# The Past and Present of Modern Greek Studies in the United States

**Alexander Kitroeff***

**RÉSUMÉ**

Cet article examine le passé et le présent des études grecques modernes aux Etats-Unis et évalue autant la situation de ce domaine d'études que le débat qui a cours autour de l' état actuel de ce dernier ainsi que de son avenir. L'auteur soutient que les études grecques modernes aux Etats-Unis ont subi un développement lent et fragmentaire à cause de trois facteurs principaux : 1) une incompatibilité avec les disciplines académiques établies; 2) les efforts du domaine lui-même à suivre des tendances académiques courantes malgré l'absence de fondations «traditionnelles» solides; 3) la dépendance au financement externe et autres arrangements spéciaux avec des universités qui ont mené à une fragmentation puisque chaque «centre» a du s'adapter aux réalités des universités dont ils sont les hôtes. Le dépassement de tels obstacles pourrait aider au progrès des études grecques modernes aux Etats-Unis en s'appuyant sur les réalisations considérables au sein de la diversité de ses composantes, et ce en depit des difficultés générales.

**ABSTRACT**

This article examines the past and present of Modern Greek Studies and assess the state of the field as well as the debate about its state and future which has unfolded over the past years. It argues that modern Greek studies in the United States has experienced a slow and fragmentary development because of three main factors: its incompatibility with the established academic disciplines and fields in the United States; the field's own attempts to become relevant to current academic trends despite the lack of a sturdy "traditional" foundation and its dependence on outside funding and special arrangements with universities that has led to fragmentation because each "center" has to adapt to the realities of its host universities. Overcoming such obstacles would help Modern Greek Studies in the United States build on the considerable achievements of several of its component parts, the general difficulties notwithstanding.

The field of modern Greek studies has been in a self-acknowledged state of decline at least since the 1990s. While not everyone working in this academic field might agree entirely with this assertion, there is consensus that the field has been facing serious difficulties in establishing itself in

* Haverford College

American academe as a respected and significant sub-discipline. As a result, there have been a series of essays and other interventions over the past two decades seeking an explanation of the problems facing modern Greek studies and recommending solutions. It is perhaps ironic that the level of self-reflexivity is extremely high, and collections of contributions such as those grouped under the rubric "Wither the Neohellenic?", originally papers at a conference at Ohio State University in 1996 and published later on in the *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 15.2 (1997), confirm the high quality of scholarship in the field. Subsequent journal articles, as for example a *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* double issue [Vol. 27, 2001] devoted to a conference on the relationship of modern Greek Studies to the study of classical antiquity and another cluster of articles on the topic of modern Greek studies in the *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 24.1 (2006).

This article takes stock of both the state of the field and the debate about its state and future by way of arguing that modern Greek studies in the United States has experienced a slow and fragmentary development because of three main factors: its incompatibility with the established academic disciplines and fields in the United States; the field's own attempts to become relevant to current academic trends despite the lack of a sturdy "traditional" foundation and thirdly the field's dependence on outside funding that has led to fragmentation because each "centre" has to adapt to the realities of its host university.

**Modern Greek and Classical Studies**

The study of modern Greece never became an integral part of classical studies in the United States. Although it can be considered as the first form of "area studies" Classics departments, on the whole have shunned the idea of housing modern Greek studies, even language. One can speculate about the reasons for this repudiation of any acceptance of Greek cultural continuity or an unwillingness to consider modern Greece in conjunction with Classical Greece, a view that has a long history. Modern Greek has made some inroads in a few departments but it has remained on the margins of the discipline.

Stelios Vasilakis, who completed a doctoral study in classics at New York University, and is co-owner of the publishers *greekworks.com,* had this to say about the classics and modern Greece in his own intervention in the debate about the state of modern Greek studies:

"One would have thought that the emphasis on the continuity between

classical and modern Greek culture would have led departments of classics to embrace programs of modern Greek language and literature (the major areas of study in modern Greek studies). However, despite assertions of the classicists' embrace and acceptance of such coexistence, the reality suggests that they remain indifferent and in many cases hostile toward modern Greek. A large number of classicists today attribute a parasitic role to modern Greek in its relation to antiquity and view the "discipline" as a "poor relative," imposed upon them by university administrators in their never ending search for funding. The three-day conference at UCLA that inspired this essay, for example, was organized by the department of classics, but its faculty – with the exception of co-organizer Sarah Morris – was absent from the proceedings. To give another example, while the chair of modern Greek language and literature at New York University was appointed through the department of classics, collaboration between the two fields was kept at a minimum." (Vasilakis, 2002 – see also Vasilakis, 2001).

