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Upcoming Events

Paradise: The Lexicon of Felicity in the Premodern Eastern Mediterranean

On Sunday, October 24, at 3pm, Hellenic Link–Midwest presents Professor Paul J. Griffiths and Professor Nanno Marinatos in a lecture titled “*Paradise in the East Mediterranean: A Vocabulary of Narrative and Visual Motifs.*” This lecture will be held at the Four Points Sheraton hotel, 10255 West Irving Park Road at Schiller Park (corner of Irving and Manheim by O’Hare airport, phone: 847 671 4230).

That there was, or is, or will be a place of final felicity is an idea few are able to do without. Paradise is one name for it, heaven another. It is limned, usually, by way of contrast with the evils and sufferings of our present mode of existence, or by depicting its ghastly polar opposite, hell. Ideas about it are always related, more or less distantly, to ideas about what’s right (or wrong) with human existence, individual, social, and political. And it is most familiar to contemporary Westerners in forms derived from the classical Christian synthesis, and has hell as its chief contrastive term.

The history and lexicon of ideas about final felicity, however, is complex. For the peoples of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece, paradise was neither in nor identical with heaven, and was not conceived as hell’s opposite. And the Christian synthesis (which itself has a complicated and disputed history) is not remotely adequate as an interpretive lens for premodern Jewish or Islamic thought about these matters.

This lecture will shed some light on the forms the lexicon of felicity took in the premodern Eastern Mediterranean. Focus will be placed on textual and visual data from the four principal religious traditions of the region and period: Greek religion; Judaism; Christianity; and Islam.

Paul J. Griffiths is chair of the Department of Classics and Mediterranean Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago. His field of expertise covers an unusual span ranging from Buddhist philosophy to Augustine. Formerly professor at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago he joined UIC in 2000 as ‘*Schmid Professor of Catholic Studies.*’ His current work is on Augustine and ‘*Curiosity.*’

Nanno Marinatos is one of the world’s foremost experts in Minoan culture. Nanno studied in the U.S. and Germany, and has made significant contributions in the study of

Minoan and Greek religion through her books and articles. She has appeared on television, the BBC, the Discovery Channel, and Norwegian and German Television programs. She is currently a full professor of Classics and Mediterranean Studies at UIC.

Byzantium in the History of Modern Greece

On Sunday, October 21, at 3pm, Hellenic Link–Midwest presents Leonidas Pittos, in a lecture titled “*Byzantium in the History of Modern Greece: Perceptions of Continuity and Change.*” This lecture will be held at the Four Points Sheraton hotel, 10255 West Irving Park Road at Schiller Park.

Who were the Byzantines? Greek in language and culture, the ruling elites of the eastern Roman—or “Byzantine”—Empire perceived themselves from within the prism of three cultural, political, and religious identities: as the heirs of Hellenic culture, as continuators of the Roman imperium, and as the defenders of Orthodox Christianity. The “Byzantines” constructed and understood their cultural and political identities in different ways throughout the various periods of the Empire’s history, but always from within the same discursive framework. The role of religion in Imperial ideology as well as the cultural and political import of religious orthodoxy played important roles in the development and evolution of “Byzantine” identity throughout the history of the empire.

What place, however, does Byzantium have in the history of Modern Greece? Historians of classical and modern Greece as well as Byzantium have had varying answers to this question. Among modern historians, some have placed the beginnings of “neo-Hellenism” (Νέος Ελληνισμός) to the thirteenth century (post-1204) or to the Palaiologan Period (1261-1453), others much earlier to the ninth century; another group of scholars to after 1453 and even to the eighteenth century. Earlier, Greek intellectuals such as Adiamantios Koraes, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, regarded the Byzantine period as an aberration in Greek history altogether. They rejected the ethnonym Rhomaios (an identification with the medieval Orthodox Christian empire of Byzantium—το Ρωμαϊκό of the popular collective memory) used by the Greek-speaking Christian inhabitants of the old Byzantine world, leaving no room for Byzantium or Orthodox Christianity in their vision of a revived Hellenism. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the debate between the supporters of demotic modern Greek and those of puristic (καθαρεύουσα) became a debate over the authenticity of “ρωμοσύνη”—or “romanity”—that looked to Byzantium

and folk culture vis-à-vis an identity that looked exclusively to the age of Plato and Perikles.

