The Quest for Hellenism: Religion, Nationalism and Collective Identities in Greece (1453-1913)

Livaniou Dimitris
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.198

To cite this article:

ABSTRACT: The main aim of this essay is to offer a critical survey of the development of Greek collective identities, between 1453 and 1913. That period witnessed dramatic transformations, and the arrival of a modernising and Westernising wave, which crashed onto the Greek shores in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The ensuing clash between Western and modern ideas of nationalism on the one hand, and time-honoured local mentalities nurtured by Orthodoxy and the Ottoman millet system, on the other, was intense. This paper attempts to chart some salient aspects of that struggle, to discuss the evolution of concepts and words, such as “Hellene” [Ελλην], “Hellenism” [Ελληνισμός], “Roman” [Ρωμαίος] and “Romiosyne” [Ρωμιοσύνη], and to place them within their changing historical context.

I. The Austrian, the Hungarian and the Greeks

On 21 September 1829 an Austrian statesman sent a letter to a Hungarian nobleman. In this letter the author reflected on the Greeks: “What do we mean by the Greeks? Do we mean a people, a country, or a religion? If either of the first two, where are the dynastic and geographical boundaries? If the third, then upwards of fifty million men are Greeks…”

Prince Clemens von Metternich, our Austrian statesman, had his reasons for taking the trouble to preoccupy himself with the Greeks, a far away people of whom he knew rather little: he had to protect the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, which was then threatened by the emergence of a Greek state, and to extinguish the flames of nationalism that threatened to engulf not only the Ottomans but his own masters, the Habsburgs, as well. Regrettably, we do not know the reply of our Hungarian aristocrat, Prince Paul Esterhazy, then ambassador in London. Metternich could be excused, of course, for having difficulties in understanding what the Greek “nation” actually is. Devoted to the defence of the multi-ethnic Habsburg Empire, and steeped in a pre-national frame of mind, Metternich was referring to a subject, the definition of

* I am indebted to Professor Peter Mackridge for his perceptive and much appreciated suggestions. I should also like to thank Professor Basil Gounaris for his insightful comments.

nationalism, that neither he nor his Hungarian interlocutor were able fully to grasp.2

Therein lies, however, a delicious historical paradox: Metternich would have been rather surprised to be told that the very issues he raised in his letter were, in fact, the crux of the whole matter: in 1829 "Greece" as a state was being formed, but the definition of a "Greek" was still a matter of intense debate among the Greeks themselves: is it "religion" only that determines admission to the Greek nation? Where are exactly the "geographical boundaries" of Greece? Are the Greeks a "people" and what does this mean? This essay will attempt to show that although Metternich and Esterhazy had no clear answers to these questions, neither had the Greeks, albeit for entirely different reasons. It will further attempt to examine some aspects of the interplay between some important forms of belonging (language, religion and customs) in the formation of Greek collective identities. All these criteria played a role in the period under consideration here, but not equally, and their relative importance changed over time. A discussion of these parameters will seek to place "Hellenism" and some of its meanings within its post-Byzantine and modern Greek contexts.

At this juncture two preliminary observations are called for. The first concerns the chronological purview of this essay. It consists roughly of four centuries of Ottoman rule and one century of independent statehood. It is dangerously (and therefore unwisely) broad, but nevertheless necessary, if some relevant continuities, changes and patterns are to be identified. The chronological signposts are 1453 and 1913. All chronological conventions are arbitrary and even misleading, and those selected here are no exception. Some discussion of them is therefore necessary. The first date (1453) marks the year the Eastern Roman Empire was pronounced officially dead, by the capturing of its capital by the Ottomans. It has been accepted as the conventional, but by no means actual, beginning of the period of Ottoman domination of the Greek

2 It is of interest to note here that for the great Hungarian aristocrats (among whom the Esterhazys figured prominently) the term "Hungarian nation" [Natio Hungarica] included only the land-owning nobility and not the peasantry, irrespective of ethnicity or language. In that context, "Hungarian" meant "noble", and not "Hungarian-speaker", or "of Hungarian ethnic descent". For a good discussion of these issues see Itofik M. Islamov, "From Natio Hungarica to Hungarian Nation", in Richard L. Rudolph and David Good (eds), Nationalism and Empire: The Habsburg Empire and the Soviet Union, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991, pp. 39-45. As shall be seen below, the Hungarian experience was not much different from the Greek one during the period of Ottoman rule.
lands. From the point of view of the history of ideas that interests us here, however, it represents both a break with and (perhaps even more) a continuation of the preceding period. It was a break in the sense that it ushered in in high relief the problem of the relations between the Orthodox Greeks and their Muslim overlords, now that the Empire was definitely a thing of the past, and a Muslim potentate sat on the throne of Constantinople. But in terms of the collective identity of the Greeks it marked, as shall be seen, a continuity rather than a break: that date saw no change in the way the Greeks perceived themselves, and this is one of the reasons why 1453 did not signal the beginning of the "modern period" of Greek history. In 1453, modernity (and its consequences) was still far away. Consequently, the relative importance of this date should not be overstated. The other signpost of this essay (1913) is rather more substantive in that respect. In a narrow sense, it marked the end of the Second Balkan War, between Greece and Serbia against Bulgaria over the spoils of Macedonia. On another level, however, this war marked the complete victory of nationalism over other forms of collective identities in Greece. By 1913 Greek nationalism had come of age.

II. "Who am I?" Answers from Patriarchs and Peasants

The second observation, which refers to the nomenclature used here, can also serve as the starting point for the discussion of Hellenism and collective identities. The title of this essay refers to "Greece", but for most of the period under consideration here, neither "Greece", as a nation-state or a nationalist project, nor "Greeks" [Ελληνες] in the sense of a group identified by that name, existed. Anachronisms are habitually derided as an elementary mistake to be avoided at all costs, but some anachronistic terms have been so much entrenched that their common use escapes attention, and confuses issues of identity instead of clarifying them. The Ottoman Empire, for example, is frequently called the "Turkish Empire", which was ruled by "Turks" and subjected the Greeks to "Turkish rule" [Τουρκοκρατία]. The use of such appellations imply three assumptions: a) that the Ottomans called themselves

---

3 This is a rough, although convenient, chronological demarcation, but it should be noted that the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans and the Greek lands was a piecemeal process, starting in the fourteenth century and effectively ending in 1669 with the fall of Crete, although some Aegean islands were captured much later; Tinos, for example, in 1715.

by that name, b) that they were, or had an awareness of being, “Turks” in a
national sense, and c) that there is an intrinsic continuity between the Ottoman
“Turkish” Empire and the modern (Kemalist) Turkish Republic. All these
inferences are equally erroneous, given that the Ottoman administrative élite of
the Empire was highly multi-ethnic, and until the very end of the nineteenth
century used “Turk” as a term of abuse, denoting the uncivilised and illiterate
Anatolian peasant; on the other hand, perceptions of continuity between the
Ottoman Empire and the modern Turkish state are also misleading, for the
entire Kemalist ideological edifice was built on the utter rejection of the
Ottoman past, which was vehemently castigated as “backward”, “oriental”, and
inimical to the Western world that modern Turkey wished to join.5 When, in
the 1920s, Kemal declared to his countrymen that “There is no nation in the
world greater, older or more honourable than the Turkish nation,” he signalled
a massive break with the past, not the culmination of an age-old process.6

The “Ottomans-as-Turks” example, and its intellectual ramifications, have
some interesting parallels in the terminology used in the Greek case. Just as the
appellation “Turkish” misleadingly turkifies the Ottoman Empire long before
(some of) the Young Turks attempted to do just that in the twentieth century,
there have been attempts to “Hellenise” the Eastern Roman Empire, either
because nineteenth-century Greek Romanticism (through Spyridon Zampelios
and Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos) constructed Byzantium as the medieval
phase of the primordial “Hellenic nation”, or because a segment of the
Byzantine intelligentsia used the term “Hellene” to identify themselves,
especially in the last two centuries of the Empire. The first of these two views
belongs to the intellectual history of the independent Greek state, and will be
discussed later on. An examination of the problem of Byzantine “Hellenism”,
however, or, as some scholars would like to suggest, nationalism,7 lies beyond
the scope of this essay, and the competence of its author. But given the
continuity between the late Byzantine and post-Byzantine periods in terms of
collective identity, and the importance of nomenclature, some brief discussion
of these points is appropriate here by way of introduction.

5 For these issues see Bernard Lewis, The Emergence of Modern Turkey, London:
6 Andrew Mango, Atatürk, London: John Murray, 1999, p. 469. For the glorification
of Turkish history by Kemal see also Patrick B. Kinross, Atatürk: The Rebirth of a Nation,
7 Paul Magdalino, “Hellenism and Nationalism in Byzantium”, in John Burke and
Stathis Goumelliot (eds), Neo-Hellenism, Canberra: Australian National University, 1992, p. 5.
There is no doubt that by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries a growing number of intellectuals gradually abandoned the customary word “Roman” [Ῥωμαίοι] to identify themselves, and used instead the term “Hellene” [Ἑλληνες], thus demonstrating a profound admiration of the language and artistic output of the ancient Greeks, and sometimes an awareness of an ancestral connection with them. This may well have signalled a shift in the cultural identity of some of those authors, given that until then the term “Hellene” meant “pagan”. It should be noted, however, that the literary environment of the period also played a role in favouring the word “Hellene” over “Roman”. To give but one example, Speros Vryonis quotes what is to him a “most interesting” reference to the Byzantines as “Hellenes” by the historian Kritoboulos. In describing the gradual Ottoman advance in the Balkans, our fifteenth-century Byzantine historian, inter alia, writes: “καταστρέφοντες δὲ Μυσίας [...], ἐπὶ δὲ Ἱλλυρίους, Τροπαείας, Ἑλλήνες...”. But if the Albanians became “Illyrians” for our archaising historian, is it not appropriate that the Byzantines too will become “Hellenes”? Surely, it would have been odd for Kritoboulos to put “Romans” next to “Illyrians” and “Moesians”. In this case, it seems that it was Kritoboulos’ archaism, rather than his “Hellenism”, that dictated the use of the word “Hellene”.

The most prominent and oft-quoted case of Hellenism, however, is that of Pletho, who did not mince his words about his own perceptions of belonging. Addressing Manuel II Palaiologos, Pletho declared that “We over whom you rule and hold sway are Hellenes by race, as is demonstrated by our language and ancestral education.” Yet, this startlingly modern formulation of Hellenic identity has been debated. 

---

8 See, for example, Speros Vryonis Jr, “Byzantine Cultural Self-consciousness in the Fifteenth Century”, in Slobodan Curcic and Doula Mouriki (eds), The Twilight of Byzantium: Aspects of Cultural and Religious History in the Late Byzantine Empire, Princeton: Dept of Art and Archaeology, Program in Hellenic Studies, Princeton University, 1991, pp. 5-14.


