensive historical testimonia, but refer for greater convenience—and objectivity—to the analysis of my work set forth by Professor Ian Moles, its translator, in his study «Nationalism and Byzantine Greece»¹, which Bryer appears to have overlooked. There he submitted the relevant chapters of my history to the rack of the four basic criteria of the birth and growth of national consciousness developed by Frederick Hertz in his *Nationality in History and Politics*² p21 ff, and concluded:

«Modern Hellenism had approached its hour of fulfilment only to be held back by the advanced decomposition of the Empire and the new external threat. Far from being stifled, however, Greek nationalist consciousness flourished in the conditions of foreign occupation until finally, sound and intact, only more rigorous, it triumphantly burst those bonds in 1821. Such is the thesis which Professor Vacalopoulos develops with persuasiveness and skill...»³.

In a parallel but broader study—as an historian I used purely historical data—the political scientist Professor Stephen G. Xydis⁴ essayed the examination and interpretation of the phenomenon of Greek nationalism within the terms of the theories of political sciences; after careful research, he accepts in conclusion that there are genuine indications of a 'proto-nationalism', as he terms it, during the period 1204-1453, and notes: «A perceptive Greek historian (Vacalopoulos) had termed this phenomenon as 'nationalism from above'»⁵. As well as England and France during the Hundred Years' War, examples he himself introduces, Bryer can find in Xydis' study plenty of other instances in European history of a national awakening around that time. Nor is there need to resort to the reviews of various other scholars who have agreed with my views and with the findings of Moles and Xydis in their respective studies; the above are sufficient, I think, to indicate which of us is closer to being right.

Putting aside this basic question, I come now to reply positively and directly to some of Bryer's other criticisms, many of which are drawn from the same Jenkins-Mango quiver. Bryer comments: «A more obvious and practical point, not noted by Vacalopoulos, is that there was a reluctant recognition that the Byzantine Empire and other Greek states had shrunk, that they had shrunk to what seemed to be cultural boundaries, and that these happened to be Greek, giving rise to a kind of national awareness» (p 244). But Bryer has not noted the fact that I myself made the same observation, in both the Greek (p. 154) and the English (p. 104) texts:

«At the end of the fourteenth century, as we have seen, the intellectual and political frontiers of Neo-Hellenism became more clearly defined. The seeds of Hellenic renaissance were sown amid the debris of Byzantine ruin. As the major centers of Hellas—Constantinople, Thessalonica, western Thessaly, Epirus, Athens, and the Despotate of Morea—were engulfed by the Turkish tide, so the very extremity of the Greek people revived the sense of a common historical destiny».

Referring to the author, Bryer goes on in both his reviews with his pell-mell account (the expression is his, and I lay it at his own door): «He feels obliged to demand of thirteenth—to fifteenth-century Byzantines (particularly in their weakest spot in central Greece) evidence of their ethnic and cultural ancestry more stringent than any nineteenth-century European

1. «Greek-Roman and Byzantine Studies» 10 (1969), 95-107.

2. London 1944.

3. Op. Cit. p. 107.

4. Of Hunter College, New York.

5. «Medieval Origins of Modern Greek Nationalism», *Balkan Studies* 9 No 1 (1968), 19.

national historian could», and «...more searching than any Ottoman official demanded as a definition of belonging to the Rum millet»—remarks not only unjust but facetious and vague to the point of stylistic oddity, if not obscurantism.

Continuing in the same vein to colour me in jingoist hues, he writes—seriously or simply to be witty, I cannot tell—: «Medievalists who are not Greek may be bemused by the arguments that the thesis leads him to and wonder why Albanians...and Vlachs (on the evidence, against all other, of a nineteenth-century Greek opinion) have to be classed as honorary Greeks». This might have been fair comment had Bryer been able to quote the words with which I characterize the Albanians as 'honorary Greeks', for this phrase is to be found only in the reviewer's ironic disposition. And it is only a part of the Vlachs that I take to be latinized indigenes of Greek soil, not all of them; Bryer contravenes the canons of scientific history when he generalizes like this in his report. It is inexplicable that he ignores my lengthy treatment¹ of the descent of Latin-speaking peoples of Danubian origin into the northern areas of Greece and, more specifically, Macedonia. Why does he also ignore the evidence of John Lydus² whose testimony on the diffusion of the Latin tongue throughout Greek-speaking areas of Europe gives a sufficiently convincing explanation for the survival there of Latin-speaking populations? For my source is not, as Bryer would like to believe, the theory of K. Koumas—«evidence of a nineteenth-century Greek opinion»—but Lydus; if Bryer knows this he keeps it under his hat, and it is distressing to find him committing such misrepresentation to print.

