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On the Social Construction of Hellenism Cold War Narratives of Modernity, Development and Democracy for Greece

DESPINA LALAKI*

Abstract Hellenism is one of those overarching, ever-changing narratives always subject to historical circumstances, intellectual fashions and political needs. Conversely, it is fraught with meaning and conditioning powers, enabling and constraining imagination and practical life. In this essay I tease out the hold that the idea of Hellas has had on post-war Greece and I explore the ways in which the American anti-communist rhetoric and discussions about political and economic stabilization appropriated and rearticulated Hellenism. Central to this history of transformations are the archaeologists; the archaeologists as intellectuals, as producers of culture who, while stepping in and out of their disciplinary boundaries, rewrote and legitimized the new ideological properties of Hellenism while tapping into the resources of their profession.

We feel humiliated and we understand that things cannot remain the same as they were before . . . but we gave the world democracy, and we expect the European Union to support us.

– Greek civil servant, 2010¹

If idealism must be avoided, the facts of collective idealization must not be. In our postmodern world, factual statements and fictional narratives are densely interwoven.

– Jeffrey C. Alexander, 2003

Greece has recently again stepped out of the corners of our geographical imagination. We all follow in the media, often with the Parthenon, the country's ultimate signifier, in the background, the very real prospect of European markets collapsing along with the Greek economy. In the process, the impossibility of talking about Greece without in one way or another invoking the ancients became once again clear: Greece as the "cradle of democracy," Greece as the "cradle of western – European – world civilization," Greece as the ultimate tourists' destination under the sun. Such invocations hardly come as a surprise, however. Classical antiquity and Hellenism, its intellectual byproduct, have never ceased triggering our imagination, informing our cultures in various manners

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and according always to the contingencies of history. For Hellenism, like any centuries-enduring myth, any cultural fact with such a long history, owes its strength and appeal to its versatility. Here I focus on the years that followed the Second World War, a period I consider to be the latest turning point in the long life of the ideal of Hellas. I maintain that in the wake of the Cold War era, Hellenism, which since the 18th century, hand in hand with classical scholarship and archaeology had fired people's imagination and had informed new aesthetic, moral and political orders, was employed to shape new ontological and epistemological distinctions between the Democratic West and the Communist East. Historically, the ideal of Hellenism had been informed mainly by European queries of modernity, the Enlightenment, Romanticism and, subsequently, by the Modern Greek search for identity. In the aftermath of World War II, however, I argue that under the pressure of ideological and strategic considerations Hellenism was further conditioned by American visions of democracy, development and modernization.

Archaeologists, side by side with historians and classicists, have played a central role in giving shape and form to the idea of Hellas, this imaginary landscape of memory densely populated by ruins and an unconscious longing for greatness. In this study, historically focusing on a period when for the first time American and Greek cultures systematically intersected, I turn my attention to the American archaeologists as mediators and interpreters of Greek culture. For the post-war American economic and political intervention in Greece, which led to the first proxy war between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, had a strong cultural component which remains largely unexplored. The present study, then, has a double intention: first, to bring the archaeologists as access point and analytical category into the discussion about cultural production, myth-making and public culture by following them in their work within and outside the boundaries of their profession, and second, to observe the idea of Hellas being transformed into a vehicle of Western ideology and an economic force in the emerging world markets for national cultures.

Hellenism is "a retrospective category" (Porter 2009), a modern category in the service of modernity and modernity's ultimate project: the nation. It is the product of "ressentiment" and "transvaluation." "Ressentiment," a psychologically founded term, was employed by Nietzsche to explain the master-slave relationship, the frustration of the disprivileged which sprung from a deep sense of inferiority and led to a reversal of the established social moral framework valuing weakness over power, restraint over aggression, poverty over wealth (Nietzsche 1927). "Ressentiment" refers to a

psychological state resulting from suppressed feelings of envy and desire which, according to Greenfeld in her sociological analysis of nationalism and nation-building, is instrumental in the process of “transvaluation of values; meaning a society’s creative reaction to another group’s set of values and the subsequent generation of a new set of conditions (Greenfeld 1992). Hellenism is rooted in the deep Prussian resentment against the French, in the German sense of cultural inferiority and its “ressentiment” against French culture and civilization. The Romantic ideologies of the Prussian *Zeitgeist*, as these were exemplified in Humboldt’s educational program (Marchand 1996; Morris 1994), came to reconstitute the injured national spirit. The Roman imperial vision so ardently adopted by Napoleonic France was replaced with Hellenic ideals of liberty and spiritual simplicity. Subsequently, the Modern Greek nation would engage in a search for its own *Zeitgeist* beginning from a resentment-prone situation founded on the belief in its cultural equality with – if not superiority over – its European counterparts, while its own social, economic and political conditions were insurmountably inferior. In the process the ideal of Hellas would acquire yet new layers of affect and meaning.

Moments of social upheaval and structural change offer unique opportunities in history to observe the work of “transvaluation” in action. The Second World War in Greece, the civil war that followed en suite, and the direct American intervention signal an important turning point in the history of the country and in the meaning of its core myths and cultural foundations, as these were reworked through direct interaction and exchanges between the two cultures. Envy and desire have had roles to play in the encounter of the Americans – oft-accused of philistinism – and the proud descendants of the ancient Greeks who could, however, find very little pride in their modernity. The circumstances that set in motion “ressentiment” and “transvaluation,” however are what interests me the most. Therefore, my intention here is to explore the conditions through which this reciprocal interaction took shape, and to subsequently observe any changes in the meaning embedded in the idea of Hellas and Hellenism.

Greece at the Crossroads

Greek history in the 1930s is in many respects a European history. Greece had joined the family of European fascist governments in 1936, before the Axis powers engulfed the country. General Metaxa’s dictatorship, which was deeply rooted in the old schism between republicans and royalists over the question of monarchy, sprang from similar circumstances: the economic slump of the

Thirties, the inability of the political parties to leverage the crisis and the rise of the communist party, which in the elections of 1936 held the balance of power. King George II, fearing another of the many coups that had punctuated the modern history of the country, the escalation of social unrest and the ascendance of the communists, and probably fearful for his own position (he had, after all, just returned from a twelve-year exile), endorsed Metaxas' regime and presided over an ever-divided country (Clogg 1992; Pelt 2001).