The intellectual history of the place of Byzantium in Greek identity, however, may be traced to the fourteenth century to a time when the Empire had been reduced to a collection of Greek cities in Macedonia and Thrace, a few Aegean islands, and the Peloponnesus and its intellectual elites debated the consequences of capitulating either religiously to the Papacy and the Latin West or politically to the rising Ottoman emirate. From this debate there emerged an intellectual movement that looked to the West for the symbols of cultural legitimation and, from the eighteenth century onward, for the queues for an “authentic” modern Greek identity. It is this political and cultural program, squarely situated within a growing colonialist discourse emanating from the West by the eighteenth century, that thereafter set the agenda for subsequent discussions and debates on the place of Byzantium in the emergent modern Greek consciousness.

Leonidas Pittos is a visiting lecturer in Modern Greek at the Classics Department, University of Illinois at Chicago. He has earned a BA in History and Ancient Greek Language at the University of Illinois at Chicago in 2001 and an MA in Social Sciences at the University of Chicago. His Master’s Thesis was titled: “*John Kantakouzenos and the Construction of Byzantine Identity during the Hesychast Controversy, 1338-1351*”. He is presently working on his PhD Thesis in the History Program at the University of Chicago. His PhD thesis title is: “*Hesychast Manuscripts and the Discursive Geography of Late Byzantine Identity*”

In Brief

Greek Firms Among Business Week's Global-1000

Eight Greek firms appear in the ranking of the world's 1000 largest companies in 2004 compiled by the US magazine Business Week. These enterprises with their ranking in parenthesis are: National Bank of Greece (715), EFG Eurobank Ergasias (771), Hellenic Telecommunications Organization (818), Alpha Bank (883), Football Pools Organization (884), Coca Cola HBC (911), Public Power Corporation (930), and Cosmote (969).

Greek Writers Making an Impact Abroad

A study conducted by Greece’s National Book Center has revealed that foreign readers are slowly discovering a new generation of Greek authors and a new image of modern Greece, apart from the most frequently translated great poets Costas Cavafys, Odysseas Elytis, Yiannis Ritsos and George Seferis and the novels of Nikos Kazantzakis.

New writers whose work has been translated and published abroad include Vassilis Vassilikos, Rea Galanaki, Apostolos Doxiadis, Menis Koumantareas, Pavlos Matesis, Andreas Staikos, Thanassis Valtinos, Zyranna Zateli, Demosthenes Kourtovik, Petros Markaris, Costas Mourselas, Dido Sotiriou and Evgenia Fakinou.

According to professor of modern Greek literature and translator Jacques Bouchard, who presented the results of the survey on August 3, the emphasis has switched from Greek poetry to prose that gives new insights into life in the Greek countryside and capital. He said that 1,400 Greek works of literature have been translated and published abroad into 40 European and other languages. Modern Greek poets that have been translated into at least five other languages include Manolis Anagnostakis, Nassos Vagenas, Kiki Dimoula and Antonis Fostieris. Greek theatre, on the other hand, is massively under-represented with just a handful of translated plays, as are short stories, Cretan literature and the treatises from the era of the Greek Enlightenment. Also scarce are translations of poets and writers well known and highly regarded in Greece, such as Dionysis Solomos, Andreas Kalvos, Kostis Palamas, Angelos Sikelianos, George Vizyinos and Alexandros Papadiamantis, while Greek children's literature abroad is dominated by Evgenios Trivizas for young children and Alki Zei for teenagers.

The largest number of Greek works translated into any single language is in French, with 264 titles, followed by English with 215, German with 179, Spanish with 132 and Italian with 90. The number of Greek titles translated into Turkish had risen to 67, and at least nine modern Greek writers have been translated into Chinese.

From Our History

Empire and the Price of Arrogance and Greed

In 415 BC, imperial Athens decided to undertake an expedition to conquer Sicily. The disastrous defeat of the Athenians in Sicily led to the demise of the Athenian Empire, and to the beginnings of the decline of classical Greece. As an introduction to the expedition to Sicily, this writing gives a summary of the Greek settlement in Southern Italy and Sicily, and the creation of Magna Graecia (Μεγάλη Ελλάς).

