

RECENSIONS/BOOK REVIEWS

Alexis Politis, Ρωμαντικά Χρόνια, Ιδεολογίες και
Νοοτροπίες στην Ελλάδα του 1830–1880

[Romanticist Years; Ideologies and Mentalities in Greece 1830-
1880] Athens: EMNE-Mnemon, 1993 148pp 1760 Drchs

The study of nineteenth century Greece has been augmented recently with the addition of several articles and books that have explored the meaning and the uses of nationalist ideology. The topic of nationalism had been left too long in the hands of diplomatic or literary historical works that either isolated nationalism from the realm of ideas or from its political context. A most interesting “break” with past approaches was made a few years ago by Elli Skopetea’s study *To “Protypo Vasileio kai E Megale Idea”* [The Model Kingdom and the great Idea] that was subtitled “Aspects of the national problem in Greece (1830-1880)” and that appeared in Athens in 1988. The book was well received, although the lack of a systematic book reviewing tradition in Greece precludes any definitive statement about the reactions of the scholarly community and the more general readership. Skopetea’s work “broke” with the tradition of literary historiography pioneered by the late K. Th. Dimaras implicitly, by not encasing her analysis within the confines of specific literary genres and currents the way Dimaras has done in his classic studies on the Greek Enlightenment and on Greek Romanticism. Thus Skopetea’s approach to her goal, which was to offer an understanding of the evolution of nationalist ideology in Greece followed more closely the contours of political history, though several of the categories she adopted were similar to those Dimaras had worked with, and, moreover, she did not qualify her analysis of ideology with any systematic reference to the political context.

Now, Alexis Politis, a student of K. Th. Dimaras, has come out with a short study of the ideological trends of the same period Skopetea studied that functions, somehow, as a methodological riposte issued from the more literary minded historiographical school in Athens. Unlike the scholarly practices in North America, authors in Greece do not explicitly challenge the work of one another, and the undersigned may be exaggerating the extent to which Politis had any sort of intellectual confrontation in mind. He mentions that he takes a different line from Skopetea once, fleetingly in a footnote. To be sure, despite the prevalence of the Dimaras style and approach - the book, after all is about the “Romanticist years” - Politis’ study certainly brings some interesting, fresh insights to the study of Greek nationalism that deserve attention.

The book is divided into five chapters; the “introductory” chapter discusses

the circumstances of the emergence of the independent Greek state. The “first” chapter deals with what the author describes as the crystallization of the national consciousness, and there he deals with the emergence of historiography, folklore studies and also the “Great Idea in a sub-section that is one of the book’s strongest points. The “second” chapter, deals with views, meanings and ideologies. There are several short sub-sections that treat topics such as the debate over whether Greece belonged to the East or the West, the concept of the “people”, Ancient Greece and, finally, the role of poetry. The “third” chapter is much shorter than the preceding two and deals with “behaviors, attitudes and mentalities.” It refers to things such as clothing, dietary habits, the spread of European music and the language question. The concluding chapter deals with “ideologies, mentalities and realities.” It deals with how the future was perceived, attitudes towards modernization and the political structures of the country.

Since the book is only 148 pages long, judging from the topics it includes one can appreciate that it is more of a “tour d’horizon” than it is a “tour de force”.

Nevertheless, there are interesting insights and new material included in this study, if only briefly and in passing. Politis combines well the Dimaras like attentiveness to sources stressing the author rather than the text, with a sensitivity to the fact that statements on, say, the “Great Idea” are not necessarily deeply held beliefs but a way of communicating that may not necessarily be about the “Great Idea” itself but about the particular historical conjuncture. His treatment of the debates over Greece belonging to the East or to the West is similarly sensitive, he qualifies the various quotes by also referring to the particular conditions in which those statements were made.

There is a strong and almost mischievous treatment of how the early nineteenth century views of Greek scholars about Ancient Macedonia were quite different to the subsequent conventional wisdom that had Ancient Macedonians firmly embedded in historical continuum of Greek history.

There are several other very interesting insights that together with the author’s obvious mastery of the literary sources of the period offer us an appreciation of the contradictory and “stop-start” nature of ideas and their evolution over time. The extent of the new material the author cites is quite impressive given that there have been several works on the topics he is discussing. The basic message that comes through from the author’s analysis is that during this formative period of the ideas about the Greek nation and Greek identity, the protagonists were far less consistent and more unsure about those issues than later generations of ideologies have assumed. It is a welcome reminder that the past and its study are much more complicated than they first appear.

Next to its virtues, this study has its weaknesses. The book’s brevity ultimately, becomes a major problem: concepts are not systematically explained, the

reasoning behind the juxtaposition of ideologies, mentalities and behaviours is left unexplained. Even if one makes allowances for the fact that the author himself repeatedly mentions that he is merely sketching out the problems involved in a particular topic, one still feels cheated by the speed at which the author glosses over important, complex issues such as, for example, the wounded pride of the Greeks, an interesting new category he introduces only to skate over it in three or four pages. The level of study of the Greek nineteenth century demands more thorough investigations. One can only hope that the author, true to the Dimaras style, will enlarge on this first approach with a more thorough and systematic work in the near future.

Alexander KITROEFF
New York University

PARIS ARNOPOULOS, *MEDITERRANEAN 2000*,
VOLUME 1, ATHENS, FOUNDATION FOR
MEDITERRANEAN STUDIES, 1992, P. 206

The aim of this book as mentioned in its prologue is “to look into the position of the Mediterranean region in a global perspective and try to forecast its prospects by the year 2000”. The book is written by Paris Arnopoulos, but it is the result of research conducted by an interdisciplinary team under the auspices of the Athens based Foundation for Mediterranean Studies. It is divided in three chapters. The first chapter deals with the theoretical framework and presents a model for the study of social systems. The second chapter presents the regional aspects of the Mediterranean world. The third chapter focuses on the economic, cultural and political prospects of the region.

The Mediterranean has been the centre of various civilizations and has a history of more than five thousand years. The Mediterranean world exerted considerable influence on humanity via the Greco-Roman, Judeo-Christian and Arab-Islamic cultures.

Furthermore the Mediterranean region qualifies as an international system for three thousand years from a territorial, historical and structural-functional point of view. The author of this study poses the question “whether it will continue to maintain its distinct identity in the face of the revolutionary changes which the world is undergoing presently.”

In order to answer this question, the author proceeds with “a geohistorical model of general systems theory, especially constructed for this purpose”.

The introduction of a model together with the Delphi technique, enabled the research team to investigate the region as a case study of the Mediterranean world. It's a futuristic investigation which tries to present an overall perspective