Yet there is more: he attributes to me certain statements about the physiological characteristics of the coastal Pontians and the Armenian elements among the inhabitants of the interior, and about the barbarous fighting-methods employed by the Turks during their advance into Asia Minor. What can I say except that he ought to have taken the trouble to turn to the notes³ at the back of the book to see whether they are my words or someone else's? Waiting for him there he would find what the Arab Muhammed b. Māngli (second half of the fourteenth century) had to say:

«They fight merely for the desire of overpowering and of victory, not in order to defend a belief or a religion—as if they had a lust for bloodshed and destruction...but when they are transplanted into civilized lands and take up the Mohammedan religion, their manner of living becomes good and their nature improves»⁴.

As to the origins of the legendary *megale idea*, «the bugbear of nineteenth-century local Greek politics» as Bryer describes it, — he seems unaware that only the name is a product of the nineteenth century, whereas its content germinated after 1204, when the Franks took Constantinople, to be articulated with renewed vigour after 1453 when the city fell into the hands of the Turks. Anyone familiar with Byzantine and modern Greek history will be well up on this subject; it is a leit-motif continuously brought up and discussed in historical works and the traditions of the Greek people during the latter centuries of the Byzantine Empire and Turcokratia, and in fact is nothing else but the desire for the recovery or liberation of the lost territories—a very natural frame of mind amongst whatever people, for a shorter or longer period of time, while there are other concomitant factors such as slavery, persecution etc. Were the English to lose London or the Russians Moscow, I cannot believe that they would not have a desire to recover them.

1. pp. 13-14, English translation.

2. Sixth-century A.D.

3. Cf. p. 292 n. 59, p. 294 n. 20.

4. p. 292 n. 29.

Bryer maintains (and lately Nicol too) that the idolization of antiquity and of all things Greeks found in Byzantine writers was simply a fashionable movement amongst philologists, an empty stylistic affectation that, since their works were written in ancient Greek, evoked no response in the ordinary people. I do not think that this was the case: what language did they speak when they communicated with the people, with soldiers? Ancient Greek? Was there an iron curtain that so separated the intellectual, civil and military leaders from the people that it was impossible for them to exert any influence on at least certain popular classes? And if we assume that this was in fact the case, how then did the modern Greek people come into being? Leaving aside the other factors, did this return to antiquity and the ancient Greek prototypes play no role at all?

Bryer is advised to read an article written by a «Western historian» coming from the camp of the social democrats, that of Johannes Irmischer of East Germany: «Nikāa als Zentrum des griechischen Patriotismus», RESEE 8 (1970). This article supports my own views and makes it clear that Karl Marx himself in the last years of his life, though he did not have at his disposal material available to scholarship only recently, had seen in the doctrinal disputes between emperor John Vatatzes and the Pope, the national and political awakening of Modern Greek nation. Yet Bryer speaks of literary movement and hollow rhetoric.

Bryer, it seems, is proud of his good knowledge not only of Greek history but of the language (let us not forget that he held the post of Lecturer of English at Athens University!), to the extent that he lays the following charge: «He (Vacalopoulos) shows a curious insensitivity to the language of the neo-Hellenes»—and he adds a dash of hyperbole—«When Bessarion, for example, writes in literary convention that he knows the daily thoughts of the Despot, Vacalopoulos speculates on the excellence of the cardinal's intelligence system» (p. 245). If the style is enviable his conclusions are bewildering. Indeed, it is Bryer's sensitivity to the language of the neo-Hellenes that is 'curious', a sensitivity not shared by other Western historians nor even by Greek reviewers of my book, none of whom observed that Bessarion wrote in «literary convention». Not a single word from Bryer in support of his claim, yet to him I «speculate on the excellence of the cardinal's intelligence system» when I reflect on the possibility that someone from Constantine's immediate circle had 'leaked' information to Bessarion or was keeping him abreast.

Since Bryer continues his rebukes pell-mell, I am obliged to follow his 'order'. When I retain Kritoboulos' *Taurus*, the ancient name, instead of using the *Pontic Alps*—and I admit that I should have altered it to avoid confusion—he makes a fuss and finds occasion to teach me a little Greek geography. Next come two quite startling observations; he alleges, firstly, that I rely upon the opinion of a nineteenth-century traveller (he undoubtedly means the German anatolist A.. Mordmann) to show the ethnic composition of the East, whereas it is perfectly obvious that I cite him to illustrate the extent of crypto-christianity. Hard upon this come the second, that I failed to devote sufficient attention to folk-lore and custom which, though more difficult to work with, provide stronger evidence. Once again, it appears that Bryer has not consulted the notes at the back of the book. On pp. 275-277 I give a fairly comprehensive bibliography with my own comments, and among other works refer to «the monumental» work by Phaidon Koukoules, *The Life and Civilization of the Byzantines* I-V, Athens 1952, and especially that part of volume V which is entitled «The Modern Greek Language and the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Customs» (p. 276-77). Furthermore, I make use of the findings of the laographical sciences as extensively as the methodical examination of my historical theme permits, and in point of fact stress their significance explicitly on pp. 18, 20-21. All of which passes by unnoticed; Bryer simply repeats what I myself have written.

