Byzantium in the poetry of Kostis Palamas and C. P. Cavafy*

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The creation of an image common to and accepted by a specific society is a gradual process of multi-level complexity. The image of Byzantium after the eighteenth century is the result of just such a process involving political, religious and cultural factors. However, even though the presence of Byzantium as a cultural image in Modern Greece is evident, the development and impact of this image have only recently become the subject of closer study.[1] This neglect stems from the wavering attitude of Greek intellectuals towards Byzantium, which they admired for the glory it imparted to the history of Greece, but also abhorred because of its supposed medieval character.[2]

From where does this attitude come? The newly created Greek State found itself in the midst of European developments

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[1] See indicatively G.P. Savvidis, "Cavafy, Gibbon and Byzantium (1966)", in id., *Μικρά Καβαφικά A* (Athens 1985), pp. 91-9; Annita Panaretou, "Τὸ Βυζάντιο στὴ νεοελληνικὴ λογοτεχνία", *Βυζαντινὸς Δόμος* 1 (1987) 43-63; G. Kechagioglou, "Τύχες της βυζαντινής ακριτικής ποίησης στη νεοελληνική λογοτεχνία: σταθμοί και χρήσεις", *Ἑλληνικὰ* 37 (1986) 83-109; Natalia G. Deligiannaki, "Ὁ Σικελιανὸς καὶ ἡ μεσαιωνικὴ παράδοση: *Ὁ Θάνατος τοῦ Διγενῆ* καὶ τὸ 'Ακριτικὸ Ἔπος", *Παλίμψηστον* 8 (1989) 125-49; Th. Detorakis, "Ὁ Νικηφόρος Φωκᾶς στὴν ἱστορία καὶ στὴ λογοτεχνία", *Παλίμψηστον* 9-10 (1989-90) 127-49.

[2] See, for example, D. Vikelas, *Περὶ Βυζαντινῶν* (London 1874, reprinted Athens 1971).

which had taken place since the eighteenth century. A peculiar situation had been created in this process. The Greek world, before the 1821 revolution, was a widespread community with wealthy and educated members in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in the Ottoman Empire. With the formation of the State a division was created between those inside and those outside the small territory of Greece, a division conveniently termed Helladic and Hellenic. Whereas before the revolution only a Greek Nation existed, now the Greek State did not represent the entire Nation. A rivalry emerged that culminated, on one hand, in the demand of the Helladic State to absorb the Hellenic Nation and control it on its own terms and, on the other, in the Hellenic Nation's insistence on participating forcefully in the developments within the Helladic State. This demand and insistence was paralleled by the Greek society's vision of uniting Nation and State, the well-known political concept of the "Great Idea".

The Helladic State, in orienting itself towards the West in an attempt to dissociate itself from its Ottoman past, accepted among other things the western frame of cultural notions. This frame included two essential concepts: 1) the unquestioned admiration and idealization of Ancient Greek culture; 2) a peculiarly negative approach to the East, which was accepted only for its exotic value, namely as a source of inspiration for Westerners who needed to find an artistic escape in a world of dreams, languor and sensuality. This view of the East, the Orientalist perspective, dominated western society at the time and was assiduously appropriated by Helladic intellectuals.

Byzantium offered to the nineteenth century the ideal example of an oriental state in its fullest expression. Apparently full of intrigues, eunuchs, courtiers and infinite wealth, Byzantium was but the medieval version of the Ottoman Empire. This Orientalist view allowed the West to place the beginnings of the various European states in the Middle Ages along the lines of a nationalist model and to claim the inheritance of Ancient Greece via Rome and the Renaissance, thus establishing its cultural superiority.

The Greek answer to this historical model, first formulated by Spyridon Zambelios (1815-1881),[3] was ultimately given by Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos (1815-1891) in his voluminous *History of the Greek Nation*, published between 1860 and 1877, and covering the time from Homer to the 1821 revolution. Paparrigopoulos formulated most forcefully the theory of Greek continuity through the survival of the Greek Nation, presenting Byzantium as the Christian realization of Ancient Greece and creating the paradox term "Hellenochristian" to describe this phase of Greek history. Thus, Byzantium as the "Medieval Greek State" became part of Medieval Europe, an equal, if not superior, inheritor of the ancient spirit. The Paparrigopoulian model did not mean, however, that Byzantine culture was in any way understood. Byzantine history, yes, was useful for the glorification of the Greek Nation, but other than that the negative image of a culturally sterile period remained unshaken.[4]

More concretely, a comparison of the image of Byzantium in the poetry of Palamas and Cavafy will give us the opportunity to see how two contemporary but wholly diverging artists treat this subject, why they do so and what is the result.