The German occupation, incongruously, gave rise to some new prospects for change with the emergence of a popular movement which, out of political exasperation, famine and death, would create pockets of civil society away from the traditional centers of power. The Greek government, not an elected body, under the leadership of Emmanouil Tsouderos (Metaxas had died in January 1941), along with the King and elements of the Greek armed forces, moved to Cairo and the country was left to be ruled by a puppet government that the Germans had installed. While the in-fighting for power would continue in Cairo, in occupied Greece various groups sprang up, of which the most popular and organizationally firm was the National Liberation Front (EAM). Effectively led by the communist party (KKE), by 1943 it had emerged as the most powerful governing body with a central organization, a union arm, a youth movement and a military branch – the Greek People's Liberation Army (ELAS) – which would lead the resistance movement (Hondros 1983; Mazower 2001).

Rivalries among various groups would be consolidated in the opposition between EAM and the National Republican Greek League (EDES). EDES was supported by factions of the old anti-communist political powers, on occasion would collaborate with the occupation forces, and would eventually play a dubious role in the fight of the British against ELAS.² The British polity towards the resistance movement in Greece was, to say the least, ambivalent, ambiguous and underhanded. While the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) was ordered to carry intelligence and sabotage operations among the *antartes* (guerillas) in the mountains of Greece and to serve as the communication link between Cairo and the Greek resistance organizations, there was a systematic effort to maintain this collaboration on strictly military terms (Woodhouse 1948). When the war was coming to a close and the time for political choices would come, the British would openly pit EDES against EAM, undermining the latter's authority (Auty and Clogg 1975). William Donovan, the head of the U.S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS), in a memorandum to the Joint Chiefs of Staff dated November 26, 1943, had identified the situation as follows:

Originally, all guerilla groups in Greece were set up under a joint GHQ, over which the senior British liaison officer presided although his functions were, strictly speaking, only advisory. The political situation has changed this and now it is the proposed policy of the British to attempt to build up the EDES group in opposition to the EAM group which is to be starved of supplies and attacked on the propaganda front.³

Americans were watching from the sidelines. The OSS, the American brand of war intelligence, had infiltrated Greece and was closely monitoring any new developments. From its base in Cairo and through various locations on the coast of Turkey, OSS agents – for the most part Greek personnel or often Greek-Americans who were familiar with the land and the language – would infiltrate occupied Greece in order to establish connections in the country, especially with the *antartes* who were putting up a tenacious but unequal fight against the Axis Powers. Men, documents, radio equipment, gold for payments and other supplies to and from Greece and the Middle East would pass chiefly through Izmir, Turkey.⁴ OSS had extensively recruited among the circles of scientists and scholars with linguistic, social and historical knowledge of world regions that appeared to have a bearing on American affairs (Katz 1987, 1989; Mabee 1987; Mead 1979), and American archaeologists who had worked for years in Greece, all affiliated with the American School of Classical Studies at Athens (ASCSA) established already in 1882 (Lord 1947; Meritt 1984), were recruited to serve in various capacities either directly in the field or from the OSS offices in Washington. No American policy was in place at the time, and until December of 1944, two months after the German troops had evacuated Athens, probably little attention was paid to the small country in the southern fringes of Europe. What would soon become of concern to the West and also to the U.S. was that the unpopularity of British policy among the Greeks, along with the growing power of EAM and the communist party, would result in a swing of positive Greek public opinion toward the USSR and possibly in Russian political influence in the country. Until then, Hellas was lying dormant in libraries and scholars' dim offices, was arduously and silently unearthed from the soil that had harbored it for centuries, and would only make headlines again when the fear of being lost to the East appeared to be very real.

“United States and Greece.” An Archaeologist’s Perspective

“A baggy questionable idea . . . burdened with more meaning than it can coherently hold” (Porter 2009, pp. 7, 9), “a quicksand of shifting perceptions” (Herzfeld 1986, p.4), Hellenism or the concept of Hellas eludes definition. It may be better understood as a “rela-

tion,” as Porter suggests, between an imagined past and the ever-changing political, social, and intellectual needs of modernity. The ideal of Hellas is rooted in the French-German cultural and political antagonisms of the 18th and early 19th centuries: in Luther’s insistence to circumvent the French Latin-based interpretations of the Bible and to understand Christianity via the Greek text alone (Morris 1994); in the German disagreement with the French indulgence of imperial Rome as opposed to the Greek city-state model, which better resonated with the German political arrangement (Bernal 1987); in Winckelmann’s dreams of cultural purity and social vigor. Hellenism is the progenitor of Modern Greece, of the Greek national fantasy as it rose from the European and the Greek Enlightenment (Gourgouris 1996) and the literary topographies of Romanticism (Güthenke 2008; Leontis 1995); it is the connective tissue, the intellectual matrix in which the Modern Greek nation is embedded.

Few scholars have had a better understanding of Hellenism and have contributed as much to its most recent formulations as Carl Blegen, the archaeologist who “brought ancients to life” (Horstman 1999). Two excavations, both closely entangled with the Homeric myths of *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the one at Troy and the other at Pylos, established Blegen’s reputation in the 1930s. At Troy, Blegen challenged Heinrich Schliemann’s finds which had suggested that the destruction on level six (Troy VI) had been caused by the Greek siege, and he identified Troy VII as the Homeric city.⁵ As is often the case in the largely speculative science of archaeology, Blegen was later proven wrong as well. His engagement with the Homeric epics continued with his explorations at Pylos, where he sought to locate the palace of Nestor, the elder king of the *Iliad*, who had contributed 90 ships to the war against the Trojans and offered his wise, always conciliatory advice to the younger, more impulsive Agamemnon and Achilles. Blegen not only located a palace in the north-east of the Peloponnese, equal in consequence to discoveries at Mycenae and Tiryns,⁶ but most importantly stumbled upon a few hundred clay tablets with inscriptions that would later be identified as Linear B and as an early form of Greek language.⁷