10 Cf. in this context the observation of C. Th. Dimaras: “Naturally, the archaism of the historians [of the 15th century] somewhat complicates things; just as the Ottomans become Persians, it is natural that the Romans (Romios) become Hellenes in the historiographical texts.” Νεολληνικές Διαφωτισμοί [Neohellenic Enlightenments], Athens: Ermis, 1983, p. 83.

identity, based on the continuity of language and culture, was a truly singular case, for Plethon remained, as Donal Nicol has observed, “a dreamer of dreams”, and “an odd man out”.12 He represented few others beyond himself, not least because he was pagan. His paganism obviously made it easier for him to break the barrier of religion and to accept unconditionally that the idolaters of ancient Greece were his own forefathers.13

Perhaps a more sensitive guide to the complexity and contradiction that characterised the attitudes of the Byzantine intellectual circles of that period was the case of the first post-Byzantine patriarch, Gennadios Scholarios, whose reign marks the beginning of the period under consideration in this essay. A staunch enemy of Pletho on philosophical grounds,14 Scholarios in a well-known passage asked the question “Who am I?”. He refused to call himself Hellene (οὐκ ἄν ζητέην ποιτεί· Ἔλλην εἶναι), opting instead for “Christian”, for he “did not think as the Hellenes did”, despite the fact that he spoke their language.15 Importantly, however, he did so in a religious context, in his dialogue with a Jew, and in that context Hellene could have only meant “pagan”. The rejection of the “Hellenic” appellation was then quite appropriate. In other contexts, however, when religion was not the main issue, occasionally he uses the traditional “Roman” [Ῥωμαῖος], but he also repeatedly referred to the Byzantines as “Hellenes”, “children of the Hellenes” (Ἕλληνες γίνεται πατρίδος) and to their fatherland as “Greece” [Ἕλληνα], whereas the Orthodox Church is an “Eastern” one [Εὐαγγελικοὶ].16

13 Interestingly, Pletho’s tradition was mirrored in the Arabic setting five centuries later. Just as it took a non-Christian (in this case, a pagan) to go beyond religion and advocate secular concepts of belonging that rest on ethnicity and language, it took non-Muslim (in this case, Christian) Arabs first to formulate the idea of Arabic nationalism based on language and ethnic commonality, and to reject Islam as the prime marker of belonging. In both the Greek and Arabic cases, the road to nationalism had to by-pass the universalism of religion. For the role of Christian Arabs in the development of Arab nationalism see Basam Tibi, Arab Nationalism: A Critical Enquiry, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990, pp. 96-105.
16 I follow here the meticulous and careful examination of the word “Hellene” in
The multiplicity of contexts, which necessitated Scholarios' oscillation among "Hellene", "Christian" and "Roman", demonstrates perhaps the limits of a quest for any meaningful national content of the word "Hellene".\textsuperscript{17}

One thing, however, appears to be certain: Scholarios remained deeply attached to Orthodox Christianity, which constituted the most important dimension in his identity and clearly overshadowed all others. It was the defence of Christianity, now threatened both by the Latin West and his Muslim ruler, that preoccupied him most. For Scholarios, the coming of the Ottomans was clearly not a "national" disaster, the enslavement of one nation by another, but more of a political and religious one. In enumerating the disasters he faced, he wrote that with the coming of the Ottomans, "we have no Emperor, no free church, no freedom of speech".\textsuperscript{18} It can be said that the second grievance was somewhat higher in his considerations than the other two. A solution to this problem would make life for him at least tolerable. So, it can be argued that when his new overlord decided to restore the position of the Church, and allow Christians to worship their God, Scholarios was apparently prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt. The available evidence suggests that he had good relations with the Sultan, and he had even the odd good word to say of Mehmet II, when he spoke of his "humanity" \[\text{προσφέρεται}\].\textsuperscript{19}

By identifying first and foremost as a Christian, Scholarios was in accord with the majority of the Byzantines, irrespective of their educational level, for most Byzantines would call themselves "Romans" or "Christians" every time they encountered the rare opportunity to identify themselves. It was these words that survived the fall of Constantinople and displayed an astonishing tenacity. In the ninth century, for example, St Gregory, a native of Asia Minor,
was arrested in Thrace and received a good beating. The reason for that treatment escaped the historical record, but not the question he was asked: to identify himself. His answer was rather simple: “I am a Christian, my parents are such and such, and I am of the Orthodox persuasion.”20 That much was enough to him, and apparently to his tormentors. A thousand years later, around 1891, a Greek nationalist visited Asia Minor, the land of St Gregory, only to receive to his considerable distress exactly the same answer:

For if today you ask a Christian, even one speaking a corrupted Greek: “What are you?”; “A Christian (Christianos),” he will unhesitatingly reply. “All right, but other people are Christians, the Armenians, the Franks, the Russians…” “I don’t know,” he will answer, “Yes, these people believe in Christ but I am a Christian.” “Perhaps you are a Greek?” “No, I am not anything, I’ve told you that I’m a Christian, and once again I say to you that I am a Christian…” 21

What we see here is a continuum in terms of collective identity, which spanned almost a millennium. The prevalence of Orthodox Christianity had created a way of perceiving the world, and a way of perceiving one another, that appears to have changed very little during the period of Ottoman domination. That tradition, formed under the Byzantine Empire, was cemented, as shall be seen, by the administrative practices and worldview of the Ottoman Empire. It obviously excluded nationalism; it excluded, that is, the emergence of secular forms of belonging, which rested on language and identification with “a nation”. In that respect, the views of St Gregory proved remarkably enduring.

Further instances of continuity between the Byzantines and post-Byzantine identities can be readily observed. For the Byzantines, Orthodox Christianity was the main force that could motivate and unite against any adversary. Nowhere is this more palpable than in the case of war. In fighting the Bulgarian Simeon in the tenth century, Romanus I Lecapenus urged his men to die for Christendom, overlooking the small detail that the Bulgarians were by that time also Christians. This did not appear to trouble the Emperor in the least.22 Ten centuries later, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a Greek officer, Pavlos Melas, was also fighting a war against the Bulgarians, but this time in Ottoman-held Macedonia. Melas himself was a nationalist, but the peasants whose allegiance he wanted to

21 As quoted by Richard Clogg, “Anadolu Hiristiyan Karindaslarimiz: The Turkish-speaking Greeks of Asia Minor”, in Neohellenism, p. 67
22 Cited in Cyril Mango, Byzantium, p. 31.
attract were not. Consequently, in order to reinforce his message to the
Macedonian peasants he ordered a seal which bore the Cross and the inscription
Εν Τοίτω Νίκα [In this sign conquer].23 The Byzantine echoes of our captain's
seal, alluding to Constantine the Great, could not have been more pronounced.
Again, the fact that his enemies were also Orthodox Christians left our officer
unmoved. Clearly, at times of war, Christianity was not a commodity that could
be shared. In the Byzantine and post-Byzantine world (which in many cases
survived to the twentieth century, as the above-mentioned illustrates) it had
become solidified as a marker of "our own" identity only, despite the obvious fact
that it also formed the main identity of "our" opponents.

But if the "Christian" and "Roman" appellations survived the fall of the
City, what remained of the "Hellenism" of the late-Byzantine intellectuals?
True, the "Hellenic" fire had not raged with intensity in the first place; Pletho's
views were too idiosyncratic, and were buried with him, while the "Hellenism"
of the intellectuals was confined to their circle and did not seem to have
reached a wider following. But some flames of it apparently continued to
flicker, as Jonathan Harris has shown, among the Byzantine émigrés in the
West, in Renaissance Italy but also further afield. Many of these used the word
"Hellene" instead of "Roman", were proud of their Hellenic inheritance, and
considered their language a crucial element of their identity.24 Interestingly,
some of these émigrés converted to Catholicism, and this dimension of their
intellectual constitution invites a question which goes to the heart of the
"Hellenic" debate: they thought of themselves as Greeks despite the fact that
they were no longer Orthodox, but would they have been accepted as such by
their Orthodox brethren? In other words, was it possible for someone to be a
Catholic and a "Greek" at the same time?

On one level, the answer depends on whom we are talking to. For
Bessarion, there was no contradiction between Hellenism and Catholicism. In
his funerary inscription, which was written by himself, he proudly included all
his magnificent Latin titles (Episcopus Tusculanus / Sanctae Romanae
Ecclesiae Cardinalis / Patriarcha Constantinopolitanus), but he did not fail to
add that he was from "Noble Greece" (nobili Graecia ortus oriundivsqve).25

24 See his Greek Emigres in the West, Camberley: Porphyrogenitus, 1995, and his article
"Common Language and the Common Good: Aspects of Identity among Byzantine
Emitters in Renaissance Italy", in Sally McKee (ed.), Crossing Boundaries: Issues of Cultural
and Individual Identity in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Turnhout: Brepols, 1999,
pp. 189-202, for a number of such cases.
25 Theodoros N. Zais, Γενάδης Β Σχολάργος, Βίος – συγγράμματα – διδασκαλία

http://epublishing.ekt.gr | e-Publisher: EKT | Downloaded at 25/07/2020 19:56:51 |
The view from the Greek East, however, must have been much less sanguine. Most Orthodox, and especially the non-educated, would have found it very difficult to accept that a Latin, irrespective of his language, could also be a Greek, one of “us”: the Orthodox peasantry of the Ottoman-ruled Greek lands went as far as to deny that a Westerner could ever be a Christian. They were “Latics” and “Franks”, generic terms of Byzantine origin that denoted the largely undifferentiated Catholic multitudes of the West, but they were not “Christians”. These attitudes also enjoyed a long lease of life, and even crossed the boundaries of language. In 1827 an educated Greek, dressed *ala Franga* (like the Franks), visited a house on the island of Poros and crossed himself the way the Orthodox do. When the Albanian-speaking housewife inquired in broken Greek if he was a Christian, our well-dressed man answered in the affirmative. The woman was thunderstruck and ran to the door to summon everybody in to see for themselves the extraordinary sight of a “Frank” who crosses himself the way only “Christians” can do. Clearly, for the Albanian-speaking housewife even a native Greek-speaker was not necessarily (an Orthodox) Christian. He had to look and dress like “us” as well.

In fact, “Orthodoxy-as-Greekness” was not a matter of choice that could be solved by a declaration of faith. Orthodoxy, as identity, was even inscribed in one’s body, and could be proved objectively: at the beginning of the twentieth century a Greek captain (a Cretan) was leading a band of men in Ottoman Macedonia in pursuit of Bulgarian bandsmen, and, perhaps, the stray Turk that might have crossed his way. He suddenly encountered a Greek-speaker, who frantically started crossing himself and begged the captain to accept that he was a fellow Christian. But the Cretan needed harder proof of his religion, apparently because in Macedonia there were also Greek-speaking Muslims, the valaades. The unfortunate man was asked to reveal his anatomy: he was uncircumcised, and therefore not a Muslim. His religion had been proven beyond doubt, his identity and commonality with the Cretan chieftain had been established, and his life was thus spared.