The exception to the rule, initiatives at Harvard and UCLA have been few and far between and have not become a widespread pattern. While there can be some optimism about the prospect of an acknowledgement of the continuity of Hellenism from antiquity to the present from within the sphere of classical studies, more work needs to be done if the isolated instances are to acquire permanency and epistemological legitimacy. (Morris, 2001).

There is a complementary problem in the integration of modern Greek studies within Classical studies, namely the unwillingness of many modern Greek specialists to condone such a development. The continuity of Greek culture, which is in fact part of Greek conventional wisdom, is treated as an issue of debate and dispute in academic circles. This has to do with the ideological uses that continuity was subjected to beginning in the nineteenth century when it was elaborated by the Greek thinker and political activist, Constantinos Paparigopoulos. Although his was a nuanced argumentation, albeit coloured by contemporary political concerns, its subsequent political uses in a crude manner by right-wing thought and by politicians interested in serving a variety of dictatorial or anti-communist agendas has made a large segment of academic wary of embracing continuity.

Finally, irrespectively of the ways that modern Greek studies correlate and are influenced by Classical studies, the status of Classical studies in U.S. academe plays an important role. The assertions of an all-round decline of the importance of Classical education in the United States made by Victor Davis Hanson and John Heath in their seminal study *Who Killed Homer?*

*The Demise of Classical Education and the Recovery of Greek Wisdom* (Encounter Books, 2001) has been disputed and has led to a debate that is beyond the scope of this article. Less controversial is the proposition that the study of Greek and Latin at the high school level has decreased. High school curricula are necessarily more diverse, a reflection of the growing sensitivity to cultural diversity over the past decades. While this is not a bad thing in general, it has made classical studies less central to American high school education and this affects, indirectly, the standing of modern Greek studies.

**Area Studies**

Area studies, as the institutionalized and interdisciplinary focus on particular regions of the world became known, proved to be another inhospitable domain for modern Greek studies. Area studies took off in the United States only after World War II, shattering what was until then an inward-looking perspective of American higher education. Up to 1940, there were only 60 PhDs produced in American universities that dealt with the non-Western world and many of those were concerned with antiquity. Area studies began to grow in the 1950s as a result of the United States' greater awareness and involvement with the rest of the world and, by the 1960s, one could find either area studies departments, centres or institutes at most major universities. Their emergence was thanks to the realization of several Foundations that the extent of the United States' global reach did not match the academic understanding of those parts of the world within American universities. By far the most important contribution came from the Ford Foundation. Concerns that the United States was falling behind the Soviet Union and other strategic Cold War considerations meant that several other foundations began funding area studies beginning in the 1960s. It is important to note that universities and scholars were able to resist serving American strategic concerns and that indeed within area studies one could find very often a variety of critiques of American policy in a particular region as well as scholars whose work appeared to be closely attuned to the perspective of the government or other policy makers. (Szanton, 2003).

The emergence of area studies was only of indirect benefit to modern Greek studies because the regionally-based fields that emerged did not include Greece. For well known historical reasons modern Greece has been considered as part of Western Europe rather than any other area. Therefore, Near and Middle Eastern Studies included the Greeks in the Ottoman Empire but not modern Greece after its independence in 1830. Slavic

Studies that were concerned with Russia primarily and secondly with the Balkans and Eastern Europe excluded Greece by virtue of the "Slavic" rather than geographical focus.

The emergence of European Studies beginning in the 1970s – the Council for European Studies at Columbia University was established in 1970 – were mostly concerned with Western Europe or the European Union.

There have been certain "sub-regional" study perspectives that might have featured Greece much more prominently than could the category "European studies", but none of these initiatives acquired long term permanency. In the 1960s and 1970s, the development of Anthropology produced several efforts to establish a "Mediterranean" perspective. But by the 1980s, several anthropologists leveled criticisms and this regional perspective was pursued less extensively. And a movement among political scientists to conceptualize a "Southern Europe", following the parallel events of collapse of dictatorship and transition to democracy in the 1970s, was short lived.