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[3] See now I. K. Oikonomidis, *Η ενότητα του Ελληνισμού κατά τον Σπ. Ζαμπέλιο* (Athens 1989), although the presentation of the material is uneven and the analysis superficial in parts.

[4] For the conclusions presented summarily here see P. A. Agapitos, "Byzantine literature and Greek philologists in the nineteenth century", *Classica et Medievalia* 43 (1992) 231-60, where all the relevant bibliography can be found. One might mention here Elli Skopetea, *Το "πρότυπο βασίλειο" και η Μεγάλη Ιδέα. Όψεις του εθνικού προβλήματος στην Ελλάδα 1830-1880* (Athens 1988) and Th. Veremis, "From the National State to the Stateless Nation 1821-1920", in M. Blinkhorn and Th. Veremis (edd.), *Modern Greece: Nationalism and Nationality* (Athens 1990), pp. 9-22 for the political aspects; K.Th. Dimaras, *Ελληνικός Ρωμαντισμός* [Νεοελληνικά Μελετήματα 7] (Athens ^{2}1985), pp. 325-404 and M. Bernal, *Black Athena. The Afroasiatic roots of Classical Civilization. I: The fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985* (New Brunswick, N.J. 1987) for the cultural and intellectual background. See also A. Liakos, "Προς επισκευήν ολομελείας και ενότητος: Η δόμηση του εθνικού χρόνου", in T. Sklavenitis (ed.), *Επιστημονική συνάντηση στη μνήμη του Κ.Θ. Δημαρά* [K.B.E./ E.I.E.] (Athens 1994), pp. 171-99.

Kostis Palamas (born 1859 in Patras, died 1943 in Athens) is one of Greece's most prolific poets. A towering figure in the demoticist movement of the late nineteenth century, he became the leader of the "New Athenian School", dictating for almost half a century the paths of Modern Greek poetic diction.[5] We shall concern ourselves here with the 4269-verses-long epico-lyric poem *Ἡ Φλογέρα τοῦ Βασιλιᾶ*, which was composed mainly between the military defeat of 1897 and the beginning of the "Macedonian Struggle" in 1904. It was published in late 1910.[6]

The work, consisting of 12 Books and two prologues, has as its central subject the visit of Emperor Basil II (976-1025) to Athens after his final victory over the Bulgarians in 1014. This main theme is amplified by various episodes from Byzantine history, but also from ancient myth, the 1821 revolution and visions of the modern world. The final form was reached by means of a frame-story, developed in Books 1 and 12. Palamas's approach to his material is "synthetic", a term the full meaning of which will become apparent at the end of the analysis. The poet started his work by reading Paparrigopoulos, not only choosing the various

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[5] See R.A. Fletcher, *Kostes Palamas. A great Modern Greek poet: his life, his work and his struggle for demoticism* [The Kostes Palamas Institute 5] (Athens 1984) and K.Th. Dimaras, *Κωστῆς Παλαμάς. Ἡ πορεία του προς την τέχνη* (Athens ^{3}1989) in conjunction with Venetia Apostolidou, "Το παλαμικό παράδειγμα στην *Ιστορία της Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας*", in Sklavenitis (as above n. 4), pp. 127-38.

[6] For a brief history of the poem's stages of composition see the new edition by K.G. Kasinis, *Ἡ Φλογέρα τοῦ Βασιλιᾶ* [Ἵδρυμα Κώστα καὶ Ἑλένης Οὐράνη. Νεοελληνικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη 6] (Athens 1989), pp. 7-11, whose study *Ἡ ἑλληνικὴ λογοτεχνικὴ παράδοση στὴ "Φλογέρα τοῦ Βασιλιᾶ". Συμβολὴ στὴν ἔρευνα τῶν πηγῶν* [Ἵδρυμα Κωστῆ Παλαμᾶ 3] (Athens 1980) on the sources of the poem is a most important tool for a correct analysis of the *Flogera*. Book and verse numeration refer to Kasinis's edition. For an English translation of the poem see K. Palamas, *The King's Flute*. Translated by Th.Th. Stephanides and G.C. Katsimbales, preface by Ch. Diehl and introduction by E.P. Papanoutsos. Edited by D.P. Synadenos [Ἵδρυμα Κωστῆ Παλαμᾶ 4] (Athens 1982).