---

26 Elli Skopetea, *Τύπος χώρας και Μεγάλη Ιδέα* [The “Model Kingdom” and the Great Idea], Athens: Polytypo, 1988, p. 120.
27 Angelos Chotzidis (ed.), *Εθνικός Κανόνας: Ένας Κρητικός αγωνιστής για τη...*
That Catholicism (not to mention Islam28) was incompatible with "being Greek" remained an important issue that briefly flared up during the Greek War of Independence of 1821. At that time, the Greek revolutionary leaders of mainland Greece faced an awkward problem: a good number of the small Catholic population of some Aegean islands, although Greek-speaking, refused to participate in the revolt against the Ottomans. For them Catholicism was much more important than the calling of nationalism or language, and consequently they preferred the relative tolerance of their religion under the Ottoman Empire than their inclusion into an Orthodox state which might have been less inclined to respect it.29 Interestingly, this produced a mixed reaction on the part of the Orthodox Greeks: for the Orthodox of the islands, the Catholic refusal reinforced their belief that they were not Greeks at all, and a bishop had no qualms in calling them "Turk worshipers". His views probably reflected a wider trend among his co-religionists in mainland Greece: lack of Orthodoxy leads to lack of "Greekness" as well. For the Westernising elite of the Greek Revolution, however, their stance was rather baffling. It became even more so when the islanders declined to pay taxes to the emerging state. In 1823, the interior minister sent them a letter stressing that they too were considered Greeks: "Only barbaric nations [...] place religion above nationality [...]." It is revealing that the author of that letter was probably not the minister himself, but George Glarakis, a graduate of Göttingen University.30 Indeed, if the Germans did not discriminate between their Catholic and Protestant kinsmen, why should modern Greece be any different? If the German brand of nationalism emphasised the unifying bond of language and relegated the divisive issue of religion to a secondary position, why should Greece not follow suit? The main reason accounting for this

28 This perception cuts both ways. If the term "Muslim Greek" is incomprehensible, then, as Lewis has observed, "Christian Turk" is equally so: "[it] is an absurdity and a contradiction in terms". B. Lewis, The Emergence of Modern Turkey, p. 15.


discrepancy was that Glarakis and the Catholic islanders were facing in opposite directions: he was a man of the future, a future that would see Greece emerging as a modern state with a modern nationalist ideology; not so the islanders, who remained wedded to pre-modern forms of belonging, and felt unable to establish a commonality with their Orthodox brethren. In the 1820s, the future that animated Glarakis was just arriving, and the chilling wind of modernisation, as shall be seen, had not yet touched the majority of the Greeks, Catholic and Orthodox alike.

The prominent role of Orthodoxy in the collective identity of the Greek-speakers of the East was cemented under Ottoman rule, due to the administrative practices of the Ottomans. Just as their rulers had Islam as the main component of their identity and made no reference to a “Turkish” or other ethnicity, the Orthodox Christian subjects of the Empire were also united by religion. Such a focus of loyalty was facilitated by the organisation of the Ottoman Empire along religious lines, the so-called millet system, a system which emerged gradually and was crystallised in the eighteenth century.31 Each religious group inhabiting the Empire was a more or less self-governing unit, a millet, under the spiritual and to some extent temporal jurisdiction of its religious leader.32 Within this framework, the Orthodox millet included all Orthodox ethnic groups.33 Called Rum millet (meaning actually the “Roman” millet, and revealing yet another instance of the survival of the word “Roman”), it was placed under the leadership of the Patriarch of Constantinople, who was

31 This point needs to be emphasised, as many historians tend to date the millet system as early as the 15th century. For Ottoman terms of their Christian subjects and the use of the term millet, see Paraskevas Konortas, “From Ta’ife to Millet: Ottoman Terms for the Ottoman Greek Orthodox Community”, in Charles Issawi and Dimitri Gondicas (eds), Ottoman Greeks in the Age of Nationalism: Politics, Economy, and Society in the Nineteenth Century, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1999, pp. 169-179.


33 The use of the term “ethnic” in this paper does not mean to imply that these groups are “primordial” entities that exist unchanged from time immemorial. Cf. the definition that Anthony Smith gives to “ethnic categories”: “human populations whom at least some outsiders consider to constitute a separate cultural and historical grouping”. Anthony Smith, National Identity, London: Penguin Books, 1991, pp. 20-21.
The religious head of the Orthodox Christians of the Ottoman Empire. Such an arrangement had profound repercussions for the non-Greek Balkan Orthodox peoples, especially during the nineteenth century. After the abolition of the Slavonic Sees, Bulgarians and Serbs, together with Romanians and Christian Albanians, were brought directly under the leadership of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The language of the liturgy, especially in the Bulgarian lands to the south of the Balkan Mountains and in Macedonia, was then mainly (although not exclusively) Greek, and Greek was the *lingua franca* of high culture and commerce; so much so that many educated Vlachs and Bulgarians referred to themselves in the nineteenth century as "Greeks".

The collective identity that the Patriarchate nourished has been a matter of intense debate. Greek cultural and religious "domination" led many to accuse the Patriarchate of being essentially an agent of denationalisation of the Slavs. But this view is coloured by a nineteenth-century nationalist context, and projects into the past current perceptions and ideas. The issue of "denationalisation" was a non-issue for the Church during the period of Ottoman rule. What the Patriarchate of Constantinople promoted was not a "national" Greek project, for such a thing did not exist. Most Greek-speakers in that period continued to refer to themselves, as we have seen, as "Christians" or "Romans" and had no conception of a "Greek" nation. As for the Patriarchate, what it promoted was the concept of the community of believers, the "Christian Commonwealth", which was shared to varying degrees by all Balkan peoples, and made no reference to ethnic or national identification. That said, the unity imposed in the Balkans by religion should not be confused

34 Both the Serbian Patriarchate of Peć (Ipek) and the nominally "Bulgarian" Archdiocesan of Ochrid were abolished during the eighteenth century, in 1766 and 1767 respectively.

35 The continuation of the Byzantine world view has been perceptive called by the Romanian scholar Nicolae Iorga, "Byzance après Byzance": N. Iorga, Byzance après Byzance. Continuation de l'histoire et de la vie byzantine, Bucharest: Institut d'Études Byzantines, 1935. The concept of a "Byzantine Commonwealth", a community of believers cutting across linguistic and ethnic boundaries and united by Byzantine traditions and Orthodoxy was first elaborated by Dimitri Obolensky in his masterly The Byzantine Commonwealth, London: Phoenix, 1971. For the functioning of this community under Ottoman rule and the role of the Patriarchate of Constantinople as its guardian, the work of Pachalis Kitromilides is a subtle and highly sensitive guide: see his collection of studies Enlightenment, Nationalism and Orthodoxy: Studies in the Culture and Political Thought of South-eastern Europe, Aldershot: Variorum, 1994. See also his "Balkan Mentality: History, Legend, Imagination", Nations and Nationalism 11, no. 2 (1996), pp. 163-191.
with uniformity. Customs, regional fragmentation, the social organisation of households, language and divisions of labour, to name but a few factors, all pointed to obvious divisions within the Balkan Christian body, and even among the speakers of the same language. However, these cleavages did not have “national” content until well into the nineteenth century.

The division of labour is a case in point. As Greeks dominated Balkan commerce in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Romanian and Slav peasant resentment against Greek merchants began to build up, and accusations were fired off, for “The Greek is a pernicious disease which penetrates to the bone.”36 Such criticisms have often been interpreted as manifestations of “national” grievances, directed against the dominant Greek presence. But it remains doubtful whether those reactions amounted to anything more than peasant hostility to the emergence of a moneyed economy, represented by Greek-speaking (and, as shall be seen below, not necessarily ethnic Greek) financial activities. For the peasants, religion remained the only form of collective identity they could make sense of. Ethnic descent played little, if any, role in their loyalties. As Kitromilides has shown, peasant geography was a religious geography, punctuated by holy relics, monasteries and the routes of pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In the eighteenth century, for a Greek in, say, Thessaloniki, Jerusalem was in a sense a much closer land than Athens. Ethnic boundaries had little meaning, and of course there were no national frontiers. Their calendar was not determined by a secular concept of time but by saints’ festivals and agricultural work. It was a Christian and a peasant calendar.37 This tradition of identification with religion was not, as has already been noted, something new, but a residual strength of the Christian identity fostered by the Byzantine Commonwealth. Further, appellations, such as “Greek” or “Bulgarian”, tended to reflect the division of labour, rather than “race”, “ethnicity” or language. In broad terms, every transhumant shepherd was thought to be a “Vlach”,38 just as merchants were invariably called, or perceived as, “Greeks”, and peasants were

36 For such accusations see L. S. Stavrianos, The Balkans since 1453, Hinsdale: Dryde
Press, 1958, p. 224.
37 For this “Geography of Faith”, see Paschalis Kitromilides, Νεοελληνικός Δημοκρατισμός: Οι πολιτικές και κοινωνικές ιδέες [Neohellenic Enlightenment: the political and social ideas], Athens: MIET, 1996, pp. 126-127.
“Bulgarians”. Such use of ethnic terms, it should be noted, was employed as much within the Balkans as outside the region. From the fifteenth century and well into the nineteenth, Western observers, both priestly and lay, considered the Balkans to be a “Greek” peninsula, inhabited by “Greeks”, if not exclusively at least predominantly, due to the prominence of Orthodoxy and the Greek language, and because most merchants and bishops they encountered were either Greek-speakers or Hellenised Slavs.39

The issue of the Greek language is also revealing in this context, for it affords much insight into how the Patriarchate perceived the function of the Greek language, and into the identity it promoted during the period of Ottoman rule. The imposition of the use of Greek in the liturgy in a large part of the Balkans during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has been presented as an important “national” divide between Slavs and Greeks, as many Slavs had now to listen to a liturgy which was in a language “alien” to them. Such a move, however, no matter how bitterly it was resented by the Slavs, was not aimed at their “denationalisation”. The two liturgical languages of Balkan Christianity, Hellenistic Greek and Old Church Slavonic, were just that: Christian languages, appropriate vehicles for the dissemination of the word of God, sanctioned by tradition. Neither the Patriarchate of Constantinople, nor that of the Serbs, perceived them as “national” tongues that should be addressed to, or even understood by, modern “Greeks”, “Serbs” or “Bulgarians”. This is highlighted by the fact that, although both scriptural languages were almost unintelligible to the uneducated Greek and Slav peasants, the Patriarchate and the Serbian Church stubbornly refused to translate them into their respective vernaculars.40 The audience of the scriptures was the Christian flock, not the modern “nation”.