**The Emergence of Modern Greek Studies**

The difficulty modern Greek studies faced in being inserted into a broader field of area studies did not, of course prevent their emergence. This happened in the 1960s and it led to the establishment of the Modern Greek Studies Association. As Lambropoulos mentions, from the 1960s to the 1980s, the field "was dominated by the study of literature-specifically, poetry and prose. During this period, the majority of the people who taught and translated Modern Greek, the majority of those who helped establish the Modern Greek Studies Association and the first Modern Greek programs, the majority of those who became internationally identified with the field so far as magazines, journals, publishing houses, fellow scholars, or the general public, were concerned, focused on literature and especially on that of the twentieth century. Pioneer academic work took as its object the eminent authors C. P. Cavafy, Nikos Kazantzakis, George Seferis, Odysseus Elytis, and Yannis Ritsos. Literary methods were deployed for the artistic, intellectual, or cultural analysis of verse and fiction that people assumed possessed great and universal literary merit. Approaches varied, but the emphasis was normally on the importance of artistic complexity and on quality. Even history and political science adopted similar criteria, seeking to find processes of reconciliation and elements of synthesis in the Greek past and present. Simply put, at that time it was possible (indeed, customary) to structure the regular symposium of the Modern Greek Studies Association

around a single unifying theme. This era, since it was mainly driven by artistic appreciation, may be called *aesthetic* (although the term needs to be understood in the broadest possible sense)". (Lambropoulos, 1997, p. 197) The scholars who should be mentioned here include Peter Bien, Edmund Keeley, Kimon Friar, Rae Dalven, Philip Sherrard and their work in turn was informed by contributions by historians such as John Petropulos and Speros Vryonis, Jr., as well as social scientists such as John Iatrides and Adamantia Pollis. They were joined gradually by others that included Gerasimos Augustinos, Nikiforos Diamantouros, Thanasis Maskaleris, Kostas Myrsiades, S. Victor Papacosma and Harry J. Psomiades.

It is very important to underscore the fact that the young field of modern Greek studies was dominated by literature and poetry, because it is precisely those studies that would experience the greatest intellectual upheavals beginning in the 1980s. However, prior to that, the contributions of pioneers in the field led to the establishment of modern Greek studies centres in several universities in the United States. These included the Center for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies established in 1974 at Queens College, New York, under the leadership of political science professor Harry J. Psomiades, and funded partially by contributions of Greek-Americans. In 1975 a Greek government grant of $ one million established the George Seferis Chair of Modern Greek Language and Literature that was filled by the literary scholar George Savvides and was attached to the university's Classics Department. Precisely because he felt awkward at being a neohellenist in a Classics Department, Savvides stressed the vibrancy of modern Greek culture when he arrived in Cambridge, Mass. (Kennen, 1977). The Program of Hellenic Studies at Princeton University established in 1979, thanks to a generous donation of an alumnus of the University, Stanley J. Seeger in order to advance the understanding of the culture of ancient Greece and its influence and to stimulate creative expression and thought, in and about modern Greece.

A number of other modern Greek studies centres began appearing in American universities at that time. It is beyond the scope of this article to mention all of them. One of the earliest was the Kazantzakis Chair at San Francisco State University, established in 1983, was initially funded by a major gift from Angelos Tsakopoulos, which has been augmented by a number of donations by Eleni Kazantzakis, the members of the board of the Modern Greek Studies Foundation, a Bay Area non-profit organization, the J. F. Costopoulos Foundation and the Greek Ministry of Culture. Another

important initiative came in 1988 when a donation by another Greek American, Kimon A. Doukas established the Hellenic program at Columbia University in 1988.

However, the proliferation of these chairs, centres or programs, did not mean that the narrow field of modern Greek studies had somehow gained an autonomous and respected place in the curricula of U.S. universities. To understand why, we have to return to the chronological examination of the evolution of this field.