knew as Kedrenos. A quotation from it figures as one of the poem's two mottoes. After the successful wars against the Bulgarians and the final victory at the Battle of Kleidion in the spring of 1014, Basil leaves his headquarters in Thessaloniki for Athens. Skylitzes does not give any explanation for this journey. It is not a military expedition, but possibly a survey of the lands that had suffered most heavily from the wars of the previous years. Skylitzes writes: "[Basil,] having arrived at Athens and having thanked the Theotokos for his victory and having adorned the church with splendid and luxurious offerings, returned to Constantinople."[12] This statement may be surprising to us in its compactness, but is typical of a Byzantine high functionary of the State. Athens was nothing but a brief stopping-place on the return to Constantinople, the Empire's absolute centre. The Parthenon, in which the church of the Virgin Mary was built, was of no interest because Skylitzes, like any other intellectual of the early Middle Ages, had no perception of history as archaeology.[13] Moreover, the continuation of the passage, which Palamas omitted, makes it clear that the actual victory celebrations took place in the capital with a formal triumph.[14]

This Byzantine perspective has been radically transformed in the *Flogera*. In Book 3 Basil, contemplating his victory, is seized by a desire to crown his piety with a final jewel (3.114-32). He has a vision of the great cities of the world: they appear to him as beautiful women, but he falls in love with poor Athens (3.133-78). The image of Athens is immediately contrasted to that of Constantinople and its protectress, the Virgin Mary at Blachernai; Basil chooses the war-like Virgin of the Rock, as Palamas calls her, the incarnation of Pallas Athena (3.179-216). This is a first indication of the poet's Helladic ideology. The central aspect of Byzantine culture, namely the Constantinopolitan perspective, is undermined. Athens takes over the role as

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[12] Skylitzes 364.80-83 (Thurn).

[13] On this conceptual two-dimensionality see C. Mango, "Antique statuary and the Byzantine beholder", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963) 55-75 (reprinted in id., *Byzantium and its Image. History and Culture of the Byzantine Empire* [London 1984], art. no. V).

[14] Skylitzes 364.89-365.91 (Thurn).

incidents involved, but primarily taking up the idea of continuity.[7]

Continuity in the poem is expressed on three different levels: 1) the survival of the Greek Nation in history; 2) the survival of the Greek language; 3) Byzantium as the focal point where Antiquity and Modern Hellenism merge. It is this concept that dictated the choice of the main theme. The visit of a glorious Byzantine emperor, victor over the northern enemies of Modern Greece, to the most famous city of Classical Antiquity established the epic canvas. During this phase of composition Palamas thought of calling his poem "Byzantine Rhapsody",[8] an indication of the work's episodic and seemingly improvisatory character, since the phrase is obviously equivalent to titles of well-known nineteenth-century musical works such as Brahms's "Hungarian rhapsody" or Bizet's "Spanish rhapsody".[9] The appearance of the final volume of Gustave Schlumberger's *L'épopée byzantine* in 1905 and its immediate translation into Greek[10] changed Palamas's perspective, for there he discovered a source that caught his poetic fancy and gave the *Flogera* its final title and form.[11]

The poem's central theme is to be found in the *Chronography* of the eleventh-century historian Skylitzes, whom Palamas

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[7] For a succinct and sympathetic interpretation of the poem, especially of the issue of continuity, see E.P. Papanoutsos, *Παλαμᾶς-Καβάφης-Σικελιανός* (Athens ^{3}1971), pp. 98-114.

[8] Letter no. 123 to Penelope Delta (September 1910) in K. Palamas, *Ἀλληλογραφία. Τόμος Α΄: 1875-1915.* Εἰσαγωγή, φιλολογικὴ ἐπιμέλεια, σημειώσεις Κ.Γ. Κασίνη [Ἵδρυμα Κωστῆ Παλαμᾶ 2.1] (Athens 1975), p. 197; see also Kasinis (ed.), p. 9 for further attestations of the subtitle.