39 Habsburg authorities in Transylvania, for example, tended to call all members of Orthodox merchant companies “Greeks”. Significantly, these companies included not only Slavs, Romanians and Christian Albanians, but also a sprinkle of Armenians and Jews. See Richard Clogg, “The Greek Merchant Companies in Transylvania”, in Heinz-Dietrich Lowe, Stefan Troebst and Gunther H. Tönnies (eds), Minderheiten, Regionalbewusstsein und Zentralismus in Osmitteneuropa, Cologne, Weimar and Vienna: Böhlau, 2000, p. 163; Western travellers in Macedonia, such as Pouqueville, quickly realised that the term “Bulgarian” was used locally to describe poor Slav peasants. See Douglas Dakin, The Greek Struggle in Macedonia, Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1966, p. 11.

It is interesting to add here that even in the mid-nineteenth century when the Patriarchate of Constantinople started to use some modern-sounding terms to denote its flock, their content remained very traditional. One example will suffice to illustrate this point. In two synodical letters (in 1836 and 1839), Patriarch Gregory VI fiercely and unreservedly condemned the translations of the Bible into modern Greek, Turkish, Arabic and Slavonic that were printed by missionaries. It is the rhetoric of this reaction that is of interest here, for it raises a number of points about the role of the Greek language as understood by the Patriarchate in the mid-nineteenth century. The first attack was fired off in 1836, in a synodical letter against the heterodox teachings and the activities of the missionaries.41 In this letter, the Patriarch attacked “foreigners, men who speak another language and are of another religion” [Εννοια, άλλοι άνθρω- 
ποί και άλλη γλώσσα και άλλο θρησκεύμα]. These men “contaminate our religion 
and corrupt our nation” [χολίζουσι την θητείαν θρησκείαν και διαρθρώσουν 
το ημέτερον πόλις]. By disseminating their little books (the translations), they 
attack “both religion, and the dialect, and our noble paternal sentiments”. But 
what exactly was this “nation”, and what really was the “dialect” that the 
Patriarch so fervently defended? In a section of this letter, addressed explicitly 
to “all Orthodox peoples” [προς τους απεντακόλ Ορθοδόξες λαοί], he 
becomes even more illuminating. He urged the faithful to defend “the most 
precious things: the salvation of our souls, the preservation of the religion of 
our holy fathers” and “our national character” [τον εθνικόν μας χαρακτήρα]. 
He even prompts them to guard “ourselves and our children inside our 
fatherland and nation”. A number of issues emerge here: this was written in 
1836, at a time when a Greek state had been established, as well as a de facto 
independent Serbia, whereas the Patriarch now found himself in the Ottoman 
Empire. But where is his true fatherland [πατρίδα] and further, given that he 
explicitly addressed all Orthodox and not only the Greeks, who belongs to his 
“nation” [πόλις] and what exactly did he mean by “national character”? 

It appears that Gregory, despite his modern terminology, still perceived the 
Orthodox in a very Ottoman fashion, as a millet, a pre-modern and pre- 
national community which is united in faith, although obviously divided by 
the spoken vernaculars. Similarly, the Greek language of the scriptures belongs 
equally to all Orthodox, and is not perceived as the “national” language of the

41 The text is in Manouil Gedeon, Κανονικαὶ κατάξεις, επιστολαί, διάταξις, διαπειρά- 
τα των Ἀγίων τῶν Πατριάρχων Κωνσταντινοπολίων [Canonical regulations, letters, 
statutes of the Most Holy Patriarchs of Constantinople], Constantinople: Patriarchikon 
The Quest for Hellenism

Greeks, but the (almost sacred) language of the faithful. Within this context, the "nation" of the Patriarch can only be Orthodoxy, and his "fatherland" the lands of the Orthodox. As for his "national character", this can only include the traditions and teaching of the true faith. Arguably, Gregory had not moved much from the position taken by Scholarios four centuries earlier. Reference has already been made to the work of Angelou, who plausibly concluded that the use of "Hellenic" by Scholarios was just another name for the Christian oecumene. It is that concept that we can find behind Gregory's exhortations to defend our "nation".

This community of Christians, however, whose custodian remained the Patriarchate, had a name: Genos [Γένος, plural: Γένη], a word that linguistically carries connotations of lineage through blood and ancestry, and remains notoriously untranslatable. It started life in the Byzantine Empire as γένος των Ρωμαίων [of the Romans], or γένος των Χριστιανών [of the Christians], but in many instances remained unaccompanied by adjectives and other appellations. It is the one single word that was used throughout the period of Ottoman rule by the Greek-speaking Christians to denote the wider community they thought they belonged to, but it was not employed only by them: in 1768 a religious book was published in Bucharest for the benefit of the Karamanli (Orthodox, but Turkish-speaking) community of Asia Minor. It was printed in Greek using Turkish characters, but also had a page in Greek. That page referred to the "Orthodox Genos of the Romans" [Ο ὁρθός γένος των Ρωμαίων]. It is clear that the meaning of genos was primarily religious: it denoted the Orthodox Christians, and it was frequently qualified as the genos "of the Romans" or "of the Christians". But it had many nuances and its meaning varied according to its user. In November 1700 Patriarch Kallinikos wrote a letter to the Wallachian ruler Constantin Brâncoveanu, praising him for publishing in his printing press many books that benefited "our unfortunate genos" [του δυστυχούσι γένος ήμας]. Obviously, being Orthodox Christians, the Wallachian ruler and the Greek Patriarch belonged to the same genos. Almost a century earlier, however, Metropolitan Matthew of Myra, sensing hostility between the Wallachians and the "Romans" [Greeks], urged

---

42 Both "race" and "nation" have been used, but are equally inadequate as they reflect different concepts and refer to different collective identities. For the term and its uses see Dimaras, Λακωνισμός, pp. 80-82, and Koliopoulos, Η "πέραν" Ελλάς, pp. 67-70.
43 Clogg in Neoellenism, p. 78.
44 The letter was published by Manouil Gedeon in the Patriarchal journal Εκκλησιαστική Εφημερίς, 31-12-1899, pp. 521-523.
the former to honour the Greeks, the reason being that the “Romans” were “a blessed and most Orthodox genos" [γένος ευλογημένον, γένος Ορθοδόξα-της];\(^{45}\) for the Metropolitan, Wallachians and “Romans” were distinct γένος, although both were Christians. Scholarios also made a distinction between Orthodox Christians, when he referred to other Orthodox γένος, like the Russians.\(^{46}\)

As always with such terms, context is all, and it would be unrewarding to search for consistency, for in many cases much depends on who is referring to whom, and when. But it seems that whenever patriarchs or higher religious authorities mentioned that term they actually meant the Orthodox of the Ottoman Empire, those, that is, that were within the spiritual (but not necessarily administrative) jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.\(^{47}\) The Russians were clearly another genos, which in some cases also enjoyed the distinction of being “most Orthodox”. What appears to be certain is that ethnicity and language did not play a role in the definition of the genos. Christian Arabs, for example, were not considered members of a different genos. Athanasios, a former Patriarch of Antioch and himself an ethnic Arab, spoke of his kinsmen in 1701 simply as “Christian Arabs” [Οι Χριστιανοί των Λαρισών] without feeling the need to group them in a separate genos.\(^{48}\) Vlachs and Bulgarians (whose educated classes were highly Hellenised) also did not have “their own” genos, and the same applied to the Christian but Albanian-speakers (the Arvanites) of the Peloponnese, Attica, Hydra and Spetses. It was this multi-ethnic and polyglot community that, together with the Orthodox Greek-speakers, comprised the community of the Patriarchate's flock, the genos. It is evident, then, that genos not only coincided with the Rum millet, given that the limits of both entities overlapped, but it was also used as a literal translation of the term millet into Greek.\(^{49}\) In fact, it is in the Islamic realm, where religion determined identity as much as in the Greek case, that we have to turn, if we are to find suitable terms to convey some of the nuances of genos.

---


\(^{46}\) Angelou, “Who am I?”, 15 for references to the γένος of the Πάπα and Θεός.

\(^{47}\) It is occasionally overlooked that the Orthodox Ottoman community was administratively divided into four Patriarchates, and friction among them over issues of jurisdiction was not unknown.


\(^{49}\) In the Karamanli essay referred to in notes 21 and 43 above, the phrase “most Orthodox genos of the Romans” is rendered in Turkish as “Ortodoks milletin".
as it was understood during the Turkokratia. Apart from the millet, we encounter two other terms: the Ottoman ümmet-i Muhammed, and the Arabic Umma. These terms denoted the Muslim community irrespective of linguistic or ethnic frontiers, and remained the main linguistic expression of the wider inclusive collectivity to which Ottomans and Arabs considered they belonged.\(^{50}\)

Once again, Christianity and Islam, by promoting analogous forms of belonging, produced similar linguistic results. Significantly, with the coming of nationalism millet and genos will gradually cease to have the broad and religious connotations of the previous periods, and the impulse to translate both as “nation” in the modern sense of the word will correspondingly increase. In the Greek case, this happened in the course of the nineteenth century.\(^{51}\)

III. Metternich’s Questions in Search of an Answer

What has been described so far is a religious body under the Ottoman Empire, which, although it advanced in age, showed no perceptible signs of change. This is not meant to imply that the community of Orthodox Christendom, the genos, and together with it the Greek-speakers were an immutable and unchanging entity. In terms of identity, however, a substantial fraction of them (mainly the uneducated peasantry) did not seem to show much sign of change for at least a millennium. But forces were already at work to destroy the unity of the millet, to shatter its unity, and eventually to create a Greek, a Bulgarian or a Serb out of a Christian. Since the early nineteenth century, Western ideas of belonging, and an awareness of a distinctive “national” (and, of course, glorious) past, started to penetrate the Balkans. This penetration of nationalist ideas started from outside, and from the fringes of the area, where connections with the West (mainly with France, Austria, Germany and Italy) were easier; from Western-educated Greek intellectuals, living mostly abroad; from the schools financed by a flourishing mercantile Greek bourgeoisie, in which not

---


\(^{51}\) The Turks had to wait much longer, and the transition from millet to nation was even more complicated. Even in the early proclamations of Turkish nationalists in the 1920s, including Kemal’s, the meaning of millet was unclear, as religious content alternated with a more secular one. See Erik Jan Zürcher, “The Vocabulary of Muslim Nationalism”, International Journal of the Sociology of Science 137 (1999), pp. 81-92.
only Greeks but also Hellenised Slavs started discovering their "own" past; from the community of Bulgarian traders in Constantinople; from Serbs who lived and worked in the Habsburg Empire; and from Romanians living in Transylvania. At about the same time the new revolutionary political ideas of the French Revolution started reaching the region. The impact of these ideas in the Balkans was uneven, and few were able to come into direct contact with them. But those who did were keen to sow the seeds of revolution against the ailing Ottoman Empire.52

