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Prefatory Note

Paschalis M. Kitromilides

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Special Section / Section Spéciale

THE RELEVANCE OF THE HISTORY OF MODERN GREEK SOCIETY AND CULTURE FOR COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL HISTORY

Prefatory Note

The year 2008 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the National Hellenic Research Foundation. The anniversary was appropriately honoured on 19 March 2008 with a major ceremonial occasion in the presence of the President of the Hellenic Republic, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Parliament, several members of the cabinet and a large congregation representing the research and academic community of the country. The six Institutes composing the NHRF were asked to organise their own special anniversary events at which to take stock of the contribution of each of them to the growth of knowledge in the specialised field of research served by them.

The Institute for Neohellenic Research, under its original name, the Centre for Neohellenic Research, along with the Centre, now Institute, for Byzantine Research, began operation in 1960 as the new Foundation's first two research units. To the appraisal of this half century of research effort we devoted the thirteenth C. Th. Dimaras Lecture, our Institute's annual formal event, delivered in 2008 by Professor Vincenzo Rotolo of the University of Palermo, a senior and respected presence in the field of Modern Greek studies in Europe. His text is published in the series of the C. Th. Dimaras Lectures and it provides an interesting balance-sheet of the Institute's work. We thought, however, that in order to gain a fuller and more rounded perspective on the Institute's contribution we should pose a further question: what is the relevance of the history of Modern Greek society and culture for comparative and international history? Epistemologically it is in connection with this question that the Institute's contribution might be appraised on its appropriate basis. By raising it we are essentially posing the question of the viability of Modern Greek history as a branch of historical research and we propose to assess the specific contribution of the INR to making this branch of

historical research relevant in producing knowledge that might enhance, even in a small way, our understanding of the past of human society.

Obviously we did not and do not expect easy or immediate answers to this broad and – for those of us working in the field – fundamentally existential question. But if the fulfilment of that expectation cannot be easily attained, it is still open to approximations, to an initial probing that could be quite constructive for our own self-awareness and self-appraisal. With this end in mind we invited four colleagues, who are not specialists in Modern Greek history but professionals in cognate and neighbouring branches of historical study, and asked then to ponder our question from the perspective of their particular fields of specialisation. I am deeply grateful to John Davis, Edhem Eldem, Giovanni Levi and Gilles Pécout for joining us at an important moment in the history of our Institute and for giving us the benefit of their reflection and judgement on the subject of our work, opening new perspectives for our own self-understanding.

Their responses make up this special section of *The Historical Review / La Revue Historique*. Their individual approaches to our initial question bring up a rather optimistic appraisal of the achievements and possibilities of the research field served by the INR. This is a heartening prospect for us but also a challenge for the future.

Paschalis M. Kitromilides