**Modern Greek Studies in the 1980s & 1990s**

According to Lambropoulos, by the end of the 1970s the field of modern Greek studies had become consolidated and proceeded to move to a next stage. While there is no doubt that a transition occurred, others have questioned the degree to which modern Greek studies had evolved at that point. In particular, Vasilakis argues that a genuine field had not emerged when the transition began. By the same token, the changes did not augment or undermine the "field", as Lambropoulos suggests, simply because it did not really exist. Vasilakis writes: "modern Greek studies in North America are not just a discipline in decline, but rather a non-discipline. To begin with, the organization of modern Greek studies into a field or academic discipline has never really taken place. What we have in this instance is not an established field of literary studies or a discipline, but rather a group of individuals, in most cases teaching a large number of language and literature courses in other academic departments (classics, comparative literature) in which they may or may not be welcome, burdened with administrative responsibilities, and unable in most cases to dedicate sufficient time to research." (Vasilakis, 2002).

This is a valid point borne out by subsequent developments. The field is experiencing so many structural problems currently; it behoves us to question its foundations in the first place. There is at least one major structural fault in the way the field was conceived in its earliest era. Although it was understood that modern Greek studies referred to a "unique" subject matter that could not be housed in any of the broader area studies, the specificities of the Greek case, which made it not fit in, were ignored. The most obvious unique feature is that the "Modern Greek" culturally and intellectually belongs to a broader category, the "neo-hellenic", by which I mean not only Greece, but the Greek speaking world that includes Cyprus, the Greek diaspora and (at the risk of sounding nationalistic), the lands in

which there was in the past a significant Greek-speaking and Greek Orthodox presence. The absence of these aspects of Hellenic culture compounded the weakness of what was already a small sphere of study.

The absence of a Greek-American studies component was another serious omission, and a surprising one, given the rise of ethnic studies in the United States in the 1960s. Moreover, only a few years prior to the establishment of the Modern Greek Studies Association, Theodore Saloutos had published what remains to this day a classic study on the Greek-American experience, *The Greeks in the United States* (Harvard, 1964). But the MGSA apparently decided not to give any special emphasis to the study of Greek-Americans. It was only the Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies at Queens College that showed any real interest in promoting Greek-American studies. The situation has changed, thanks to the growth of interest in diaspora studies in the mainstream of American academe. The Greek studies centres at Michigan, Ohio State and San Francisco State Universities are engaged in valuable work in this area which had been neglected in the past. This omission may have discouraged the Greek American community from participating in those programs, as well as funding them.

Irrespectively of what one thinks of the level and depth that modern Greek studies had achieved in the United States by the late 1970s, one has to acknowledge sweeping changes in perspective beginning in the 1980s. Around this time, the growth of area studies generated critiques that went beyond the accusation of these serving government policies – ironically, even though Greece did not benefit directly from their growth, modern Greek studies became caught up in the questioning of the value of area studies. The critiques, of area studies came from the more theoretically oriented disciplines such as political science and sociology and amounted to suggesting that a regional focus was too limited or by its nature empirical and even parochial. Some suggested that all area studies did was to act as a purveyor of exotica. The lack of theory, or question about what type of theory is applied in area studies, has been frequently debated. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1987) alerted scholars to the danger that a particular area is examined through a Eurocentric set of considerations.

More specifically, the effects of these broader trends on modern Greek studies was a turn towards what Lambropoulos describes as ethnographic concerns: "Since the early 1990s, Modern Greek scholarly interests have taken a different direction. The number of literary monographs has diminished. So has the number of translations published by non-Greek

presses. No new names or titles have entered the canon of important authors and books. Literary scholarship has been largely neglected by other disciplines even though it was the first to champion poststructuralist methodologies. Instead, anthropology has become the dominant discipline in terms of both quantity (productivity) and quality (relevance). Contemporary Greece is more likely to come to the attention of colleagues and the sophisticated public via this route. Thus in a very short time the aesthetic era has been superseded by one that I call *ethnographic*." (Lambropoulos, 1997, p. 198)

"The problem with the ethnographic turn, and its dominance, he goes on to suggest is that we are left with numerous studies of the Greek margins, excellent in their own right. "Modern Greek has been dramatically transformed into the study of Greek margins and aliens (linguistic, ethnic, religious, sexual, and other), documenting a long record of human rights abuses. Greek ethnography has dedicated itself overnight to the systematic advancement of the interests of marginalized minorities of all persuasions-avant-gardists, outcasts, leftists, women, patients, the poor, gays, Albanians, Pontians, Jehovah's Witnesses, refugees. (It is worth noting that this development was preceded by the anti-Hellenism of the 1980s, manifest in diverse areas such as Afro-centrism, deconstruction, gynocriticism, multiculturalism, Third-Worldism, and the Martin Bernal controversy—an open season against the Greeks that seemed to annoy only a handful of Modern Greek specialists). It is not an exaggeration to say that taking apart dominant notions of Greek identity has now become the major project in the field. Given the meteoric rise of the ethnographic tendency everywhere, one cannot complain that Modern Greek is behind its times. As a field, it is impressively synchronized with major intellectual trends like critical race studies, microhistory, subaltern studies, postcolonialism..." (Lambropoulos, 1997, p. 200).