The guardian of the genos, the Patriarchate of Constantinople, predictably, resisted the "new ideas" of revolution and nationalism, which threatened the Ottoman Empire, the "purity" of the Orthodox doctrine, and, with it, the unity of the Christian flock.53 Patriarch Gregory V anathematised the Greek revolt of 1821, but it was soon realised that the Patriarchate was fighting a losing battle. The new ideas were there to stay. There is also some evidence to suggest that even within the circles surrounding the Patriarchate ideas that approximated nationalism were not unknown during that period, but the pre-national tradition of the millet remained very strong and kept them at bay. The case of Patriarch Chrysanthos I offers an interesting illustration of this point. Chrysanthos was Metropolitan of Serres and was apparently thought of as "Bulgarian". When his name was put forward for the patriarchy in July 1822, Jeremiah, the Metropolitan of Derkon and a Greek from the island of Kalymnos, strongly protested: "There is no shortage of Greeks [Γενναίοι Έλληνες]," he argued, "Why should the Bulgarian become Patriarch?" Jeremiah was successful


in 1822 and Chrysanthos lost, but two years later, in 1824, Chrysanthos the
"Bulgarian" was duly elected Patriarch, and Jeremiah was forced to take the
road of exile to Jerusalem.\(^{54}\) Clearly his anti-Bulgarian ideas enjoyed some
currency: when Stefanos Vogoridis, a Hellenised ethnic Bulgarian, raised his
voice against a Greek at a meeting of laymen and clergy for the election of
another patriarch in 1853, his Greek interlocutor exploded: "enough is enough;
are we supposed to listen to you, you bloody Bulgarian?" [φθέγξε τελεων. Ἐπέκει
θ’κομπε, παλαγδοῦκτε [sic]].\(^{55}\) Despite these outbursts, however, the
Patriarchate itself would remain the last bastion of the inclusive identity of the
genos for years to come. Elsewhere though, developments would move much
more swiftly.

The modern Greek Enlightenment (spanning roughly the late eighteenth
and early nineteenth centuries) and the Greek Revolution of 1821 ushered in a
new phase concerning the crucial issue of who is, or should be, Greek.\(^{56}\) It was
this period that saw the first sightings of nationalism in the modern sense of the
word: both as a political programme (aiming at the establishment of a nation-
state) and as an ideology (commonality based on a "Hellenic", pre-Byzantine,
lineage and Greek language). It also witnessed the resurfacing of terms (like
"Hellenes") that had been buried, although never entirely forgotten, under a
thick layer of Christianity during the period of Ottoman rule, as well as the
emergence of a hitherto unknown quantity: the nation [έθνος], to denote the
new collective identity of the Greeks.\(^{57}\)

National motivation was one of the forces that emerged during that period,
assisted by a growing awareness, mainly among a small but highly influential
Westernised elite, about the classical past and the glory of ancient "Hellas", the

\(^{54}\) Manouil Gedeon, Ἡγγαρια Πατριαρχικά πέρι του βουλγαρικού ζητήματος (Patriarchal
documents on the Bulgarian question), Constantinople: Patriarchikon Typographion, 1908,
pp. 36–7. It should be added here that during the nineteenth century there had been three
patriarchs that were considered "Bulgarians": Evgenios II, his successor Chrysanthos I and
Agathagellos I. For the word  Гερμασι see below.

\(^{55}\) Gedeon, Ἡγγαρια, p. 71.

\(^{56}\) For the Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment see Dimaras, Διαφοροθυμία, G. P. Henderson,
The Revival of Greek Thought, 1620–1830, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1971, and
Kitromilides, Διαφοροθυμία.

\(^{57}\) According to Veloudis, the first "systematic use" of the word  έθνος (nation) in the
modern sense of the word occurred in 1839, when Georgios Kozakis-Typaldos published his
Philosophic Essay on the Progress and Fall of Old Greece. See his O Jakob Philipp
Fallnerayer και η γένεση του ελληνικού ιστορισμού (Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer and the
discovery of which was one of the most important preoccupations of the Greek Enlightenment. For this discovery of the classical past see Richard Clogg, "Sense of the Past in Pre-Independence Greece", reprinted in Anatolica, Study XI.

That notwithstanding, the Greek Revolution was in an important sense a war of Orthodox Christians against the oppression of a Muslim overlord vested with nationalist rhetoric. The Greek Catholics, as we have seen, refused to participate, but the Orthodox and Albanian-speaking islanders of Hydra and Spetses did, whereas the Balkan Slavs (Bulgarians but also Serbs) did not remain idle too. After all, the call to arms was directed towards all Orthodox Christians of the peninsula: “Fight for Faith and Motherland! The time has come, O Hellenes...”, read Alexander Ypsilantis’ revolutionary proclamation of 1821. “Our brethren and friends are everywhere ready. The Serbs, the Souliots and the whole of Epirus...” Although the terminology used in the proclamations was full of references to “Hellenes” and to “our motherland Hellas”, it was the reality of the genos and the bond of religion that most of the protagonists of the revolt (and certainly their followers) could make sense of, given that the meaning of “Hellen” and “fatherland” was not the same for those who did the talking and those who did the listening.

“Fatherland” [πατρίς] at the time meant one’s village, or island, a reality that forced the Philiki Etaireia, the revolutionary society that inspired the revolt, to use expressions such as “the general fatherland” [γενική πατρίς] or “our own fatherland” [ηδειακή μας πατρίς] to clarify things. The sense of a wider, common “fatherland” continued to be elusive throughout the revolutionary period as regional loyalties prevailed, and frustrated the efforts to create central institutions covering the insurgents’ domain. The deep divisions between Moreots, Roumeliots and Islanders, which were further subdivided into even more localised struggles for control, demonstrated both the strength

---

58 For this discovery of the classical past see Richard Clogg, "Sense of the Past in Pre-Independence Greece", reprinted in Anatolica, Study XI.
59 For the participation of Slavs in the Greek Revolution see N. Todorov, "La participation des Bulgares a l’insurrection hetairiste dans les principautes danubiennes", reprinted in id.: Society, the City and Industry in the Balkans, Fifteenth-Nineteenth Centuries, Aldershot: Variorum, 1998, Study XIV.
of regionalism within the context of a traditional society, and the inability of the newly emerging idea of nationalism to provide a viable alternative. Again, the continuity with the late Byzantine world appears to be striking. In discussing the issue of fifteenth-century Byzantine identity, Anthony Bryer concluded that family and place of origin were at its centre.63 In the mid-nineteenth century things were hardly different: the important families of the Mani region in the Peloponnese, for example, decided to join the revolt only when their dominant position in their own region, the only fatherland that mattered to them, had been assured.64

If "fatherland" had many meanings in the 1820s, so did the word "Hellenes". During the period of the Greek Revolution the meaning of the term was unclear, as both language and religion were employed as criteria for denoting the "Greek". According to the first Greek revolutionary constitution voted in 1822, all Christians shared this appellation, for it was stipulated that "Greeks" were those who believe in Christ, and were born within the insurgents' domains. The second national assembly, in addition to religion, inserted also the criterion of language, stating that Greeks are also those who have the Greek language as their native tongue and believe in Christ. It is indicative of the relative strength of religion over language, however, that the third and last Greek national assembly, convened at Trezen in 1827, deleted the reference to the Greek language, and argued that Greeks are simply those born in the country who believe in Christ, as well as those who came to Greece from Ottoman-occupied lands and believe in Christ and wish either to fight with the insurgents or live in Greece.65 Such formulations were not a novelty. When the radical thinker and revolutionary Rhigas Velestinlis drafted his "New Political Constitution" in 1797, envisaging a republic which would include most of the Balkans, he included in his "class of citizens" all Christians irrespective of their knowledge of Greek, provided that they helped "Greece".66

62 Diamandouros, Οι απαρχές, passim.
64 Frangos, "Philiki Etaireia", p. 98.
66 "He who is a Christian and does not speak colloquial or ancient Greek, but only assists Greece, is a citizen." Rhigas Velestinlis, "The New Political Constitution of the Inhabitants of Rumeli, Asia Minor, the Archipelago, Moldavia and Wallachia", Article 4:
For Rhigas, Greek language was important in his definition of the “Citizen”, and all Greek-speakers were considered “citizens” irrespective of their religion. But, ultimately, the bond of religion was too strong to be left out. At any rate, it was not possible for language to be used as an exclusive criterion of ethnicity in the 1820s, for it would have excluded substantial Albanian-speaking populations. It seems, however, that these views were not only based on political expediency; they reflected the strength of religion and the inability of even highly educated Greeks to separate the Balkan ethnic groups on the basis of language: in 1824, the Phanariot Theodore Negris compiled a catalogue of “Greeks” which included not only the “Serbian”, the “Bulgarian”, and the “Thracian”, but also the “Antiochene”, the “Syrian”, and the “Bithynian” as well.67

It should be added here that, although these constitutional documents referred to “Hellenes”, very few Greeks beyond a segment of intellectuals would have used that term to describe themselves. Most would continue to use “Roman” or “Christian”, although the more educated would also opt for “Graikos”, a term which has also had a long pedigree.68 Writing in 1768 Evgenios Voulgaris argued that “Graikos” is preferable both to “Roman” and “Hellene”, for the former signified the ancient Romans, while “Hellene” still had associations with “paganism”. All nations of Europe,” he added, “do not identify our genos with another name.” Some forty years later, Adamantios Korais, the father of the Greek Enlightenment, agreed with Voulgaris on the usefulness of “Graikos” as a term used “by all enlightened nations of Europe”. But in his time (and in his circle) the term “Hellene” had been purified from its traces of, and allusions to, “paganism”, and therefore, according to Korais, “Hellene” could also be used as a legitimate appellation by the Greeks together with “Graikos”. The case of

---

66 Concerning the Class of Citizens”, translated by Richard Clogg in Richard Clogg (ed.), The Movement for Greek Independence, 1770-1821, p. 158.  
67 As cited in E. Skopetea, “Ποιοι Ελληνες” p. 25.  
69 Dimaras, Διαστρατηγικά, pp. 84-86. Cf. Koliopoulos, H “τέχνη” Ελλάς, pp. 72-75. The use of “Graikos” came under strong attack, for it was considered by many a European influence on the Greek nomenclature (from the latin word Graecus) that had to be resisted.
Kosmas Aitolos (1714-1779) offers a revealing glimpse into the use of “Hellene” in the eighteenth century, before its rehabilitation by Korais and the other Enlightenment intellectuals. Kosmas, “the Teacher of the genos” as he is habitually called, insisted that his listeners (many of them Albanian-speaking) were not “Hellenes”: “You are not Hellenes [Ελλήνες],” he kept telling them during his teachings. “You are not unbelievers, heretics, atheists, but you are pious Orthodox Christians.” At the same time, however, he urged them “to teach your children to learn Greek [Ελληνικά], for our Church uses the Hellenic language and our genos is ‘Hellenic’ [Ελληνικός].” The semantic difference between the ancient “Hellenes” and their language is thus quite clear: their language should be used, and could be called by that name, but their pagan beliefs meant that their name as a collective appellation was clearly inappropriate. Consequently, Kosmas’ genos (which obviously included both Greek- and Albanian-speaking Christians) was the traditional “genos of the Christians”, and the use of the Greek language was allowed only because it was sanctioned by Christianity, and perceived as a Christian language; a belief, as we have seen, that the Patriarchate of Constantinople firmly promoted. It appears, however, that there was another, although much less widespread, use of the term “Hellene” among the Greek peasantry during the Turkokratia: the “Hellene” became in their eyes a mythological superhuman, a hero with tremendous power and endurance, capable of performing astonishing feats.

