

Modern Greek Studies: Present and Future

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Whither modern Greek studies? This question, asked in various parts of the world outside Greece, concerns both the present and future. In fact, the very context prompted us to devote the current issue of *Études helléniques/Hellenic Studies* to the topic. We had hoped for greater participation in this debate, but it proved difficult for various reasons not worth mentioning here. In the end however, we have compiled a series of articles that provide a global view of the situation and obviously a full portrait. Defining the area is already difficult, as perusal of the many different point of views expressed and websites indicates. Chairs of modern Greek are listed along with seemingly full programs or basic courses next to political, historical and Byzantine studies, not to mention classics departments. There is even a site from the University of Athens (Department of History) presented within the framework of a project¹ in which we find modern Greek studies plus the teaching of anything related to Greece, from the Golden Age to today!

Another example, provided by Thomas W. Gallant, lists 40 modern Greek studies programs in Canada; whereas there are only four². Even the official statistics from the Greek Ministry of Education refer to nine chairs of modern Greek studies in Canada. In reality, there are three at the following universities: McGill (Montreal), York (Toronto) and Simon Fraser (Vancouver). Furthermore, the latter two chairs are held by historians with the predictable consequences on the teaching of Greek language and literature. The other programs in Canada include classics and, in some instances, modern Greek.

Another instance of this phenomenon: there are supposedly 344 chairs of modern Greek studies around the world including 179 in Europe³. The plot thickens, however, when one consults the sites, even the official ones, on line. As Hans Eideneier points out in his article in this issue, the data are incorrect when it comes to modern Greek studies abroad. He demonstrates that chairs of classical Greek established in the Middle Ages, long before Greece even existed as a modern state, are counted as chairs of modern Greek. How, he

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asked, could anyone consider the Martinus Crusius professor *Utrius Linguae* (named after the professor who lived from 1526-1607) at Tübingen as a chair of modern Greek in the way that the Greek Ministry of Education proudly did in 2006? Moreover, Eideneier shows that one cannot count programs or chairs in which the teachers are lecturers named by the universities, or secondary school teachers who are sent and paid by Greece. As the German neohellenist said «On an official level, Greece paints a rosy picture of modern Greek studies flourishing outside Greece, including Germany in this optimistic, idealized image, without showing the necessary concern over future developments. Yet the harsh reality is either this ideal picture of university modern Greek studies never existed, or even if it once did, things have altered dramatically over the last few years».

On the other side of the Atlantic, in the United States, Gregory Jusdanis points out that «to do modern Greek today is to dissimulate; that is, to say one thing in public and another in private. In this modern Greek studies resembles a postcolonial situation. You learn to make the distinctions between the outside and the inside and offer different arguments, depending on the circumstances. Attend any meeting of modern Greek scholars and you will immediately notice this code-switching. On the podium we laud the many achievements of the field but over coffee we express our disquiet about its many problems and we worry about its future⁴».

There is obviously a methodological problem in counting modern Greek studies around the world. There is also a problem in how to measure their vitality or decline. Let us try to avoid misunderstandings through the following typology:

1. Modern Greek chairs which teach the Greek language, culture and literature with possible specialization in a specific period or topic.
2. Chairs of Greek history where the Greek language and possibly literature and culture are taught with the mention of a specific period or topic.
3. Political studies or foreign policy chairs with a mention of specialization in a specific period or area.
4. Modern Greek studies programs in which the language, literature and culture are taught.
5. Modern Greek programs which teach only language.
6. Research centres with specialization in one area or possibly with involvement in other activities.

Within each category, the level of education must be specified, e.g., undergraduate or post-graduate (MA and PhD). If not, it must be

mentioned that courses lead to credits in another degree or remain credit-free optional courses. In each category the issue of research must also be raised and details given.

Obviously not exhaustive, this typology could be refined but it does successfully exclude chairs and programs of ancient Greek as well as Byzantine studies. Even if we could make a link between the latter and modern Greek, we still need to count them separately. This is not a value judgment but rather an epistemological issue.

Given the difficult times, most universities are closing unprofitable programs which are usually found in the humanities. Of course modern Greek is one of the first on the chopping block. In fact it is within this context that the role of Greece - as well as that of the Greek diaspora communities - becomes necessary to the survival of modern Greek studies. Yes, Greece may have some interest in these studies; however, we see the lack of coordination among the various ministries involved. We can say the same thing for the diaspora, too. There is a lack of serious, in-depth research on the context in which modern Greek studies could develop in different parts of the world. In another time, another economic context, we could find Greek programs scattered around the globe. Some of these are no longer viable; moreover, it is impossible to save all these programs with the means available. It is, however, possible to make strategic choices. These choices will be difficult but necessary if we are to reinforce and regroup some of the programs. It may require closing those with no future, but nothing can be done without an overall vision of Greek cultural policy.

The efforts of the Greek diaspora in this field must be acknowledged, but sometimes local or personal ambitions take over. In some cases, modern Greek studies programs neglect the reality of diaspora Greek communities. In the United States, for example, until very recently, there was no interest in studying Greek-American literature. The big names of modern Greek literature sufficed: Cavafy, Seferis, Elytis, and Kazantzakis. In fact no links were seen among the modern Greek studies programs and Greek language courses for children of the diaspora in community schools.

There is no doubt that the decline in classics, especially in ancient Greek, has influenced modern Greek studies. It is well known that several programs came into being within classics departments as a sort of extension. In terms of Byzantine studies, modern Greek does not have the same attachment as before. In fact, Byzantine studies has turned towards countries other than Greece, e.g., the Balkans and Slavic-language countries. Actually, Byzantine

specialists no longer consider knowledge of modern Greek necessary.