But while its practitioners have every reason to feel proud of its continuing vitality and responsiveness to broader scholarly developments, as a whole these form a series of interventions that undermine the entity of modern Greece while little had been done in the meantime to understand Greece and the ways it has been constructed. We know the margins without knowing well what is at the core, precisely because the field is so underdeveloped. As Lambropoulos explains, "the reason for the paradoxical inability of ethnography to advance the broader study of a culture, a tradition, a people, or a country beyond its own disciplinary confines is not its colonialist and

imperialist heritage, a Eurocentric legacy that contemporary scholarship has eloquently and convincingly exposed and denounced. Rather, it is its liberal-that is, its value-neutral, guilt-ridden-attitude to the world." (Lambropoulos, 1997, p. 201).

In a response to this critique of the ethnographic turn in modern Greek studies, a respected anthropologist, Loring Danforth, stated that as an anthropologist "I am not convinced that it is intrinsically more worthwhile to study the Greek heroes of the War of Independence rather than the Turkish heroes, or the Greek heroes of the Macedonian Struggle rather than the Slav heroes. Finally, I cannot help but ask: «Does Hellenism, does Modern Greek culture, really have more 'exemplary accomplishments' to offer than French culture, Egyptian culture, or Navaho culture?» Again, as an anthropologist I must answer with a firm «No.» (Danforth, 1998)

At the core of Danforth's thinking is an entirely legitimate disciplinary perspective, one that privileges anthropological concerns, over "modern Greek studies" concerns but something that also proves the point that modern Greek studies lacks the type of weight and value that commands the attention of practitioners in various disciplines. Could one for example, study World War I without taking into account the British perspective, or indeed understand a great deal about that war by examining it from the British standpoint?

But the ethnographic turn was not the only recent development that undermined the still coalescing field of modern Greek studies. There was a moment in between the earlier humanist-oriented work and the ethnographic work that a post-modernist turn became dominant in the field. It entailed, as it should have, a direct or indirect debunking of the premises of the older humanist school and was headed by Lambropoulos and his colleagues at Ohio State, including Gregory Jusdanis. The problem they created was the same one created by the ethnographic turn, namely a critique of an establishment that was not really very well established and in fact still on the margins of mainstream U.S. academe.

For better or for worse, the postmodernist turn was limited by its own intellectual premises. As Jusdanis has succinctly pointed out, "Greek antiquity, having borne the brunt of postmodernism's generalized critique of Eurocentric values, has lost much of its former prestige. And this tarnishing of antiquity's luster has also darkened the picture of modern Greece. Classical Greece's displaced position in the West has adversely affected neohellenic culture's claim for recognition. The postmodern discourses of

multiculturalism, postcolonialism, and poststructuralism that have spearheaded the attack on the classical model have shifted scholars' attention to other societies considered exemplary cases for study-societies evidencing globalization, anti-imperialism, and hybridity, qualities that are not felt to apply to Greece. In other words, modern Greece may not be as interesting today as in previous decades partly because the criteria for evaluating the «worthiness» of cultures have changed. A society claiming direct descent from ancient Greece is not going to be viewed with the same sympathy today as it was in the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth, when Europeans traced their own cultural origins to Hellas and celebrated the Athenian *polis* as the prototype *par excellence* of democratic government." (Jusdanis, 1997, pp. 171-72)

In other words, it was structurally impossible for a "postmodern modern Greek studies" to somehow achieve the status and centrality in academe that eluded it before the post-modern turn. Ultimately of course, like all new innovatory approaches, postmodernism became absorbed – some might say domesticated – into modern Greek studies and in placing its emphasis on textual analysis and deconstruction has proved in some cases enriching and in other cases mystifying and confusing.