Mycenaean civilization (1600–1100 B.C.) was firmly established then as Greek, the latest phase or the offspring of “Helladic” (2800–1100 B.C.) to use the term that Blegen and Alan Wace, a prominent British archaeologist, Director of the British School of Archaeology in Athens (1914–1923) and Blegen’s long-time associate, had coined for a new civilization they had excavated at Korakou, a mount on the gulf coast west of modern Corinth, in 1915–16.⁸ The excavators had identified a discontinuity in the mainland pottery, which in the long archaeological tradition was most often equated

with distinct cultural strains with ethnic and racial implications; consequently they suggested the cultural emancipation of the mainland from the Minoan domination, a theory for which a major proponent was none other than Arthur Evans, the British archaeologist who had unearthed Knossos. Another collaboration, this time between J. B. Haley and Blegen, led in 1928 to a publication titled "The Coming of the Greeks" (1928), which, based on linguistic and archaeological research, suggested that this new cultural strain in the Greek mainland – the "Helladic" – could be identified within speakers of a branch of the Indo-European language family. While the jury is still out debating the ethnic composition of these new groups and their place of origin about 4,000 years ago – the north is traditionally favored as working hypothesis – Blegen's propositions still have a very strong hold on the archaeological debates and on the linearity of Modern Greek history. Side by side with Schliemann's, Evans' and Tsountas' (the Greek archaeologist charged with "codifying" the Cycladic Civilization c. 3200–1100 B.C.), Blegen's picture is prominently featured in the first pages of the first volume of *The History of the Greek Nation*, the latest "definitive" 17-volume history, which grounds the origins of the Greek civilization on the Helladic, Mycenaean, Minoan and Cycladic civilizations as defined by the respective Founding Fathers of Prehistoric Greek archaeology.⁹

Blegen's propositions and the choice of the term "Helladic" for the new culture he had identified did not occur in an intellectual vacuum. They constituted a response to earlier debates about the "Greekness" of the Mycenaean civilization in which Tsountas had already identified manifestations of the "Greek spirit" and which would culminate in the 5th century B.C., the peak era of Hellenism (Voutsaki 2002). Suggestions about any Eastern, Phoenician origins of the Mycenaeans clashed with the Hellenic premise of cultural continuity which Bronze Age archaeologists such as Blegen, Wace or Tsountas extended into the mythical past of Prehistory. The question of "Greekness" after the defeat in Asia Minor and the collapse of the "Great Idea" which envisioned the expansion of the Greek state in the lands of unredeemed nationals, was central in the nation's quest for identity in the 1920s as well as in the decades that followed. The national catastrophe haunted the collective imagination. At the same time, new social challenges that manifested largely in the rise of the working class movement – in Marxist ideology and the quest for a modernization which increasingly looked toward the West and liberal humanism – gave to the question of Greek identity a new impetus and urgency. Archaeologists were fully engaged in the task of producing and re-producing the national subjects while they also provided the contextual frame-

work for their expression serving the rhetoric of the Greek state and its cultural manifestations. I suggest, however, that this was hardly a national project, strictly speaking. The quest for the ideal of Hellas has always been central in the constitution of the Western episteme.

If Hellenism as a concept eludes definition the same cannot be said about its affects, which are subject to observation. Its conditioning power can be detected in disciplinary practices such as that of archaeology, in political ones such as the establishment of the Greek state early in the 19th century, and in its re-establishment after the end of World War II and the ensuing Civil War. An unpublished manuscript written by Blegen in the mid 1940s and available today at the administrative archives of the ASCSA sheds more light in this latest chapter of Hellenism.

While Blegen's expertise was on the Greek Bronze Age he intimately knew Modern Greece, too. In 1910, at the age of twenty-three, he first visited the country as a student at the ASCSA, and by the time of his death in 1971 he had made Greece his home and his final resting place, having experienced first hand the land and its people in the most troublesome moments of their modern history. In 1918, for instance, he took part for a year in the American Commission of the Red Cross, investigating Eastern Macedonia and assisting with the repatriation and rehabilitation of thousands of refugees who during the war had been held as prisoners in Bulgaria (Barry 1919). During WWII, he was recruited by the OSS to head the Greek desk of the Foreign Nationalities Branch (FNB) in Washington, which was following European and Mediterranean ethnic groups living in the United States and recording their knowledge of political trends and conditions affecting their native lands.¹⁰

As a new world state of affairs was coming into place – a post-war, post-colonial, post-modern world – scientists and intellectuals would play a central role in articulating its new shape and form. The resistance movement in Greece, as in other places in Europe, would take on social and political dimensions that constituted a potential threat to the social order that the victors of the war had envisioned, and now a new war for the hearts and minds of those liberated would be set in motion. In 1945 Blegen, while still in the employ of the FNB, was invited by Harvard University Press to offer once again his services. Roger Scaife, the Director of the Press, had projected a series of books on various parts of the world written with reference to their importance in the foreign relations of the United States, and Donald C. McKay, professor of History at Harvard and head of Mediterranean Research and Analysis during the war, was called to serve as associate editor.¹¹ McKay, who evoked in his letters his earlier harmonious collaboration with Blegen in Washington and the high regard in which he was held as

an authority both in Ancient and Modern Greece, succinctly explained the objectives of the project and outlined an ambitious plan which envisioned the publication of more than twenty-three volumes in a two-year period:

The books will deal in some cases with individual countries (the Soviet Union, France, Germany), in others with regions (Southeast Asia, the Caribbean countries). They will seek to make the average intelligent American reader conscious of the character of these countries (geography, people, government, economy), with the great changes which have in most cases been affected by the war, with the character of our relations with them in the past, and above all with the problems which we shall have to face in our relations with them in the immediate and near future.¹²

In the company of some very distinguished scholars,¹³ Blegen would take up the task. However, within the next four years, and while sharing his time between his duties as Cultural Attaché for the American Embassy in Athens upon his return in 1945, as Director of the ASCSA and as archaeologist, Blegen would not complete the project. He has left us with a good draft of his manuscript though, *United States and Greece: An Archaeologist's Perspective*, which prescribes the future of Greece by pointing toward its familiar, revered past.