Archaeology has confirmed that the first Greek settlement was on the island of Ischia, but a mainland community was soon set up as well at Cumae, north of Naples, both probably by 750 B.C. From the Cumaeans the locals learned to write, and thus the Latin alphabet came to being, which is the alphabet of many of the dominant languages of our time. The most active Greeks in these first moves were Euboeans, who had taken leadership in the Levantine trade with metals as the prime objective.

The early merchant-explorers, in sum, found the sea-lanes and spied out the land, to be followed by a genuine emigration. In the second half of the eighth century there were three foundations in the great Catanian plain and its northern extension east of Mount Etna: first a relatively unimportant one at Naxos; then Leontini, nine kilometres in from the coast, at the southern edge of the plain; and last Catania (*Κατάνη* in Greek) itself. In the same period, Syracuse was established as well as Zancle and Megara Hyblaea. Finally, in 688 the first colonizing wave in Sicily from overseas was completed with the foundation of Gela. Each new foundation had an acknowledged 'mother-city', which provided the leader of the expedition and did the planning, and men joined in from other Greek communities at the start as well as in such later recruiting as may have occurred. The official founders of the four most northern colonies were Chalcidians from Euboea, of Megara Hyblaea men from Megara, of Syracuse Corinthians, and of Gela a combined Rhodian-Cretan group, while some *Γραοί* from Tanagra of Boeotia are responsible for the Latin name Graecus for Greeks.

Intensive archaeological study in the present century has shown not only that the successful colonies grew rapidly and flourished, but also that they differed significantly in their relations with the Sicels. Both at Naxos and at Leontini there is evidence that the first Greek migrants and the Sicels lived side by side for a time, the latter being pushed out only gradually. Not till half a century later did the Greeks take over the latter. The Sicels now disappear from the archaeological record there, whether absorbed or expelled we cannot say.

Outside the immediate zone of the Greek settlements, peaceful and useful relations continued with the Sicels of the interior so long as the Chalcidian colonies remained independent communities, which means until Syracuse became the dominant power in eastern Sicily at the beginning of the fifth century B.C. The upshot of this Chalcidian activity was that by 500 B.C. the whole Sicel area as far as Enna seems to have become Hellenized. At Syracuse the colonists began by conquering and subjugating the Sicels of their district, reducing them to a servile status (except, presumably, for those women the Greeks took as wives, at least in the first generation or two). Herodotus and later Greek writers record a special name—*Kyllyrioi*—for these subjects, whom they classified as slaves. The position of the *Kyllyrioi* may have been analogous to that of the Spartan helots. If so, they lacked freedom of movement or occupation and, in effect,

they worked involuntarily for the Syracusan citizenry; but, unlike the more familiar chattel slaves, they could not be sold or removed from the land they tilled and they retained their own family and community life, a 'national' existence, one could almost say.

Within a century of its foundation, Syracuse established three strong-points: in the interior at Akrai (now Palazzolo Acreide), then a few kilometres further west at Kasmenai (at Monte Casale), and on the coast at Helorus below the present Noto Marina. About 650 a group from Zancle joined with refugees from Syracuse, settled at Himera. At the same time or perhaps two decades later, Selinus was founded from Megara Hyblaea, probably with reinforcements from the original Megara in Greece. Finally, in 580, Akragas on the south coast, some 100 km east of Selinus, was established by Geloans and Rhodians, to become, in the long run, Syracuse's only real rival on the island in wealth and power.