[9] The phrase "Byzantine rhapsody" is, in my opinion, not connected to the term ραψωδία, denoting the books of the Homeric poems, a term which Palamas used as a title to a short poem of "Homeric" content; see D. Ricks, *The Shade of Homer. A study in Modern Greek poetry* (Cambridge 1989), pp. 50-2.

[10] G. Schlumberger, *L'épopée byzantine à la fin du Xe siècle* (Paris 1896-1905); the Greek translation by S.I. Voutyras and I. Lambridis (Athens 1904-5) was published in the prestigious series sponsored by Maraslis.

[11] For the whole context see Kasinis, *Παράδοση*, pp. 46-57, and esp. p. 50 n. 46.

centre of Hellenism. We are already one step removed from a proper understanding of Byzantium.

The other motto of the poem comes from a short episode in the work of the late thirteenth-century historian Georgios Pachymeres. Pachymeres describes how, during the siege of Galata by Michael Palaiologos in the summer of 1260, a group of magnates makes an excursion to the empty fields that lie west of Constantinople's main walls. They reach the Hebdomon, which in older times was the central military camp of the capital, now a place of pasture. They wander through the ruins of the church of St John the Evangelist. Pachymeres writes:

> Suddenly, they saw in the corner the remains of a man long dead, standing erect, complete with all his limbs, naked from head to toe. He had in his mouth the reed of a shepherd's flute, placed there in derision by some of those who were tending the flocks. As they saw it, they were amazed at the corpse's completeness and wondered to whom this earthen dust belonged, thus congealed and still shaped as a body; then, they observed to the right the empty tomb with verses engraved upon it, declaring who the buried man was. And he was, as the letters proclaimed, Basil the Bulgar-slayer.[15]

The description is sober. There is no mysticism involved in the discovery, while the funerary inscription, which the author does not report, discloses immediately the identity of the corpse. I would suggest that Pachymeres points to the power of the transmitted word, not as poetic diction but as archaeological discovery. We are 200 years later than Skylitzes. Byzantium has changed and its intellectuals are beginning to interpret the "historicity" of the objects around them.[16]

This is the scene that gave Palamas the title and frame-story to his poem. Book 1 of the *Flogera* opens with the description of the siege of Galata and the excursion to the Hebdomon. Palamas follows Pachymeres but expands the text, establishing a setting radically removed from the original (1.47ff.). In vv. 74-5 the "suddenly" of Pachymeres is picked up,

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[15] Pachymeres II.21 (I, 175.12-177.7 Failler).

[16] On this change see H.-G. Beck, *Theodoros Metochites. Die Krise des byzantinischen Weltbildes im 14. Jahrhundert* (Munich 1952).

but the scene is transformed into a moment of mysterious encounter. Palamas describes the corpse of the emperor with the flute in his mouth as "complete; black and naked and incomparable and grand" (1.84), creating a sense of superhuman magnitude. Basil becomes a Nietzschean *Übermensch*, a concept that Palamas used consciously, as he later revealed.[17] The poet then proceeds to quote the inscription with the interesting qualitative statement that the engraved letters were half-erased (I.101-2). The text Palamas presents as that of the inscription is not wholly his invention, because the inscription has, in fact, been preserved. Palamas knew it from Schlumberger's work. Naturally, he does not quote the actual text, but expands it, translates the archaic diction into his poetic idiom and once again incorporates Helladic ideology. He stresses that Basil chose a different place for his burial from the rulers of Constantinople (1.103-5, 108-10). However, the original states that "some previous emperors have variously prepared for their burial uncommon sites",[18] which implies the existence of precedents for the choice of a highly irregular burial site. While the historical Basil simply excuses his personal preferences, the Basil of Palamas rejects Byzantium.

Moreover, it is not the half-erased text that becomes the gate to the other world, but the flute in the emperor's mouth: as soon as the leader of the group tries to remove it, the flute begins to speak in a human voice. The Byzantine perception of the written word as transmitter of wisdom has been subverted, while Byzantium is reduced to the minor *accidens* of poetic inspiration. Palamas reasserts through the voice of the flute the power of oral poetry and becomes himself the expounder of history. We

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[17] In yet another letter to Penelope Delta (no. 139, January 1912), Palamas underlined the general difference between her Basil and his: "Πόσο μὲ συγκίνησε – τί φαντάζεστε; ὁ ἥσυχος, Ὀλύμπιας ἀγαθοσύνης ἀνθρωπισμὸς τοῦ Βουλγαροκτόνου, κάτι ὅλως ἀντίθετο ἀπὸ τὸ νιτσιακὸ κάπως φάντασμα τῆς Φλογέρας τοῦ Βασιλιᾶ" (*Ἀλληλογραφία* I, 217.9-10 Kasinis). On the Nietzschean background of Palamas see B.-L. Eklund, *The Ideal and the Real. A study of the ideas in Kostis Palamas' "Ὁ Δωδεκάλογος τοῦ Γύφτου"* (Gothenburg 1972), pp. 20-39.