**1990s: A Wave of New Centres**

The institutional presence of modern Greek studies in the United States was strengthened in the 1990s with the establishment of a wave of new centres. The new era of globalization and affirmation of national and ethnic identity acted as a positive force in terms of the creation of new modern Greek studies centres with the help of funding from Greek institutions and Greek Americans. Among these was the Onassis Center at New York University in 1989 which has since been downgraded to a "program." This was an ambitious project that included the creation of five faculty positions located jointly in university departments and the centre which had its own building and ran its own outreach program. The first director was Professor Spiros Vryonis, Jr. who served until 1995 until he was replaced by classics professor Phillip Mitsis. As a result of differences between the Onassis Foundation and the university over the direction the centre would take, and other conflicts that had caused Vryonis departure, the project was partially abandoned but the faculty positions remained. The "center" then curtailed its scope and became one of the "area studies" programs of NYU.

The problems Hellenic Studies faced at NYU are a reminder of the complexity of trying to introduce this small field in a large research university. Even an institution, like NYU was actively engaged in trying to attract funding to pursue the establishment of area studies chairs. The dynamics of a research university are such that the influence of area studies programs will depend on their ability to find graduate students and that was an area that the Onassis Center had either overlooked or had not been informed about very well when it was negotiating with the University. The Center was more invested in the undergraduate courses it was offering. But it is no great secret that many departments in research universities are less concerned with undergraduate teaching and focused more on graduate-level teaching. At the same time, the robust "outreach" program did not have a corresponding beneficial influence in the eyes of the academic departments.

In 1997, Socrates Kokkalis, founder and chairman of the Greek-based Intracom S.A., a global group of telecommunications, electronics and software development companies and the owner of the Greek soccer team Olympiakos, founded the Kokkalis Program on South-eastern and East-Central Europe. Based at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, the Kokkalis Program focuses on stability, democracy, prosperity and institutional vitality in South-eastern and East-Central Europe and it has a special interest in Greece and its regional role.

In 1999, the Foundation for Modern Greek Studies, a group of Greek community leaders from Ann Arbor and the Detroit area raised funds to create the Cavafy Professorship in Modern Greek at the University of Michigan in 1999. A modern Greek program has been formed around that chair which was awarded to Vassilis Lambropoulos. At the same time, the University of St. Louis acquired the Hellenic-Government-Karakas Family Professorship in Greek Studies. In St. Louis as well, Greek-American community contributions helped pay for the establishment of the program.

A Hellenic studies program at Yale was established in 2001 by the Stavros Niarchos foundation. The Program organizes lectures, symposia, conferences and supports faculty and student scholarly activities, as well as cultural events. The Program of Hellenic Studies offers a comprehensive program of instruction in the modern Greek language at the elementary, intermediate and advanced levels and cooperates closely with the Center for Language Study at Yale University for the development of technology-based teaching aids for the acquisition and mastering of modern Greek and the enrichment of other Hellenic oriented courses. In addition, the Program offers a variety

of courses in modern Greek literature and culture as well as in Ottoman and modern Greek history.

Finally, this representative example of the major centres includes a series of chairs and programs funded by the California-based Tsakopoulos family at Sacramento State University (formerly the Vryonis Center), Stanford University and most recently at Georgetown University with the Eleni and Markos Tsakopoulos-Kounalakis Chair in Hellenic Studies. The Spiros Basil Vryonis Center for the Study of Hellenism established in 1985 in Los Angeles, before it moved to Sacramento, was a cultural institution dedicated to studying, understanding, and promoting Hellenism and its role and significance in contemporary culture and society. At Stanford, the Tsakopoulos family of Sacramento donated $2 million in honor of former Greek Prime Minister Constantine Mitsotakis to create a professorship to support the study of Greek ideas in contemporary society. Matching funds from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation's gift to the School of Humanities and Sciences helped establish the chair, which was established in 2006 as the Tsakopoulos-Kounalakis Professorship in honor of conservative Greek politician Constantine Mitsotakis.

With the addition of these new centres, there are currently about thirty programs, centres or chairs of modern Greek studies housed in universities across the United States. Although this is a positive development its value should not be exaggerated. We come back to the problem that Modern Greek studies is not a clearly established or accepted field of study. Consequently, each program / centre / chair is obliged to adapt to the broader needs and goals of its host institution. In most cases this curtails the scope of their activity. For example, a program may be well endowed but cannot attract graduate students because of the standards of entry imposed by the university. Or in the case of an urban "commuter school" the program cannot be very ambitious in some areas due to lack of student interest. And in general, the low profile of modern Greek studies prevents the centres or chairs from playing as central role as they would like in the educational mission of each university.