This view continues to hold to this day, especially among Orthodox scholars who attacked the European orientation of Korais and the Enlightenment. Cf., for example, the attitude of Christos Giannaras, a prominent “Neo-Orthodox” theologian who forcefully attacked Korais and his use of “Graikos”, which was nothing more than “a contemptuous linguistic invention of the Westerners” [γενικά λέξης αφαίρεσις από τους Ευρωπαίους]. See Christos Giannaras, Ορθόδοξα και Δύση στη νεότερη Ελλάδα [Orthodoxy and the West in modern Greece], Athens 1996, p. 217. It should be added here, as Peter Mackridge has suggested to me, that the term “Graikos” has been used in most cases to denote the Greek-speaker only. 70 As cited by Alexis Politis, Ρομαντικά χρόνια: Ιδεολογίες και μυθοπλασίες στην Ελλάδα του 1830-1880 [Romantic years: ideologies and mentalities in Greece, 1830-1880], Athens: Mnimon, 1993, p. 33, and Dimaras, Διαφωτισμός, p. 83. The phrase “our genos is Hellenic” obviously contradicts the previous quotation, and merits some comment here. Peter Mackridge has suggested to me that the phrase may be a later fabrication, possibly inserted by Fanis Michalopoulou. But Dimaras, who cites the phrase, does not seem to question it. Mackridge’s suggestion is entirely plausible, for it is clear that the contested citation not only flatly contradicts Kosmas’ other sayings, but also conveniently helps him acquire some “Hellenic” credentials. And, of course, it gives valuable ammunition to some scholars to count Kosmas as yet another “ideological forerunner” of the Greek Revolution of 1821. Further research, however, is needed on this point, as the jury is still out.

---

70 This view continues to hold to this day, especially among Orthodox scholars who attacked the European orientation of Korais and the Enlightenment. Cf., for example, the attitude of Christos Giannaras, a prominent “Neo-Orthodox” theologian who forcefully attacked Korais and his use of “Graikos”, which was nothing more than “a contemptuous linguistic invention of the Westerners” [γενικά λέξης αφαίρεσις από τους Ευρωπαίους]. See Christos Giannaras, Ορθόδοξα και Δύση στη νεότερη Ελλάδα [Orthodoxy and the West in modern Greece], Athens 1996, p. 217. It should be added here, as Peter Mackridge has suggested to me, that the term “Graikos” has been used in most cases to denote the Greek-speaker only.

---
The physical prowess of the “Hellene” was profoundly admired and this admiration left some traces in folk songs, folk tales and legends. It is in the context of “Hellene” as “hero” that we encounter this word in relation to the last Byzantine emperor in a Pontic Greek folk song about the fall of Constantinople: “Πην Ηελεν ηνταν άριζεν 3 άλεν Κεστοντινον”, which should be translated as “when the hero Constantine [Palaiologos] ruled the City [Constantinople].”

If the revolutionary constitutions were prepared to use the inclusive “Christian” to define the Greek, and to downplay the role of language, not everybody agreed. The equation of “Christian” with “Hellene” was coming under increasingly strong attack. For Korais and many intellectuals of the Greek Enlightenment and beyond, and especially for those who were archaising in their literary pursuits, the “Greek” could only be someone who speaks Greek. Religion, although important, was now not enough, for it was language only that could ultimately grant admission to the Greek nation. Prominent among these intellectuals was the Phanariot Panayiotis Kodrikas, who argued that only language can truly distinguish between nations, for it is the surest marker of “national existence” [εθνική ύπαρξις]. In his early works, Paparrigopoulos, Greece’s national historian par excellence, agreed with this narrow definition, and in 1853 he wrote that members of the Greek nation were only those “who speak the Greek language as their native tongue”. In the course of the nineteenth century language became increasingly accepted as a valid criterion of ethnicity, and fought a long and painful war with religion for the coveted position of the main signifier of a “Greek”. That battle had profound ramifications not only for the development of Greek nationalism, but also for the realisation of its most important project: the “Great Idea”.

The inclusion of all “Greeks” within a single state, first formulated by Ioannis Colettis in 1844, gave a new urgency to the need to define the “Greek”. Clearly, the “Great Idea” had Byzantine geographical connotations, as it

---

71 Panayiotis Christou, Ηερπητέες, pp. 126-128. It is worth adding here that “the Hellenes are mentioned more often in the folk material that is in prose – particularly the παραθέσεις – than in the songs”. I would like to thank Peter Mackridge for this point.


included not only the lands where Greek-speakers predominated, but also areas in which they formed isolated enclaves, and were surrounded by other ethnic groups. The preferred territorial boundaries of “Greece” varied widely during the nineteenth century, but many would agree that its “true” borders extended from the Balkan Mountains in the north, to Crete in the south, and from Epirus in the west (including the southern part of what is today Albania) to Asia Minor in the east. Macedonia, a notoriously undefined land with a solid Slav (and mostly Bulgarian-speaking) majority, figured prominently in that context. Up to the middle of the nineteenth century, the Slav neighbours of the Greeks were generally considered to be pious and peaceful Christians, and they were allowed to move freely in and out of the Greek genos and ethnos, according to the eye, or rather the criterion of ethnicity, of the beholder. But from then onwards things deteriorated rapidly: the Fallmerayer affair, which provoked an anti-Slavic hysteria in Greece; the emergence of Bulgarian nationalism and the correspondent increase of communal violence in many parts of Macedonia; the creation of a Bulgarian Church in 1870 independent of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, as well as the turbulence of the Eastern Question with the creation of the short-lived “Greater Bulgaria” of San Stefano in 1878, laid bare the danger that the Bulgarian factor represented for the realisation of the Great Idea. The Greek national and historical imagination was accordingly recast, and embarked on a process that would transform the Bulgarians from harmless peasants and good Christians into blood-thirsty barbarians.\footnote{For this transformation see Dimitris Livanios, "Christians, Heroes and Barbarians: Serbs and Bulgarians in the Modern Greek Historical Imagination (1602-1950)", in D. Tziovas (ed.), Greece and the Balkans: Identities, Perceptions and Cultural Encounters since the Enlightenment, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003, pp. 68-83, and the bibliography cited there.} But the main issue remained open: how many Bulgarian-speakers could be claimed for “Hellas”? How much land could Greek nationalism claim as being legitimately, that is “ethnically”, its own? The dilemma of how to approach the position of the Slavs in relation to the Greek nation became thus quite acute, for if “Greekness” was allowed to be confined to the Greek-speakers only, then “Greece” itself would have to be cut down to its linguistic size and could not make much headway in Macedonia. Consequently, the power of language to determine ethnicity had to be somehow tempered.

A solution to such a problem came through the application to the Slavs of two relatively novel terms: “national descent” [εθνική καταγωγή], and “national sentiment” or, perhaps, “national consciousness” [εθνικός:] the Slavs of Macedonia and beyond were Greeks, not by virtue of their language but because...
of their Greek descent. Predictably, research on their descent proved that south of the Balkan Mountains "there is no Bulgaria." Just as the Turkish-speaking Karamanli peasants of Asia Minor were Greeks by descent who adopted the Turkish tongue but retained their ancestral religion, the Slavs were considered "Slavicised Greeks" or "Slavophone Greeks." As for their "national consciousness" [ζητήματα], this was also Greek, for their continuing adherence to the spiritual leadership of the Patriarchate of Constantinople during its struggle with the Bulgarian Church after 1870 "proved" that they considered themselves members of the "Greek nation." After all, it was argued, if the Alsatians can be both German-speaking and French, why should the Slavs of Macedonia be prevented from doing the same with regard to Greece? The employment of Orthodoxy and national descent, as equally conclusive "proofs" of Hellenic ancestry and consciousness, enabled Greek nationalism to downplay the role of language when needed, and to cast a very wide net: not only the Slav-speakers up to the Balkan Mountains were now "Greeks" by descent or sentiment, but also the Christian Arabs of Syria and Palestine. In 1899, in a development that mirrored the Greek-Bulgarian church struggle, an Arab was elected Patriarch of Antioch, despite the attempt of the Patriarchate of Constantinople to impose a Greek candidate. But was this clash a national struggle between Greeks and Arabs? Not so, declared the archivist of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The Syrian Christians were Greeks by descent, and "the theory that there is a Greek and an Arabic national entity in Syria fighting one another is proven historically to be totally baseless," he wrote in 1904.  