Accounting for the post-war American involvement in Greece, Blegen opens his book with a disclaimer:

. . . our purpose in coming to the assistance of Greece at this juncture . . . was not to promote any imperialistic ambitions nor did it represent desires for territorial aggrandizement. But our action was by no means a purely altruistic gesture . . . It was a definite notice to the other nations of the world that we believe our own vital interests are bound up with the situation in Greece, and that we are determined to defend our own social order and ideals of government and to safeguard the way of life in which we have faith and which, we realize, is being threatened by international forces eager to destroy it . . . It has become clear that Greece is the object of pressure and attack by international communist totalitarianism which is seeking to expand its domination step by step, first over Europe and then over the world.¹⁴

Undoubtedly, Blegen echoes here Truman's speech rhetoric which, in a well-known phrase attributed to Senator Arthur Vandenberg, meant "to scare hell out of the country" (Ivie 1999). Truman's speech in the Congress in March of 1947, and the passionate discussions that followed it in the Congress and the media, composed the picture of a western world under threat of imminent destruction unless this new form of totalitarianism was contained and countered by the civilizing forces of capitalism and democracy.¹⁵

In the book, Blegen establishes a precedent for this new economic environment by stressing and rather stretching the importance of U.S. trade with Greece in the 1930s and their assistance towards

infrastructure development.¹⁶ Most importantly, however, he focuses on the political history of the Greek state, always with an emphasis on the destabilizing communist threat and after establishing some important connections to the part of Greek history with which the American public imagination was already acquainted: classical antiquity. Extracting from his extensive knowledge as archaeologist and historian, Blegen would draw a direct line between prehistory, classical antiquity, and medieval Byzantine history, concluding that “. . . there is no doubt that in the people of modern Greece we must recognize the descendents of the ancient Greeks,”¹⁷ directly objecting to ethnic theories such as those advanced early in the 19th century by Jacob Philipp Fallmerayer, who had claimed that “not the slightest drop of undiluted Hellenic blood flows in the veins of the Christian population of present-day Greece.”¹⁸ Blegen’s linear ascending and descending historicity was, of course, deeply rooted in a particular cluster of European understandings about history, space and time (Thomas 2004), and in the cultural connotations of the Hellenic ideal for European and even American intellectual origins, which were traced back to the ancient Greeks, since, according to Blegen:

. . . it was in the fifth and fourth centuries, the classical period par excellence, that democracy was developed and flourished . . . and to these two centuries belong many of the names most illustrious in history, philosophy, drama, architecture, sculpture, painting, and the other arts. Greek culture, at this point, reached maturity and the beginning of its decline.¹⁹

With a great leap in time, the culmination of this decline would not be difficult for the reader to identify in the next pages: the emergence of communism as a political force in the life of the country, which, however, would only constitute a serious threat provided that poverty and economic destitution remained unchallenged. In any other case, according always to the author, the Greek character is not susceptible to the core values of the communist ideology and the profile of the communist; “of general intelligence,” which “it sometimes attains to an unusual order . . . that keen Hellenic preoccupation with telling of all things new is still as intense as it was in the days of St. Paul.” And while explaining the Greek *zeitgeist* as an unchanging constant throughout the ages, Blegen moves from the Judeo-Christian canon – which the idolatrous Greeks were the first Europeans to explore and engage with at the Agora, where Paul would first preach to the Athenians – back to Aristotle:

It shows itself [the Greek alertness of mind] in a lively interest, not to say inquisitiveness, with reference to what is going on about one, and it is particularly concerned with persons and personalities. It leads to what is little short of a

passionate interest in politics and political developments, local, domestic, and international. For the Greek pre-eminently fits Aristotle's definition of man as a "political animal".²⁰

Reassuring his prospective American readers about the deserving character and nature of the Greek people and implicitly eradicating any popular concerns about their dubious ethnic and racial characteristics is Blegen's main concern. After all, the Immigration Act of 1924, which radically restricted the immigration of Eastern and Southern Europeans to the U.S. out of fear of the ethnic and racial degeneration of the country, was still in place. In addition to the lively intelligence of the modern Greek, Blegen stresses his "highly developed individualism," "perhaps the most conspicuous of the qualities inherited from his ancient ancestors who invented the concept of democracy." Intelligent, individualistic, albeit often excessively, and keen to finance and banking, with an "almost universal desire to acquire and hold individual property," Blegen asserts "the fundamental anti-communist philosophy of the majority of the population. Indeed, in this individualistic and essentially unindustrialized state, the ground is not normally favorable to the sowing of communist seed."²¹ The seeds, nevertheless, had found fertile ground in Macedonia and Thrace among the propertyless tobacco workers, the undernourished laborers in the big cities, and among those who harbored resentment "of what they believe[d] to be unjust political discrimination and negligence or incompetence on the part of the government."²²

The employment of the notion of the "Greek identity" and the ideologism of "Greekness" – embedded in the concept of race and a series of timeless, inalienable idioms of the Greek character as a bulwark against communism – was certainly not Blegen's invention. This same notion had been taken up by the Greek state to face the labor unrest and the communist ideologisms of internationalism and proletarian solidarity (Apostolakou 1997) and by the Greek liberal intellectuals. The latter found in an idealized and abstract nationalism (as opposed to nationalism) of a spiritual and metaphysical kind, the antidote to both the corrupting effects of western modernity and the Marxist historical materialism which they largely rejected as antihumanist. Like Blegen, they firmly placed "Greekness" in the Western and European civilizational tradition, advocating for the leading role of Greek culture or "Hellenism" in the revival of humanism (Tziovas 1989).

Blegen does not put his reader at rest. He builds a case for a people whose nature and rich culture should safeguard them in a distinct place among the democratic nations of the world but who, subject to corrupting external powers, are on the verge of collapse

under the sheer power of eastern totalitarianism. Blegen's book is in essence an appeal for a renewal of American philhellenism, which back in the 19th century may not have mobilized the American government to assist the Greek fight against the Ottoman Empire, but did inspire private initiative despite the Monroe Doctrine which dictated that the U.S. stay away from European politics. Once again, in the name of Greece's symbolic importance as the cradle of western civilization and, on a more pragmatic level now, on the basis of its strategic significance as the underbelly of western democracy in Southern Europe, the Greek state had to be defended.