[18] *Anth. Pal.* III, 216.1-2 (Cougny).

are confronted here with the image of the poet as prophet, the romantic perception of Homeric poetry. And it is no coincidence that Palamas dedicated the *Flogera* to Alexandros Pallis, who had translated the *Iliad* into the *dhimotiki* of the Psycharian school, in an attempt to transform it into a Modern Greek folk-song. It is exactly this intellectual climate that is reflected in the opening speech of the flute (1.166-99). The flute is the sister of the Muses, inspired by the Sibyl and the voice of Hecuba; it has heard the famous dialogue between the Mermaid and King Alexander, it has played for Maximo and Digenis, it is poetic Fancy herself, speaking in the voice of the bird that so often announces in Modern Greek folk-songs the fate of mortals. The passage presents the continuity of Greek poetic creativity through a rich, flowing, sensual language and a skilfully crafted fifteen-syllable verse.

This "Homeric" grandeur of Palamas's language and vision finds its full development in Book 4. Here the poet describes the army of Basil, as he takes the road for Athens and passes through glorious sites of the 1821 revolution. The book opens with a description of the famous weapon of the Byzantine fleet, known in Byzantine times as "liquid fire", but in the West as the "Greek fire" (*feu grégeois*). And it is this term that Palamas uses to describe the effect of the ἑλληνικὴ φωτιὰ on the enemies of Hellenism (4.29-50). Thus, the neutral term "liquid fire" becomes – in its new form as the nationally charged "Greek fire" – the symbol of the "Great Idea". Then the flute, as if in a vision, evokes the passing of the army. Palamas draws his poetic devices from Homer, combining two famous passages from the *Iliad*: in Book 2 the "catalogue of ships" enumerates all the participants in the war against Troy; in Book 3 Helen, in the *teichoskopia* scene, introduces from the walls of Troy the Achaean chieftains down in the fields. With a similar catalogue the flute describes from the top of Mount Parnassus the various contingents of the army as they pass by down in the valley (4.51-423). In the 400-verses-long passage a tremendous array of people march by in a huge panorama. One detail deserves attention. The main part of Basil's army consists of soldiers from the areas of Macedonia and south of it. Only in one passage are soldiers from the eastern parts of the Empire included. These are the *akrites*, the border-warriors, known to

all through the *Digenis Akritis* and the figure of Digenis in the folk-songs. Once again Palamas establishes his Helladic ideology, once again the reality of Byzantium is subverted.

A dominant trait of Basil's character in the *Flogera* is his ascetic way of life (9.336-57), the result of his utter rejection of the female sex (10.49-54), a rejection based on the female image typical of *fin-de-siècle* art and literature. It is an image in which the female is contrastingly defined by a simultaneous angelic and demonic nature. It is indicative that at the end of the nineteenth century artists concentrate on the depiction of the biblical triad Delilah, Salome and Judith.[19] The three women apparently present some common characteristics: they are Middle-Easterners, they are sexually dominant and they kill the men who submit to their charms. This ideological construct appears fully developed in the *Flogera*, since the historical Empress Theophano, Basil's mother, furnishes all the necessary material for the depiction of the woman demon.[20] Book 2 takes place on the Princes' Islands, the traditional place of exile for fallen emperors at the time. The description of the scenery, where the oriental sun scorches the earth while the flowers encompass it with their heavy scent (2.48-55), signals the sensual eroticism of the East. From within this dim atmospheric setting appear the ghosts of Theophano and of the three men she has slain. Theophano is described as having this dual nature which destroys men: "Fury and Sphinx, you living flesh, dragoness, Aphrodite! ... You, sin and salvation, and resurrection and death" (2.212, 289).