60 Dimitris Livianios

76 N. I. Kokkonis, Ιστορία των Βουλγάρων. Από της εμφάνισής τους εν Ευρώπη μέχρι της υπό των Οθωμανών κατακτήσεως [History of the Bulgarians: from their arrival in Europe until their conquest by the Ottomans], Athens: Typographioin Ch. N. Philadelfios, 1877, pp. 5-15. Cf. the view of Stilpon Kyriakides: "The population of the south and east parts of Bulgaria was in the past bilingual...Racially, these Slavic-speaking populations have nothing in common with the Bulgarians and are of pure Greek origin." 
The Northern Ethnological Boundaries of Hellenism, Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1935, pp. 53-56. See also Koliopoulos, Η "πόλη" Ελλάς [The "City"] pp. 150-156. 
77 Most of the Greek accounts written to justify the Greek claims on Macedonia adopted this line of argument and presented to the European public opinion a solidly "Greek" population of Macedonia, consisting of both the Patriarchist Slavs and the Greek-speakers of the region. See for example V. Colocotronis, Macédoine et l’Hellenisme. Étude historique et ethnologique, Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1919. 
78 Kallinikos Delikanis, Υπόψεια τού Αντιοχενού Ζητήματος [Memorandum on the Antiochene Question], Constantinople: Patriarchikon Typografeion, 1904, p. 50. He
The Greek attempt to claim the Slavs as Greeks by descent was intimately linked, as we have seen, with the Great Idea. This project, however, was of equal importance for the establishment of the descent and historical evolution of the Greek nation itself. The unity in space that the Great Idea required also demanded unity in time.\(^79\) The modern Greek Enlightenment had put the spotlight on the classical past of the Greeks, and had established the continuity between them and their ancient forefathers. But Byzantium remained in a historical and historiographical limbo: the Enlightenment was either suspicious or outright hostile to Byzantine theocracy, the ideas that it represented, and to the Patriarchate that embodied them. But Greek Romanticism in the second half of the nineteenth century came to fill that gap. Spyridon Zampelios and especially Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos established the “unbroken line” of continuity of the Hellenic nation from antiquity to modern times. Now the Byzantine Empire became a “Hellenic Empire”, the vital middle link in the long chain of Hellenism.\(^80\) With Paparrigopoulos’ voluminous History of the Greek Nation (1860-1874) the unfolding of the Greek nation throughout history became firmly outlined, and remains an article of faith for Greek nationalism to this day. Consequently, the Romantic perception of the unbroken continuity of the “Hellenes” from archaic Greece through the Byzantine Empire, together with the Greek language and Orthodox Christianity became the holy trinity which supported the Greek nation. It is this ideology that the modern Greek state promoted through its educational mechanisms, which predictably emphasised the national, and nationalising, role of history.\(^81\)

\(^{79}\) For the importance of “unity” in time and space in Greek Romanticism see Dimaras, Ρωμαντισμός, pp. 419-427, and esp. p. 422.

\(^{80}\) For the role of Byzantium in Greek Romanticism see Dimaras, Ρωμαντισμός, pp. 376-379; for the wider context see David Ricks and Paul Magdalino (eds), Byzantium and the Modern Greek Identity, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998.

Of these elements, however, it was religion that helped most to create the Greek nation. The ethnic groups that came together to form it (the Greek-, Albanian- and Vlach-speakers) had mostly Orthodoxy (and Greek education) in common; only Orthodoxy could provide the connecting bond that ultimately (and through the policies of the nation-state) would forge the Greek nation. We have already seen the problems that the Greek insurgents faced with the case of the Catholics of the Aegean. Arguably, then, the process of Greek nation-building in the nineteenth century would had been seriously challenged if the substantial number of Albanian-speakers, for example, were Catholics instead of Orthodox. The overwhelming preponderance of Orthodoxy made the creation of a Greek nation a much more feasible task. The use of the Greek language was not enough to forge this sense of belonging, for the peasants were sensitive to the commonality based on religion, not language. It was not for nothing that the revolutionary proclamations of 1821 emphasised that the struggle was undertaken “For Faith and Fatherland”: Υπέρ Πίστεως και Νατάριός. If the insurgents did not have a common “Faith” it would had been difficult to envisage a common “Fatherland”.

The historical rehabilitation of Byzantium and its incorporation into Greek national history took place in the wake of the Fallmerayer affair, a controversy over the descent of modern Greeks that provoked a massive reaction on the part of the Greeks. Fallmerayer’s claim in 1830 that massive Slavic invasions of the Byzantine Empire had led to the racial disappearance of the Greek population of the Peloponnese came as a stupendous shock to the newly minted Greek nationalism. His theories attacked many targets: by depicting the Greeks of his day as descendants of Slavs, he not only deprived modern Greeks of their foremost source of pride and equated them with lesser breeds like the Slavs, but removed their European credentials as well. For if they are not the linear descendants of “the Glory that was Greece”, then they had no real place in European civilisation. The entire ideological credo of both the Greeks and European Philhelleneism seemed to be suddenly turning into a castle of mud, swept over by the Slavic tidal wave of the Middle Ages.  

The indignation of the young Paparrigopoulos summed up the prevailing feeling in Greece, when

---

82 For Fallmerayer’s theory as an attack on the European orientation of the Greeks see Michael Herzfeld, Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology and the Making of Modern Greece, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982, pp. 75-76. For the Greek historiographical reaction, which led the young Paparrigopoulos to write his first historical study on the Slavic tribes in the Peloponnese (in 1843), see Veloudis, Fallmerayer, passim. On Paparrigopoulos’ reaction see ibid., pp. 63-80.
he wrote in 1846 that such theories, reiterating that the Greeks were in fact
“Skythians, Slavs, Albanians, children of northern lands” reduced the Greek
nation into a “shapeless mass” [«γνωμόν άχρισσόν», having a “fake life” [επίπλασ-
στον ζωήν].

The Greek rebuttal of Fallmerayer’s theories dramatically opened the whole
issue of the descent of modern Greeks and sparked off a systematic interest not
only in the history of Byzantium, but also in folkloric studies [λαογραφία].

The premises of this new discipline, yet another offspring of the Greek
Romantic movement, were thus quite explicit: to prove that the Greeks of the
nineteenth century were the direct descendants of the ancient Greeks and to
identify elements of such a continuity in the modern Greek folk culture.

Nikolaos Politis, the founding father of modern Greek folklore studies, neatly
formulated these premises when he wrote in 1871 that the main issue at stake
was “to seek the kinship between our own manners and customs and those of
the ancient Hellenes.” The imperative of “continuity” between ancient and
modern Greece held captive Greek folklore studies well into the twentieth
century, as the ghost of Fallmerayer continued to haunt Greek scholars.

Within this framework, the role of modern Greek customs became an issue of
paramount importance in the second half of the nineteenth century, for they

---

83 “...Σκύθες, Σκάλιν, Λίβανοι, πάθες χωριών νυτπροφέλων”. Quotes from his article,
published in Πανόραμα in 1850 as cited by C. Th. Dimaras, Κωνσταντίνος Παπαρριγο-
πούλος: Η εποχή του, η ζωή του, τα έργα του [Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos: his times, his
life, his work], Athens: MIET, 1986, p. 149.

84 As quoted by Herrfeld, Ours Once More, p. 101. See also ibid., pp. 75-96, for Greek
reactions to Fallmerayer, and pp. 97-122 on the role of λαογραφία to provide “proof” of the
continuity between ancient and modern Greeks. For the intellectual climate of this period
see also Alexis Politis, Η ανακάλυψη των ελληνικών θηματικών τραγουδιών [The discovery
of the Greek folksongs], Athens: Themelio, 1984; and Ρωμαντικές χρόνες, pp. 48-60; on the
national preoccupations of Greek folklore studies see also Alki Kyriakidou-Nestoros, Η θεω-
ρία της ελληνικής λαογραφίας. Κριτική ανάλυση [The theory of Greek folklore studies:
critical analysis], Athens: Etaireia Spoudon Neoellinikou Politismou kai Genikis Paideias,
1978.

85 Cf. for example, Stilpon Kyriakides, “The Language and Folk Culture of Modern
Greeks”, originally written in 1943 to refute the propaganda of the wartime German
occupation which “indoctrinated” their soldiers with Fallmerayer’s ideas. The essay
concludes with a reference to the attachment of the Greeks to freedom, from antiquity
through Byzantium to modern times. “This, more than anything else,” he notes, “shows the
purity of the blood in their [i.e. the Greeks’] veins.” See Stilpon P. Kyriakides, Two Studies
were treated primarily as "survivals" of ancient Greece, offering "living proof" of the unbroken line that connected the "ancients" with the "moderns".86

Within that Romantic context the one remaining discontinuity was remedied, and an important gulf was bridged: that separating Hellenism (as a term, and as a concept) with Christianity. In the fifteenth century Scholarios burned Pletho’s book and condemned Hellenism, by which he meant paganism. In his time there was still legislation that made it an offence for a Christian to "Hellenise", that is to perform pagan rituals.87 In the eighteenth century the term "Hellene" and its derivatives (like the word Ελληνική) retained, as we have seen, some pagan connotations, although it also came to denote in a literary context the use of archaising language. So the gulf separating the idea of "Hellenism" from Christianity was still quite wide. The anti-Byzantine and antiquity-oriented Greek Enlightenment was unable to link the two, but Greek Romanticism, which reinvented Byzantium as a Hellenic Empire, was. In 1852 one of its prime advocates, Spyridon Zampelios, forged the word "Helleno-Christian" [Ελληνοκρηστικός], thus uniting for the first time two terms that until his time were considered mutually exclusive.88 Greek nationalism, as a project of defining the Greek and his past, was now complete. "Hellenism" was decontaminated from paganism, and was fused with Christianity to produce what was considered to be the essence of modern Greek national identity.

IV. Shattering the Common Bonds: Violence and Nationalism

Inevitably, all these important developments affected mainly the intellectuals. It was relatively easy for an educated and Westernised élite to perceive themselves as “Hellenes” and to identify with a “past” that was only “theirs”. But the peasants found the same question difficult to grasp. However, with the descent of nationalism to the Balkans and the establishment of nation-states, the relation between religion and nationalism was placed on a completely different footing. What followed was the nationalisation of religion, the attempt of the nation-states to harness Christianity to the particular national movement, be it Greek, Serbian or (much later) Bulgarian. That process was marked by (unilateral or "canonical") declarations of independence of the Churches of Greece (1833), Romania (1865) and Serbia (1879) from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. It was thought inconceivable that

86 For the "survivalist" approach of the Greek folklorists, see Kyriakidou-Nestoros, H θεωρία, p. 103, pp. 108-109.
87 C. M. Woodhouse, in Neohellenism, op. cit., p. 32.
88 Dimaras, Ρωμανισμός, p. 378.
religion should be controlled by any institution other than the state, especially as the Patriarchate was now (after the revolutions) in "foreign" territory. In 1870 came the turn of the Bulgarians, who still lacked a state of their own, to establish their own national church, the Exarchate. The result was the institutional break-up of the Balkan religious community.89 Through the medium of national Churches, religion became the champion of nationalism, for the Church was now attached to national states, or, in the Bulgarian case, to a national cause. The priests would start talking about nations, about "Greece", or "Serbia", which were now taking shape.

What was needed, however, to really forge the nation in the Balkans was conflict and war between the Christians themselves, for only then "national" loyalty could conceivably take precedence over religious unity. And only then could religion become more "fused" with the concept of a particular nation, and the nation-state. At this juncture two instances of intra-Christian conflict need to be briefly discussed. The first concerns Macedonia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.90 A region of mixed population where Slavs were predominant, it remained under Ottoman domination, and all Christians continued to be under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. A growing Bulgarian national movement, however, had every reason to want to challenge this supremacy, and in 1870 they created their own Church, the Exarchate. It was no surprise that the national struggle of the Bulgarians found a religious outlet: namely the establishment of a Church, although there were no differences whatsoever (from a religious perspective) between the Bulgarian Church, the Exarchate, and the Patriarchate of Constantinople.91 The Patriarchate of Constantinople,


90 For a fuller discussion of this point see Dimitris Livanios, ""Conquering the Soul": Nationalism and Greek Guerrilla Warfare in Ottoman Macedonia, 1904-1908", Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies 23 (1999), pp. 195-221.

still viewing the world largely through pre-national spectacles, condemned the introduction of “phyletism” [φυλητισμός], that is nationalism, into the Church.92 But again it was fighting a losing battle, just as it had a century earlier when it tried to stop the penetration of Western liberal ideas. From 1870 onwards the Bulgarians claimed that every follower of the Exarch was a “Bulgarian”, while Athens responded by arguing that those who remained under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate were true “Greeks”, if not by language, then certainly because of their “national sentiment” [εθνικόν συνέντολον].