The book is written in the midst of some of the most extraordinary events in the recent history of Europe. Less than two months after the German troops' departure from Athens and following EAM's demonstration of December 3, 1944, images of British troops fighting in the streets of Athens against one of the most resilient anti-Nazi movements in Europe caused the rage of the House of Commons, and of the British and American media. Whether the demonstration represented an attempt by EAM to take over power is an issue still fervently debated. The broader role of the USSR in the following years is also a topic not settled in the literature.²³ According to Blegen, the 37-day battle that followed between the British troops, the military of the Greek government and EAM-ELAS, constituted "a carefully laid plan for the seizure of power by the Left," which the British "were inevitably drawn into . . . in support of the government, as the legally constituted regime." From liberators, the British turned into instigators of a brutal civil war, further inflamed after the elections of March 1946 and the plebiscite in September of the same year, which brought the King back. The issue that had been polarizing Greek society since the early 1920s and was for years bringing any negotiations between the more moderate political forces to a standstill was forced upon the Greeks by Churchill's myopic and colonial nostalgic vision. The American government watched from the sidelines and any criticism, such as that by U.S. Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., was rather subdued and swiftly downplayed (Wittner 1982).

The topic of the elections and of the plebiscite offers to Blegen's reader further reassurances about democratic procedures and the political stability of the country. An Allied Mission for Observing Greek Elections (AMFOGE), comprising British, French and Americans, secured that "it was unquestionably as fair and honest an election as could be held in a country so recently torn by civil war."²⁴ For the plebiscite, which recalled the King to the throne, Blegen was equally cheering and heartening: "The result unquestionably represented the conviction of the majority of the Greek people that at the

time the only possible safeguard against Communist domination lay in rallying about the King and the monarchical form of regime.”²⁵ Blegen’s emphasis on democratic processes and further comparisons with Britain and the Scandinavian countries as “some of the most firmly safeguarded and genuine democracies in the world,”²⁶ were employed to defy America’s aversion to monarchy. Alison Frantz, an archaeologist and Blegen’s assistant at the FNB, who had taken part in the AMFOGE and closely followed the events, was less sanguine, however; on August 24, 1946, she wrote to her mother, rather cynically and resignedly:

The plebiscite is scheduled for a week from today. No one has any illusions about the outcome. It will probably be technically honest, in that the King won’t get 107% of the votes as he did last time, but only the very brave republicans will dare to vote. I’m glad I wasn’t involved in AMFOGE II.²⁷

While the emphasis of American policy regarding Europe at large was on reconstruction and economic development, in Greece the problem was primarily political and military. The implementation of the Marshall Plan in Greece was in effect an exercise of *realpolitik* which meant to defend the strategic interests of the U.S. in the area. Fearing that the expansion of the Soviets’ influence in Greece would mean the fall of the whole Middle East, American advisors and administrators brought the whole Greek state apparatus under their direct control, openly maneuvered the Greek government, gave almost absolute control to the military, separating it from the political authority, and tolerated mass executions and the open persecution of the Left by a government which, in the American media, was often compared with the Nazis (Jones 1989; Merrill 2006; Nachmani 1990; Υπουργείο Εξωτερικών της Ελλάδος 2002).

It is only in cultural practices and international scholarship that Blegen will find a fertile ground free of controversy for the cultivation of amiable and cordial relations between the two countries, and will identify the brightest prospects for the future of Greece. He devotes a separate chapter on “Social and Cultural Problems” to explain his faith in culture and in American educational institutions such as the American and the Pierce College in Athens, the Anatolia College and the American Farm School in Thessaloniki, institutions “purely educational in character, patriotic but not propagandistic,” to produce the enlightened leaders of whom the Greek nation was in great need.²⁸ Confident about the strengths of American education and disheartened by the dismal situation of the Greek institutions at the time, Blegen laments the limited American visas available to Greek students as well as the lack of foundations interested in the development of close cultural relations between the two countries, clearly not yet assigning much importance to the

Fulbright Foundation in Greece, which was just being established with the active assistance of the ASCSA. Radio, the press and even Hollywood are also recognized as instrumental vehicles for conveying principal American values to the Greek public.

In this newly opening international market for national cultural industries, Greece had “the monuments and other physical remains that linger on through the landscape wherever one turns” to offer, which, “apart from the biological and linguistic legacy, the classical Greeks have bequeathed to their descendants.”²⁹ Hellenism – which Blegen time and again invokes in his book and which he had scientifically grounded in his archaeological scholarly work, the biological, linguistic and cultural continuity of Greece – provided the resonance for the country’s ideological orientation but also the means for its economic development. Hellenism, from a force *civilisatrice* would now be understood as an economic force as well, a cultural commodity in the international tourism and heritage industry:

For Greece has in abundance what is needed to attract travelers. Islands, seas, narrow coastal plains, and mountains give the scenery an endless variety, ranging from the simple to the majestic; and innumerable historic associations breathe life into every prospect. Incomparable monuments of the past lend distinction to many famous sites still bearing classical names; and museums are filled with treasures of ancient art.³⁰

Not the romantic, classically educated travelers of the 19th century but the “tourists” – a term that Blegen only hesitantly uses, in some cases scribbling “foreign visitors” over it in his manuscript – were destined to be the primary consumers of this new Hellenism in the 20th century. The most recent tourist campaign of the Greek government, more than fifty years later, with slogans such as “Live your myth in Greece,” testifies to the appeal of this latest take on the myth of Hellas.