In the current issue, two articles deal with modern Greek studies in Europe; one, with the USA; one with Australia and another tours the world from Europe to Canada via Africa, Asia and Latin America.

In his article, Hans Eideneier begins with the big picture before focusing on Germany. He notes a major change in education within Germany during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which led to a decline in the humanities including modern Greek. Although modern Greek is taught in several universities as a language, he points out that in this country of 82 million people including 350,000 Greeks, and 340 universities and institutions of higher learning, there are only two tenure positions in modern Greek studies in Germany. Note that these are not chairs. He explains how the structure of the German university has changed because of Bologna [the educational accord], which did not help modern Greek or other areas in the humanities. Within the current crisis of modern Greek studies, Eideneier suggests a new beginning. As he puts it, «[...] let us make a new beginning, the beginning after the crisis. Whether we will succeed under the conditions currently prevailing in Europe can neither be predicted nor ruled out in advance».

Moschos Morfakidis gives us a panoramic view of the situation in Spain. The growth of Greek studies in recent years seems impressive, but Morfakidis warns us that the foundation for the future is weak. He feels that soon we will be able to judge if modern Greek studies will succeed in growing or shrinking. He emphasizes the role of the Greek state and sees merit in its efforts over the past few years. According to Morfakidis, it is vitally important to outline a realistic policy in the funding of modern Greek studies so that the money will not be wasted through multiplication of events or programs of little importance. He would prefer contributions to reinforce the more promising university departments so that they survive the hard times which all languages, both major and minor, face.

Alexander Kitroeff gives us some background to modern Greek studies in the USA before presenting the current situation and debate on the future. In his opinion, modern Greek studies have developed in a slow, fragmented fashion in the United States for three reasons: incompatibility with established academic disciplines; effort by the discipline to follow academic trends without traditional bases; and lastly, dependency on outside funding. The author thinks that it is possible to surmount the obstacles and that modern Greek studies in the USA could move ahead.

Michael Psaromatis considers the history of the teaching of modern Greek in Australian universities since the very first program was established in Charles Darwin University in the north of the country. The author analyzes the factors which contributed to the decline and closing of certain Greek language teaching programs as well as the factors which contributed to the success and durability of others. The article concludes with proposals designed to ensure the survival of modern Greek studies in Australian universities.

Stephanos Constantinides offers a broad view of modern Greek studies in those areas not examined in other articles. He refers to English-speaking regions like Great Britain and South Africa; French-speaking states like France, Belgium and Switzerland, and various other countries like Italy. Regions like Latin America, Scandinavia, Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the former Soviet Union, Turkey, Africa and Asia are included. In the same article, Constantinides reviews the so-called dynasty chairs named after Greek personalities from the worlds of politics, business and literature.

George Prevelakis presents the recent, often contradictory, efforts made to revive interest in these chairs. He suggests three possible avenues for the government and foundations to follow when helping to promote the image of Greece abroad. His suggestions include relinking modern Greek studies to classics by supporting efforts to defend and promote the discipline; providing timely funding through research projects related to modern Greece and its diaspora rather than creating new chairs and centres; linking university structures already in place with local Greek diaspora communities and their socio-political milieus and reorienting their missions toward multicultural issues.

The overall balance sheet of modern Greek studies around the globe as presented herein is neither definitive nor exhaustive. This was a first attempt at providing a panoramic view. We hope to continue studying the situation so that we may develop some of the hypotheses and present more accurate, specific data for certain corners of the globe. More important, we would like to see continued efforts to answer the earlier question: *Whither modern Greek studies?* The question must include content and objectives without refusing to ask about the very pertinence of Greek history, culture and political life being introduced within broader educational institutional frameworks, e.g., European studies and Mediterranean or Balkan studies. Why teach Greek history at a chair of modern Greek studies when, after all, the course will be given in English or another language? In other words, one question is whether modern Greek studies chairs or programs should be limited to

teaching language for literary and cultural purposes and try to introduce other courses into the broader stream of the educational institution which will attract more students in the end.

In our globalized village, everything moves so quickly that the universities are obliged to reorganize disciplines and fields of research to meet new demands that serve economics and technology to the detriment of the humanities. However, at most universities, the same fields have been reorganized along the lines of multiculturalism or interculturalism within a post-colonial and post-modern context. The challenge now lies in finding a way to include the teaching of the modern Greek language and culture within that context. Given that classics departments which used to support modern Greek are in decline, the challenge is all the greater. In other words, we must find a strategy to promote modern Greek studies in an ever-changing world where the language and literature of a small nation does not garner the same attention as the economic giants like the USA, China, Japan or the European heavyweights like France, Italy and Germany.

NOTES

1. Hellenic Studies on the Net Research Project, University of Athens, Department of History, Research Project/Director: Prof. Antonis Liakos (e-mail: aliakos@cc.uoa.gr) Researcher: Despoina Valatsou (e-mail: dvalatsou@yahoo.com).

Hellenic Studies on the Net-Research Project: <http://history.arch.uoa.gr/hellenicstudies> An ambitious project of collected links, based in the University of Athens.

2. Thomas W. Gallant, «The Status of Modern Greek and Hellenic Studies in Higher Education in Canada and the York University Experience», *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. 24, 2006.

3. *Kathimerini*, 30-04-2006.

4. Gregory Jusdanis, «The Status of Modern Greek Studies in Higher Education: Who Needs Modern Greek?» *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Volume 24, 2006.