Between 1904 and 1908 a brutal low-scale guerrilla war raged in Macedonia as Greek and Bulgarian bands of irregulars tried to force the peasants to declare themselves “Greeks” or “Bulgarians”. The main task was simply to transform the Slav peasants into Greeks or Bulgarians, to break, in other words, the community fostered by religion. Realities in the field, however, frustrated the efforts of both sides. The Macedonian peasantry simply refused to identify themselves with the “national” causes of either Bulgaria or Greece and stubbornly continued to declare themselves Christians whenever the curious traveller asked the odd (for them) question “What are you, Greeks or Bulgarians?”. A Greek patriot found that reality quite disturbing: “I asked them,” he wrote “what they were - Romaioi [Greeks] or Voulgaroi [Bulgarians]? They stared at me incomprehensibly. Asking each other what my words meant, crossing themselves, and answered ‘Well, we are Christians, what do you mean by Romaioi or Voulgaroi?’.”93 Clearly the Christian Commonwealth stubbornly resisted to die a natural death. But the ability of Christianity to localise itself through the “national” Churches and local priests, to be used, in other words, as a marker of identification with particular states and national movements, gave an indirect but much-needed impetus to the creation of national identity. The peasants of Macedonia were called by the Greeks to fight for their Church, against the “schismatic” Bulgarians, but by doing so they ended up fighting for national causes. The fact that very few of them understood that connection did not make the outcome less “real”. For those peasants who did not understand that point, the priest, or a captain, was always available to explain. This is how a Greek captain described his job to a British observer: “When I go into a converted village [that is, a “Patriarchist” village that had become “Exarchist”], I call the people together into the marketplace, and tell them it was wrong to desert the old faith.”94 Prudently, he did not

---

92 Kitromilides, “Imagined Communities”, pp. 55-56.
say that the peasants deserted “Greece”, for few would have understood him. Yet again, the road to nationhood passed through religion.

Given that warfare was used in Macedonia by Christians against other Christians in order to shatter the unity imposed by religion in favour of the ideas sponsored by the nation-state, it can be argued that it served as the prologue to the developments that occurred during the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913. From the point of view of the Greek collective identities, the Second Balkan War (1913), when the Balkan allies turned against each other over the spoils of Macedonia, is especially important. To begin with, the Balkan Wars were the first armed conflict of Greece as a nation-state with another Christian state: Bulgaria. This is not to imply that the Greek-Bulgarian conflict first emerged in 1913; as we have seen, the second half of the nineteenth century had witnessed that. However, the level of mobilisation and participation in the war, the nationalist rhetoric that permeated the army, and the explosion of anti-Bulgarian feelings that engulfed the entire country, meant that the 1913 war marked the clinical death of the Christian Commonwealth as Christian killed Christian on a scale and with an intensity that had not been witnessed before. Arguably, the military and political circumstances of the 1913 war sealed the triumph of mass nationalism in Greece.

Before 1913 it was still possible, albeit with increasing difficulty as the nineteenth century wore on, for the Greek national identity to include into its fold those who could not speak the “national” language, provided they were Christians and followers of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. They were, after all, Greeks by descent or sentiment, or both. After that date, and after the long struggle against Bulgarian nationalism, few would attempt such an undertaking. And their view would carry little conviction. After 1913 the Greek nation had to speak only the “national” language, and in the interwar years neither Greece nor any other Balkan state tolerated “minority” languages that were considered a threat to the nation. On the other hand, the “nation” that emerged triumphant after 1913 in Greece, but also elsewhere in the Balkans, although primarily a secular form of belonging, was still very much coloured by the prevalence of religion over so many centuries. In an important sense, to be “Greek” (or “Serbian”) still means, at the threshold of the 21st century, to be Orthodox Christian. Although the Christian Commonwealth failed to

maintain its unity, it managed to incorporate religion into the fabric of modern Greek nationhood.

V. Epilogue: The Difficult Cohabitation of “Hellenism” and “Romiosyne”

At the beginning of this essay we encountered the conflict between Pletho and Scholarios, which placed Plato against Aristotle, but also “Hellenism” against “Christianity”, both as identity and as a name for the definition of the Greek collective self. There was an element in this conflict, however, the battle between ancient Greece and the Byzantine tradition, that went beyond its two protagonists, and can be read as the prehistory of a wider clash between two words, which much later became a conflict between two worlds as well: “Hellenism” [Ελληνισμός] and “Romiosyne” [Ρωμιόσινη, derivative of Ρωμίς/Ρωμιός]. Despite the impressive resuscitation of the “Hellene” in the nineteenth century, the “Roman” did not die an early death, and not only because its use continued to flourish among those unaffected by the educational system of the Greek state. The cleavage between “Hellenism” and “Romiosyne” soon acquired many layers. It also became a battle between two different views of the Greek past: between those who favoured the splendour of Antiquity, and their opponents who longed more for Byzantium and the revolutionary period. This conflict was reflected not only in the way the Greeks called themselves (“Hellenes” vs “Romioi”), but also in the proverbial language question: the battle between the archaising katharevousa and the colloquial demotic. The “Hellene” was adopted by the purists, who wrote (and spoke) in an archaising idiom, and despised not only the appellation “Roman” but also “the dirty and bad-mouthed mob” who spoke the living Greek language. The “Roman” name, however, and its cause, was then taken up by the demoticist movement, which had little time for the purists and their attempt to impose an artificial language.

At the turn of the twentieth century we witness the last significant battle between the two terms, when Argyris Eftaliotis published in 1901 a History of Romiosyne. The reaction of the “Hellenists” was instant: the Professor of

---

96 For the role of Byzantium in the linguistic battles of the time see Peter Mackridge, “Byzantium and the Greek Language Question in the Nineteenth Century”, in Ricks and Magdalino (eds), Byzantium, pp. 49-62.

97 Cf. the view of the purist Kontos, who thought that demotic is the preserve of “the uncivilised, the Roman who has been in a state of lethargy because of his long period of slavery, the dirty and bad-mouthed mob” [τον κηροκοιμηθέντα, ὁ γεγονός μακράν δουλεύσας καπνοδοκιμαστήρας Ρωμιόν]. As quoted by Kyriakidou-Nestoros, Η θεωρία, p. 65.
Classical Archaeology at Athens, G. Sotiriadis, noted that “Roman” meant nothing more than “a cheap and vulgar man” \(\text{άνθρωπον ευτεκὴ καὶ χρησιόν}\), while the folklorist Politis, adding to the debate the perspective of his discipline, also opted for the “Hellene”, for it symbolised the unbroken continuity of the Greek nation. But the demoticists lined up to a spirited defence of “Romiosyne”, led by Psycharis and Palamas. The term “Roman”, noted the latter, may not come “straight from the age of Pericles”, but it smells of “thyme and gun-powder”\(^\text{98}\). For them the ancient past needed to be cut down to size. Psycharis, who had a “Romeic heart” \(\text{τῇ ρωμαϊκῆς μυὸ τὴν καρδία}\) and thought that the revolutionaries of 1821 were animated by a “Romeic political force” \(\text{ρωμαϊκή πολιτικῆ \ έθνηπος}\), aptly summed up the general feeling of his circle: “The Acropolis, with all its ancient glory, is ready to fall upon us and trample us.”\(^\text{99}\)

As far as the content of Greek nationalism is concerned, however, the conflict between “Hellenes” and “Romans” reached a formal end with Zambelios’ “Hellenochristian” attempt to force Pletho and Scholarios under a common linguistic roof, and Paparrigopoulos’ historical rehabilitation of the Byzantine Empire. By then, the “Hellenic” identity had integrated into the collective self of the Greeks both the “Hellenic” past and the “Roman” attachment to Christianity and the Byzantine traditions. “Hellenism” and “Romiosyne” could now be used as alternative renderings of the same entity.\(^\text{100}\)

This is not to imply that the “Romiosyne” itself became extinct. Far from it. Its use continued, especially among the demoticists; it acquired left-wing connotations in the context of the work of poets like Yiannis Ritsos, set to music by Mikis Theodorakis in the 1960s.\(^\text{101}\) More recently, the pro-Byzantine and Christian aspects of “Romiosyne” enjoyed some currency in the 1980s and

\(^{98}\) For the battle of 1901 between “Hellenism” and “Romiosyne” see Dimitrios Tziovas, The Nationism of the Demoticists and Its Impact on their Literary Theory, 1888-1930, Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert, 1986, pp. 77-86. Quotations on pp. 80-81. For Politis’ intervention see also Herzfeld, Ours Once More, pp. 121-128.

\(^{99}\) Panayiotis Christou, \(\text{Ηρώδη \ την \ έκπνευση}\), p. 150.

\(^{100}\) Stefanos Koumanoudes translated the composite word “Hellenic world” \(\text{Ελληνικός κόσμος}\) as “Romiosyne”; “Ελληνικός κόσμος” (ο ως το κολο της Ελληνικής) in Συγγελλή, p. 356.

\(^{101}\) It may be added here that the 1970s witnessed a solitary (and entirely unsuccessful) attempt to re-introduce the word “Roman” as the proper appellation of the Greeks. In 1975, a noted theology professor of the University of Thessaloniki, aptly called Romanides, argued again the case of the “Roman constitution of the Genos” \(\text{ρωμαϊκῆς υποστάσεως του Γένους}\), but no one was prepared to listen. Ioannis Romanides, \(\text{Ρωμαιόν, Ρωμανία, Ρωμάζει [Romiosyne, Romania, Roumel]}\), Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 1975, p. 9.
1990s, as part of a new awareness of Byzantium promoted by the so-called “Neo-Orthodox” movement: a loose appellation that sheltered a number of leftist and Orthodox intellectuals with strong anti-Western overtones. Ever since the 1820s, however, the “Hellenes” have carried the day, and they were not afraid of speaking their name any longer. But Scholarios need not burn their books this time, for his own identity, and the world that he represented, had also been accepted.

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

---

102 For the “Neo-Orthodox” awareness of Byzantium see Vasilios N. Macrides, “Byzantium in Contemporary Greece: The Neo-Orthodox Current of Ideas”, in D. Ricks and P. Magdalino (eds), Byzantium, pp. 141-154.