Akragas completes the story of Greek colonization in the strict sense, but it is far from the end of the settlement history. The number of cities at the time the island passed into Roman hands in the third century B.C. was many times greater than those so far mentioned. Some, such as Tauromenium (Taormina) or Agyrium, were Sicel towns that had been dragged into the Greek power struggles of the fourth century B.C., when tyrants forcibly depopulated and repopulated almost at will. Other Sicel towns of the interior managed to escape that fate, became Hellenized without any noticeable Greek influx, and in due course slipped into the catalogue of Greek cities quietly, so to speak. The establishment of Himera, Selinus and Akragas brought the Greeks into the Sicilian and Elymian districts and marked their furthest westward movement, along with Thermae (modern Termini Imerese), about 15 km west of Himera, where there was a settlement from just before 400 B.C., and Mazara, about halfway between Selinus and Marsala, where the Selinuntines for a time maintained a trading-post, presumably for their African commerce. In the Elymian territory the puzzling exception was Segesta, where, as has already been noted, the Greek script was adopted though the native language remained in use, and where the shell of a Doric temple was built in the late fifth century that still stands as one of the greatest of surviving Greek temple-remains. The people of Segesta had even become so Greek, or at least so un-barbarian, in Greek eyes that a formal agreement was eventually made with Selinus accepting intermarriage among their respective citizens as legitimate.

From The Riches Of Our Cultural Heritage

AN EVENING IN KINGFISHER

By George Economou

“ENTERING KINGFISHER, OKLAHOMA”
the road sign reads
“THE BUCKLE ON THE GRAIN BELT.”
We drive to the Elks Club
where we join three hundred men
with big buckles on their belts
to boost the Sooners and our university
in what is traditionally OSU Aggie territory
drinking and mixing with them, eating “fries”
also known as prairie or mountain oysters
scooped up barehanded
as you hold your beer or bourbon in the other
followed by steaks, ranch style baked beans
homemade cracked wheat bread and more beer
salad fixings with no dressing whatever
strong coffee and no fooling around with dessert.
After the obligatory welcome speeches
the winningest active coach in college football
runs the play he will call this spring
a hundred times throughout the state
and then fields questions:
—“Barry (pronounced Berra), how’s the Texas
game gone turn out this year?”
—“One thing I kin tell you ‘bout the Texas
game fer sure—it’s gone be one tough sumabitchr’
—“Barry, could yuh use a sixty-six year old guard?”
—“Give that man another drink.”
Somebody does as coach Switzer
closes this appearance with a herpes joke
and a hopeful, if not overconfident
prediction about the coming season.
The macho party and male ritual complete
(except for those with expectations
based on their consumption of fries)
we move for the doors or bartenders
and I am almost out into the night air
when the sixty-six year old guard pulls
out of the line at the bar and squints
at my crimson-bordered OU name tag
offering his hand to mine which he begins to squeeze
and asks me where I’m from.
—“The university.”
—“Well, I kin see that. I mean with a name
like that where are yuh from?”
Looking back at his tag
which reads “‘Huck’ Rice”
and understanding what he’s getting at,

—“Just moved here from New York,
but I was bom in Montana.”
He squeezes harder,
—“But that’s not an American name.”
—“Sure it is, from Greece. (And making a good guess)
When did your people come over here from Germany,
Huck?”
Easing up on the squeeze,
—“Oh hell, we bin here forever.”
—“You mean you’re native American?”
—“No, no Indian. What d’yuh do at OU?”
—“I teach English.”
—“With a name like that, yuh teach English?”
—“I run the whole show in English, Huck
I’m chairman of the department, brought in
from New York.”
The handshake ends in a tie
and I’m grateful for the summers
spent opening oysters in Wellfleet.
—“Well, George, how d’yuh like workin’
here among all these Americans?”
—“I told you, Huck, I was born here.”
—“I like yuh, George, I’d like to talk
to yuh ‘bout your beliefs.”
Remembering Roy Rogers’ characterization
of Reagan when he was nominated in 1980,
—“Why, Im’a fine Christian gentleman,
just like you. Only my kind is the oldest,
Huck. Greek, you know, right back to the
language of the New Testament (making another
good guess) while you Lutherans are pretty recent.”
Shaking his head,
—“Greek, and yuh teach English
and don’t even have an accent.”
—“No, no accent, Huck, perfect English.
You’ve got the accent. But give me a
chance and I’ll be back here next year
sounding just like you.
—“I’d like that. I like yuh, George.”
—“So long, Huck, see you next year”.
Leaving Kingfisher, I try not to hear
the obvious literary echoes
and focus rather on the odd sincerity
of my dialogue with Huck,
and definitely name him
to my first team offensive line.