He surprises me by not realizing that had I followed his advice and concentrated parti-

cularly on custom and lore for evidence of continuity among the Greek people, or on Italian and other foreign trade, on numismatics, on the Venetian colonies, on demographic problems or on such other matters he would have liked, not only would I have gone off at tangent from the subject of my book but, methodologically speaking, should have produced a «series of set-pieces and vignettes»—in other words, exactly what he accuses me of doing now. Long experience as an historian—and a 'Greek historian' at that—has taught me the exact opposite of what Bryer proposes.

He makes a similar sort of error in writing of my book that «as a narrative history it is not comprehensive». Again he fails to understand that the purpose of the book was not to give a narrative account of the years between 1204-1453, but to introduce the reader to the history of Neo-Hellenism. The aim of the work and the method I followed are by no means veiled, but Bryer seems quite unaware of both of them when, after alluding to my appropriately extended consideration of the three dominant personalities of Neo-Hellenism, Gemistus, Constantine IX and Bessarion, he sums up in the following curious and unsupported fashion: «It is all a little unreflective; the facts (or often accounts of opinions and counter opinions chasing a fact) are heaped with careful annotation pell-mell into what is hoped will build up, by implication, into a picture of the growth of neo-Hellenism» (p. 246)!

Bryer seems unwilling to notice the fact that, on the same principle, I also allotted significant space to social phenomena. Fortunately this has been confirmed by other scholars such as R. Weil, who writes in his presentation of the award the book received.

«M. Vacalopoulos a minutieusement dépouillé une «documentation originale, qu'il a puisée à des sources vénitiennes, turques, anglaises. De plus, il ne s'est contenté d'exposer des faits d'histoire politique et nationale; il a montré l'importance des conditions sociales et économiques, attestant de cette façon, par un exemple assez exceptionnel, que le rôle de la conjoncture et la relation de l'événement aux structures peuvent aussi être pris en considération dans les travaux grecs d'histoire moderne et contemporaine»¹.

The section devoted to the fall of the Trapezuntian Empire Bryer, in both reviews, regards as the most complete, even though here too he detects omissions and misconceptions. His lenient judgement may perhaps be put down to the fact the history of the Pontus is his own special subject and, as such, in this area he is able to make a better assessment of my contribution. His comparatively limited experience in a number of other areas of Byzantine and modern Greek historical scholarship affords him a measure of justification for not being in a position to determine my contribution in other sections, be it the originality of my observations, the introduction of new evidence or the solution of certain large or small problems.

It would be difficult otherwise to explain his absolute silence on wholly original but nevertheless immediately and logically interdependent sections of my history (which add up to «a series of set-pieces and vignettes» only when viewed myopically) such as, for example, the adaptation of Byzantine communities, particularly that of Thessaloniki, to the new realities of Turcokratia, the privileges of the Greek communities, the crisis of faith, eschatological teaching after 1204, popular resistance against the Franks and other invaders, the re-organization of the Janissaries, the Christian Spahis in Greek lands, the Greek *armatoles*, crypto-Christianity etc.

For all these mitigating circumstances he still provokes dismay even where the material in this section on the fall of Trebizond is very familiar by contesting the scrupulously documented identification I attempt between Paliokastro (there are so many Paliokastro!) and

1. REG 74 (1961) p. XIi.

the fortress of Ardasa or Torul, without offering so much as an opinion of his own, much less a proof. Moreover, he extends his silence—to give a single, striking example—to my productive correlation of the old Pontic song about Martha with the reliable Turkish data, which results in the discovery of an accurate date for the composition of this song and, after five hundred years, of the historical identity of the traitor!

When he observes that Uzun Hasan's wife was called Theodora and not Catherine, and that 80 armenian families (according to the researches of Thiriet) and not 880 Trapezuntians sought refuge in Crete (as I wrote, abased on Noiret's book, *Documents Inédits*, p. 225), Bryer is correct. For the existence of a bishopric of Ophis, I followed the Trapezuntian metropolitan Chrysanthos Philippidis, who must be taken as the expert on this area. Bryer also notes, «Ophis... is not Chaldia nor was Kanis which is not Cheroniana»: it is the English version of the book that is mistaken here, and my fault as reviser; but I should like to note in passing that the name of the episcopate is not Cheroniana but Cheroiana or Cheriana.

APOST. E. VACALOPOULOS