This is for Palamas the erotic and decadent climate of Byzantium. When Basil, therefore, in Book 10, having rejected women, denies that he was born of a woman and suggests that his ancestors are the mythical Centaurs (10.55-8), the poet ultimately removes the ascetic emperor from his corrupt Oriental surroundings in which he has accidentally been found and gives him back to the pure Helladic culture to which he naturally belongs.

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[19] See B. Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity. Fantasies of feminine evil in fin-de-siècle culture* (New York-Oxford 1986), pp. 352-401.

[20] On the sources see Kasinis, *Παράδοση*, pp. 64-77.

We will conclude our discussion of the *Flogera* with a look at Palamas's attitude towards the texts which formed the sources of his poem. For one thing, except for the two mottoes, no other medieval text or author is ever mentioned in the poem, in contrast to ancient authors, like Homer and Hesiod. What we do find is a straight attack on Byzantine learned literature, an attack that reflects the prevailing opinion of the nineteenth century towards the main bulk of Byzantine literary production. In Book 10 Basil himself accuses the orators and philosophers of his day as people of sterile imagination writing in a dead language. This is juxtaposed to the vigorous language of the workers and the people, the language of the folk-song, which is closest to the emperor's heart (10.59-94).[21] We have here a projection of the language debate back to the Byzantine world. Interestingly enough, the material for this attack is furnished by Michael Psellos (1018-1079) in his *Chronography*. In a passage from the chapter on Basil, the Byzantine chief minister criticizes the emperor for not cultivating education at his court, for not using the written laws, but judging according to his personal will.[22] Basil, writes Psellos, "was not a fluent speaker. The phrases were not rounded off, nor were they lengthened into periods. In fact, he clipped his words, with little pauses between them, more like a peasant than a man of good education."[23] This is heavy criticism by an intellectual and politician who considered education and learning as *the* means for governing the State and upholding its image. Palamas, in reversing Psellos's criticism to praise, produces the final removal of "his" Byzantium from the conventions of the age that he purportedly describes, while simultaneously introducing the Helladic ideal of *dhimotiki*, which contrasts with the Phanariot tradition of *katharevousa*.

And it is with *katharevousa* as a stylistic medium that we can start our analysis of Cavafy's Byzantium. It is indicative of the rivalry and lack of understanding between Helladic and

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21 See also the attack on Byzantine rhetoric in 9.102-107.

22 Psell. *Chron.* I.29 (I, 40-42 Impellizzeri).

23 Psell. *Chron.* I.36.21-24 (I, 52-54 Impellizzeri). Translation by E.R.A. Sewter, *Michael Psellus. Fourteen Byzantine rulers* (Harmondsworth 1966), p. 49.

Hellenic intellectuals at the turn of the century that Palamas criticized Cavafy for his very use of *katharevousa*, which for him was false to the traditions of the Greek language and therefore unpoetic.[24]

But Cavafy (born 1863 and died 1933 in Alexandria) did not belong to the main stream of Greek literary production, not out of lack of knowledge of developments there, but out of lack of cultural affinity. His is the world of Hellenic Hellenism; cosmopolitan, restrained, profoundly sensitive to history as a continuous context rather than as a conscious evoking, educated and fluent in other languages, he has no inclination or need to define himself as a "Hellene" of "Hellas".[25] His choice of subjects, therefore, appears at least understandable within his Alexandrian context.[26]

One obvious difference between Palamas and Cavafy is the latter's approach to composition. His poems are always short, individual scenes, firmly focused on one episode, one person or one feeling. In contrast to Palamas who, inspired by one episode, uses it as a nucleus to a huge canvas, Cavafy, inspired by a scene of

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[24] See, indicatively, K. Palamas, *Ἅπαντα*, XII (Athens 1960), p. 175 (on the problems of Cavafy's λόγος and στίχος) and p. 356 (Cavafy's problematic γλώσσα). For an overt attack see Psycharis's short but brutal comment of 1924 (reprinted in *Νέα Ἑστία* 74 [1963] 1404).

[25] Note Cavafy's comment "Εἶμαι καὶ ἐγὼ Ἑλληνικός. Προσοχή, ὄχι Ἕλλην, οὔτε Ἑλληνίζων, ἀλλὰ Ἑλληνικός", remembered by G. Hatziandreas, i.e. Stratis Tsirkas, and reported by T. Malanos, *Ὁ ποιητὴς Κ.Π. Καβάφης. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ τὸ ἔργο του* (Athens ^{3}1957), p. 235.