There is, finally the problem of political motivation underlying the creation of a chair. In Vasilakis' words, «modern Greek studies in American universities are, to a large extent, the result of the involvement and financial support of individuals and the Greek American community. What has motivated this support to a certain degree, however, is the rather distorted perception that the establishment of such programs is essential for the

support of so-called 'Greek national interests.' For years, both a large part of the academic community and the general public have looked upon the creation of programs of Turkish studies in the United States as an effective lobbying tool, and have therefore relentlessly advocated creating comparable programs of modern Greek studies as a balancing mechanism to the 'invasion' of the academy by Turkish studies. The obvious problem with such an approach is that it lacks educational and intellectual motivation. The goal is merely the creation of a chair, with no concerns about its function, or its long-term perspectives and development.» (Vasilakis, 2002) This issue of political manipulation remains a serious problem but does not imply that modern Greek studies must shy away from developing a problematic and a position related to current affairs, economic, political and "national."

Overall, government funding or any other funding for that matter need not be antithetical to the academic mission of modern Greek studies. The Greek state and the Greek-American community simply have to respect the autonomy and integrity of academic interventions. This can only benefit them in the long run. There will always be foreign government funding in area studies in the United States, and this will inevitably be politically motivated. Turkey's attempts to influence scholarship surrounding the Armenian Genocide are well known. Furthermore, Turkey's interest in the broader area of history and politics outstrips that of Greece. In short, it is up to the scholarly community to resist the blandishments of government funds with strings attached, expose those within academe that go along with such plans and work towards consolidating academe's authority and its ability to manage such funds without outside influence.

**The Suspended Step of Modern Greek Studies**

If anyone believed that the new wave of chairs would lead to a strengthening of the field they would have been surprised by the findings of another cluster of essays on the state of modern Greek studies that appeared in the Journal of Modern Greek Studies in 2006.

The three contributions by scholars involved in the field in the United States, Gregory Jusdanis, Martha Klironomos and Mary Pittas-Herschbach strike a pessimistic note. They acknowledge the crisis the field has been facing recently and seek to offer strategies of survival, particular in the case of Pittas-Herschbach, organizational in Klironomos' case and more broadly epistemological on Jusdanis' part. (Jusdanis, 2006; Martha Klironomos, 2006; Mary Pittas-Herschbach 2006).

While all three levels of future strategy are useful, it is the area that Jusdanis addresses that is the most difficult. Yet what he proposes, "a clearly-defined research profile which connects scholarship on Greece to current epistemological developments" does not sound beyond the reach of the practitioners of the field. Indeed, even though one can speak of a troubled and narrow field over the past few decades, one can also single out academic book-length studies of Greece that have reached a broad readership precisely because they have linked Greece directly or indirectly to wider epistemological concerns. Jusdanis himself managed that with his book *Necessary Nationalism* published in 2001 where he discussed cultural nationalism by also alluding to the case of Greek nationalism. Other examples of work by U.S.-based historians of modern Greece, (the area I am most familiar with) include Molly Greene's *A Shared World,* a study of inter-communal relations on Ottoman Crete, published in 2000 and Mark Mazower's *Inside Hitler's Greece* (1993). Both those studies cast the Greek experience in a broader academic context. The same applies to the work of social historian Thomas Gallant who now works in Canada.

Hopefully more studies can appear by neo-hellenists based in the United States that will connect their subject matter to broader epistemological trends. But this process will reflect creatively on modern Greek studies only if practitioners of the field avoid the overheated critique of older "establishment", "canonical" or "mainstream" views of the modern Greek experience. Let them all remember there is no real mainstream or establishment in modern Greek studies, and thus their critiques strike the wrong tone in the broader academic environment. Currently, modern Greek studies possesses a number of well funded programs and centres. They need to work towards underscoring the relevancy of the modern Greek experience in a range of disciplines in order to gain respect in academe and draw in students. Otherwise, those centres will become a Potemkin village of empty houses. Much is to be done in modern Greek studies in the United States, and there is ample room for conventional and unconventional scholarship to be able to co-exist side by side. Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex,* as it were, could cohabitate with *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*.

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