Classical culture, so often credited as the progenitor of Western civilization, was now subject to the mandates of a new world order which favored the free exchange of cultural, among other, goods, and for that matter Blegen calls for some structural transformations: the liberation of the Ministry of Education from its financial servitude to the state and its closer collaboration with the tourism industry, and “some liberalization of the [Archaeological] Service’s attitude toward the export of antiquities,” for as he maintains, “the classical antiquities of Greece, although she naturally has special rights, are in a broad sense not exclusively a national possession of the country in which they happen to be found: they belong to the world, and the whole world is interested in their care.”³¹ The question of to whom a culture belongs or whose heritage it is, whether

it is national heritage, world heritage or something else, is being debated and will be debated for some time to come. However what Blegen suggests here, albeit hesitantly and probably inadvertently, is the subjection of an old idea, or better an ideal, to new rules, those of the market – an international market which would appropriate the myth of Hellas in very different ways.

Blegen, clearly in tune with ideas already in circulation at the time, would even recommend a provision for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of museums and monuments as part of the Marshall Plan program for the development of tourism in Greece.³² He would also work hard to include the ASCSA's project for the reconstruction of the Stoa of Attalos as the Museum of the Ancient Agora in this program, and would initially appropriate two hundred thousand dollars for it.³³ From where Blegen stands, archaeologists' and archaeology's role in the reconstruction of the country is central; the foreign schools of archaeology in Greece, for example the American School of Classical Studies, produce scholars as well as cultural ambassadors: "archaeology seems to offer one of the easiest and most direct channels through which Greece can assure herself a tide of good will, along with moral and material help, from all the enlightened countries of the world."³⁴

Do Archaeologists Control the Means of Symbolic Production?

Classical archaeologists study the great Mediterranean civilizations of Classical Greece and ancient Rome and by extension, the Minoan, Cycladic, Mycenaean and Helladic civilizations that preceded the Classical age. The term "civilization" has been strategically insisted upon to differentiate the object of the discipline from other research areas, especially that of anthropology, which traditionally focuses on "cultures," on smaller-scale forms of social organization which are presumably of lesser universal value. Having sprung out of Classics and Philology and the ivy-league tradition, its finds being exhibited in the most prominent institutions and drawing only the wealthiest collectors, Classical archaeology holds, in a very Bourdieusian sense, considerable symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984). Hellenism is its loftiest object of inquiry, and preoccupation with it confers class and status. Identification with Hellenism, appropriation of its values, bestows civility and a sense of superiority; it draws a sharp line, very much in the ways that Herodotus suggested, between the "civil" and the "barbaric," between the West and the East, and in Blegen's re-conceptualization, between the democratic post-war West and the totalitarian Soviet East.

Elitists and in disciplinary isolation classical archaeologists work away from the limelight, literally underground one may say; they exhibit the appropriate scholarly timidity and often an aversion for the ways in which their scientific work is popularly consumed or reproduced by the media. In general, “scientificity” and political independence are invaluable tools in the efforts of institutions and scholars to maintain their professional autonomy and, as Gieryn suggests, to seal themselves from outside powers and from any blame for undesirable consequences for non-scientists’ consumption of scientific knowledge (1999, 1983). Yet again, the rhetoric of scientific purism deprives us of understanding the social and historical complexities of scientific and cultural practices. Also, normative definitions of scientists’ or intellectuals’ obligations and moral codes often conceal historical reality. Julien Benda, conceivably the founding intellectual of the sociology of intellectuals, defined them as “all those whose activity is not in the pursuit of practical aims, all those who seek their joy in the practice of an art or a science or metaphysical speculation” (1927, p.43). Due to their devotion to ideas not always in sync with society’s more pragmatic concerns, intellectuals can find themselves alienated (Lipset 1972; Pels 1999; Shils 1972), while according to Said, “the real or ‘true’ intellectual is . . . always an outsider, living in self-imposed exile, and on the margins of society” (Jennings and Kemp-Welch 1997, p. 2). Yet, even those deeply committed to the principles of intellectual autonomy, as in Bourdieu’s case, depending on structural transformations in their field and their social environment, may abandon their professional isolation for a more active public life (Swartz 2003).

I tiptoe here between the terms “scientists,” “scholars,” and “intellectuals,” since each term suggests a different level of public involvement – the latter most often qualified to mean those who critically engage with orthodoxy and dogma (Bourdieu 1989; Foucault 1980; Gramsci 1971; Said 1994). Archaeologists themselves employ all three in their efforts for self-identification, while traditionally they favor the last the least (Hamilakis 1999). In any case, their social and political role in the construction and management of cultural heritage, in articulating the narratives that our societies and nations live by, is far more important than is often acknowledged. The stories which archaeologists have to tell carry the weight that our societies confer upon scholarly and scientific knowledge. They are told through institutions, such as museums, universities, research and educational centers, which have the sciences’ stamp of authority, social and cultural prestige (DiMaggio 1982; Zolberg 1992), as well as disciplining power (Duncan 1991). Ultimately, archaeologists work closely with networks of political and economic power. After all,

archaeology is a rather expensive enterprise requiring support by the state and/or private philanthropy.

Blegen's engagement with, essentially, a propaganda project, or the American archaeologists' collaboration with the OSS, for instance, highlight the historically close relation between the intellectual and political worlds (Shils 1972, 1961; Merton 1968), in this case between the archaeologists and the state. The history of modernity and of the state itself is coterminous with the history of the rise of intellectuals (Bauman 1992; Habermas 1962), and as Bauman further suggests, "there is a constitutive affinity between the political rulers and the cultural leaders . . . the relation is, rather, of a *HaBliebe* type (Ibid, p. 91). "The arts of domination and administration," after all, "require attention to rhetoric, ideological invention, and communication across different stations as well as rational calculation" (Boyer and Lomnitz 2005). The long literature on nationalism, state formation and state projects such as colonialism and empire building points to the importance of culture and intellectualism for governance (Eyerman 1994; Frankel 2006; Giesen 1993; Herzfeld 1986; Stoler 1995; Steinmetz 1999). Read comparatively, the same literature suggests, however, that there are no universal standards applied to the scientists' or intellectuals' social vision, which is often conditioned by scientific and cultural paradigms developed rather autonomously within the various fields from which they work.

Blegen, or his colleagues at the ASCSA at the time, were strategically positioned to tell their stories and to convey their particular views on the idea of Hellas, views which took shape within specific social settings and in professional and social interactions that extended within and outside the boundaries of their discipline. In this sense, the latest hues of the myth of Hellas are collective representations resulting from particular sets of interactions (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003) and networks, enduring or circumstantial (Granovetter 1973). Long-held scholarly practices and beliefs about the place of ancient Greece in the history of Western civilization were further enhanced and reinterpreted according to the prevalent social and political ideologies of the time: democratization and economic development. Sure enough, the archaeologists, American or Greek, did not single-handedly fashion a new narrative; neither were they the only advocates of modernization and development via the promotion of the Greek cultural heritage (in many cases, actually, they were at the forefront of resisting it). They were the only ones, however, who could provide legitimacy to any new readings of the archaeological record, recasting the "cradle of civilization" as the "cradle of democracy" and ultimately authorizing its economic exploitation.

In Conclusion: Hellenism as an American Myth

Myths enable and constrain imagination and in the process, always being subject to interpretation, they change. In different contexts their meanings might differ (Sahlins 1981; Schudson 1989; Swidler 2001) and transvaluation is always in progress in order to capture or to craft the changing moral frameworks of our societies. Their popularity, however, does not lie in scientificity or distinction alone; the success of a narrative lies in its capacity to embody, to express or even to anticipate the needs of those who embrace and consume it. For, as Jeffrey Alexander suggests:

Human beings are story-telling animals. We tell stories about our triumphs. We tell stories about tragedies. We like to believe in the verisimilitude of our accounts, but it is the moral frameworks themselves that are real and constant, not the factual material that we employ them to describe (2003, p. 84).

In this era of globalization, of economic interdependence and constant inter- and trans-culturation our myths, our stories, our values are not ours alone. Blegen, refereeing to the American intervention in Greece in the late 1940s, expressed it very succinctly: “we believe our own vital interests are bound up with the situation in Greece, and . . . we are determined to defend our own social order and ideals of government and to safeguard the way of life in which we have faith.”³⁵ Today, more than sixty years later, few would argue against the dependence of Greek life, or for that matter most of the world’s, on American politics and practices. “We could even say that everyone in the world today has two nationalities – the one they were born with and American,” Robert Bellah argues (2004, p. xii). Yet again, what most often remains unnoticed are the stories, the narratives that shape our social unconscious and make this interconnectedness possible.

In the aftermath of World War II, the United States, having emerged victorious from its struggle with ultimate evil, had to grapple with its sense of destiny. The myth of the Chosen Nation, a myth which sure enough has fueled the national imagination of other nations as well, was coming back to haunt if not to dictate the sense of the U.S.’s responsibility in the opening world arena. As the Pulitzer Prize-winning author Lawrence Wright writes in his memoir, “America had a mission – we thought it was a divine mission – to spread freedom, and freedom meant democracy, and democracy meant capitalism, and all that meant the American way of life.”³⁶ Landing on Greece in 1947 to combat communism, the U.S. was acting upon its own values of freedom, individualism and democracy, and safeguarding democracy for the country which has been charged as its first progenitor was the ultimate mission and

one which could resonate with anyone who shared this old story. Based on what Hughes calls “the myth of the innocent nation” (2004), the U.S. would be thrust upon the world to save it from evil, a battle which continues in our time structured on the same dichotomy, albeit with a different foe. Hence to save Greece was to save the American soul.

Historical “ifs” are not very popular, and it would be hard to speculate on what would have happened with the ideal of Hellas had the communists won the fight. Following the KKE’s defeat, the prospect of being rehabilitated into the national body gave a new impetus to the intellectuals of the Left to openly subscribe to the logic of historical continuity with classical antiquity (Koufou 2008), a path which might not have been taken had the civil war ended differently. Blegen’s book would be studied merely as a relic of a vanquished ideal, the carcass of what is no more. In the context, however, of the society that subsequently followed, Blegen’s book can be read as a cultural and ideological roadmap. The book was never published and it could not be studied for its public impact, but read alongside the press of the time – commenting on the correlation between democratic tutelage, economic development and modernization, the invocations by public officials of America’s indebtedness to Greece for its gift of civilization and democracy, the subsequent efforts of the Greek government to develop tourism by capitalizing upon and increasing the visibility of the classical past – Blegen’s Hellenism reads as an omen.

One may talk about another instance of “colonization of the ideal,” as Neni Panourgia has succinctly described the European identity formulation process against the cultural prototype of Classical Greece (2004), a process which bears many similarities to subsequent appropriations by the Greek state in its own efforts to articulate an official national narrative (Kotsakis 1998; Plantzos 2008). The Americans had wrestled with the ancients as well in their aesthetic and philosophical quests and in their efforts to find the most virtuous political system appropriate for their nation of states (Richard 1994; Winterer 2002), or, as Bernard Bailyn suggests (1992), employed them to window-dress their political thought. However profound or superficial, reflective or opportunistic, insightful or cursory, the American post-war engagement with Hellenism drew from and capitalized upon the undisputable prestige of the ideal and propelled it into the future, providing the subtext for Greece’s place within the post-war world system. It further introduced the Hellenic heritage into the world of free markets as a vehicle for economic development, political stabilization and modernization. Ultimately, purified in the springs of antiquity, both victorious America and civil-war-wrecked Greece

re-affirmed their democratic legacies and pledged to combat communism with Doric columns and tourism.

Notes

¹ Dan Bilefsky and Niki Kitsantonis. Greek Civil Servants Strike Over Austerity, *New York Times*. February 11, 2010.

² The account I offer here is only a broad outline of a very complex history which one can study in detail in the numerous sources available. For bibliographical guidance see Fleisher and Bowman 1981, Koulouris 2000.

³ NARA II, Record Group 226, Entry 99, Box 54, Folder 1, History of OSS Cairo.

⁴ NARA II, Record Group 226, Entry 250, Box 64, Folder 4.

⁵ Numerous levels of habitation have been identified in the citadel of Troy dating from 3,000 B.C. to the Hellenistic times in the first century B.C. These various levels have been conventionally identified as Troy I–Troy IX with multiple sub-periods and levels.

⁶ Mycenae, Tiryns and Pylos, located in Peloponnese, Southern Greece, have been identified as the most important centers of the Mycenaean civilization (c. 1600–1100 B.C.), a cultural period of Bronze Age Greece (c. 3000–1100 B.C.), and as the historical setting of the Homeric epics.

⁷ Michael Ventris and John Chadwick, an English architect and linguist, respectively, in the early 1950s deciphered the inscriptions, and the language was identified as Mycenaean Greek.

⁸ The Helladic civilization, the latest phase of which is identified with the Mycenaean, the Cycladic and the Minoan civilizations characterize in archaeological terms various cultures that developed in mainland Greece, Cyclades and Crete respectively during the Bronze Age. For more information on the excavation at the Korakou site and its importance for the designation of the “Helladic” civilization see Blegen, 1921.

⁹ “Definitive” national histories see knowledge more as a series of intellectually violent “revolutions” – as understood by Thomas Kuhn, for instance – identified with individual genius and ingenuity, and less as collective action or the cumulative effect of tradition. In that direction, see Allen (1999), *Finding the Walls of Troy: Frank Calvert and Heinrich Schliemann at Hisarlik*, where she examines Schliemann’s archaeological discoveries at Troy not within a context of heroic individualism, but as a partnership largely neglected by historiography.

¹⁰ Alison Frantz Papers (C0772), Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Correspondence, Box 4, Folder 6. This memoir is the result of a tape-recorded interview conducted for the Smith Centennial Study by Jacqueline Van Voris with M. Alison Frantz on December 4, 1971.

¹¹ Diamond 1992, explains the close relations between the Harvard community, including Donald C. McKay, the Carnegie Foundation, the State Department and the CIA in the establishment of the Russian Research Center. McKay’s proximity to these centers of power as well as the nature of the book series suggests that the project did not have its origins at Harvard.

¹² ASCSA, Blegen Library Archives, Carl W. Blegen Papers (1887–1971), Box 25, Folder 3, “The U.S. and Greece,” unpublished manuscript, Related Correspondence.

¹³ John Fairbank, a leading Sinologist of his generation, who had served as Director of the United States Information Service in China and later founded and directed the East Asia Research Center at Harvard, published with the series a volume titled *United States and China*. Arthur P. Whitaker, professor of history for almost thirty years at the University of Pennsylvania, published two volumes with the series titled *United States and Argentina* and *United States and South America*. Ephraim A. Speiser, Head of R&A, Near East section in Washington during the war, professor of Semitics at the University of Pennsylvania and Director of the American School of Oriental Research in Baghdad before the war, published *United States and Near East*.

¹⁴ ASCSA, Blegen Library Archives, Carl W. Blegen Papers (1887–1971), Box 25, Folder 1, “The U.S. and Greece,” unpublished manuscript, pp. 2–3. Henceforth referred to as “Blegen, Unpublished Manuscript.”

¹⁵ President Harry Truman’s address, which became known as the Truman Doctrine, introduced the policy of containment of Soviet expansion, which would soon take the U.S. as far as Korea and Vietnam. While Congress approved Truman’s proposal, we should bear in mind, also, the strong reactions of the liberals and the left who, even while the war was still raging, had issued warnings against the greater polarization of power domestically and internationally, and against casting the U.S. in the role of world policeman. See, for example, the strong reactions to Truman’s Soviet policy as these were expressed by Henry Wallace, FDR’s Vice President, as editor of the *New Republic*; Wallace 1947a, 1947b.

¹⁶ See also Cassimatis 1988.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁸ Fallmerayer (1790–1861), was a Tyrolean journalist and historian who objected to European philhellenism for fear of Russian expansion in the Mediterranean in the case of the weakening of the Ottoman Empire. He sought to undermine, therefore, the European support of the Greek War of Independence against the Ottomans, which was largely inspired by their belief in Greek historical and racial continuity with its classical ancestry. For more on Fallmerayer’s theories see Skopetea 1997, and Veloudis 1982.

¹⁹ Blegen, Unpublished Manuscript, p. 54.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ The answers vary, from those represented by L.S. Stavrianos (1949), who argues that there was no plot on the part of EAM, to that of William H. McNeill, (1949) U.S. Military Attaché to Greece (1944–46), who argues that on December 6, 1944, EAM attempted a coup d’état when it attacked the main government buildings. For a more nuanced approach see Iatrides and Rizopoulos 2000. Iatrides and Rizopoulos argue that there was a communist coup-in-the-making but it was unclear whether that was part of a larger master plan or simply an attempt to gain leverage pending further negotiations. On the question of whether there was any instigation on the part of Moscow, there is a general agreement in the literature that the Soviet government, in adherence to the agreements already made with the British, did not encourage a communist uprising. However, what has been debated is whether a communist victory would encourage Soviet penetration, an argument which was of course at the center of Cold War politics in the region. The most recent extensively debated publication on the topic, by Marantzides (2010), places emphasis on the coercive nature

of the Democratic Army of Greece (DSE) – which was the military arm of EAM after 1946, effectively controlled by KKE – on its poised-for-power leadership and the systematic assistance that the army received from the governments of Yugoslavia and Albania, if not, secretly and indirectly, from the USSR.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 148.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 149.

²⁶ Blegen, Unpublished Manuscript, pp. 205–6.

²⁷ Alison Frantz Papers (C0772), Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections Princeton University Library. Correspondence, Box 8, Folder 10.

²⁸ Blegen, Unpublished Manuscript, p. 245.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 256.

³⁰ Ibid, pp. 230–1.

³¹ Ibid, p. 260.

³² ASCSA, Blegen Library Archives, Administrative Records, Series 800, Subseries 804, Box 6, Folder 11. Carl W. Blegen, Memorandum for the Ambassador, August 26, 1948.

³³ ASCSA, Blegen Library Archives, Administrative Records, Series 300, Subseries 318, Box 4, Folder 4.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 257.

³⁵ Blegen, unpublished manuscript, pp. 2–3.

³⁶ Lawrence Wright 1988, p. 109, quoted in Hughes 2004, p. 155.

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