[26] For a comprehensive analysis of Cavafy's poetics with substantial bibliography see M. Pieris, *Χώρος, Φως και Λόγος. Η διαλεκτική του "μέσα-έξω" στην ποίηση του Καβάφη* (Athens 1992). For the documentation of Cavafy's relation to Byzantium, his historical readings and comments see the profound study by Diana Haas, *Le problème religieux dans l'oeuvre de Cavafy. Les années de formation [1882-1905]* (Diss. Paris IV-Sorbonne 1987), which is about to appear in the monograph series of the French Institute at Athens. The study by B. F. Christidis, *Ὁ Καβάφης καὶ τὸ Βυζάντιο* (Athens 1958), is useless since it is marred by errors concerning Byzantium, its history and culture, while the discussion of the poems is wholly subjective and for the most part undocumented.

the past, takes it over as a whole. Subject and poet stand on equal terms. Cavafy does not assume the role of the prophet; he is the individual reader responding to a given text that moved him deeply.[27]

I would like to demonstrate how this approach functions with one example, while pointing also to what I believe is a major theme in his poetry, particularly so in the Byzantine poems.[28] The poem in question, which has nothing to do with Byzantium, is "Ὁ Βασιλεὺς Δημήτριος" (1900).[29] In it the poet describes the escape of King Demetrios of Macedonia in 287 B.C. after he had been defeated by King Pyrrhos of Epirus. Cavafy prefixes a motto to the poem. It comes from Plutarch's *Demetrios*. Plutarch narrates how Demetrios fled: "And entering his tent, he – like an actor and not like a king – changes into a brown tunic instead of that tragic one, and slipping away he escaped."[30] In contrast to Plutarch's negative image of the king as actor,[31] Cavafy separates the two. In escaping in disguise Demetrios did not behave like a king. But his exit resembles that of an actor, who, as soon as his job is finished, changes costume and goes

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[27] On the question of the poet as reader see D.N. Maronitis, "Κ.Π. Καβάφης: *ἕνας ποιητὴς ἀναγνώστης*", in: *Κύκλος Καβάφη* [Βιβλιοθήκη Γενικῆς Παιδείας] (Athens 1984), pp. 53-80.

[28] When referring to Cavafy's "Byzantine" poems, I exclude all poems whose subject matter can be dated before the Justinianic era because of their strong focus on the "liminal" world of Late Antiquity (see Savvidis's classification in *Μικρά Καβαφικά A*, p. 98 n. 5). For an analysis of Cavafy's *anekdota* on Emperor Julian see G.W. Bowersock, "The Julian Poems of C.P. Cavafy", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 7 (1981) 89-104; for the published text with further bibliography see Renata Lavagnini, "Sette nuove poesie bizantine di Constantino Kavafis", *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici* N.S. 25 (1988) 217-81.

[29] Κ.Π. Καβάφη, *Τὰ ποιήματα (1897-1918/1919-1933)*. Νέα ἔκδοση τοῦ Γ.Π. Σαββίδη (Athens ^{2}1991), I, p. 33. The dates given in parentheses refer to each poem's date of composition and not of its publication.

[30] Plut. *Dem.* 44.9 (*Vitae Parallelae* III, 50 Ziegler).

[31] The negative image of the theatre is a key motif in Plutarch's *Demetrios* (e.g, 18.5, 28.1, 41.5-8, 44.9, 53.1, 53.10) and its famous counterpart *Antony*. On the whole issue see Plutarch, *Life of Antony*. Edited by C.B.R. Pelling (Cambridge 1988), pp. 21-2.

home. The theatrical image, therefore, is not negative but merely explicative. Cavafy as reader of Plutarch takes over the specific scene, he even incorporates an inconspicuous reference to the ancient author,[32] but shifts the imagery slightly to create a varied effect. His approach is not synthetic, like Palamas's, but analytic and mimetic. As a technique of textual reception it stands much closer to the rhetorical theory of Late Antiquity and Byzantium than to contemporary practices.[33] Moreover, through the use of the theatrical imagery, he imports the notion of illusion: what appears to be is not what is. The reader Cavafy is fully aware of history as a stage. This early poem is the first to address the question of theatre and illusion in so clear a manner.[34]

It is this change of roles that is most powerfully conveyed in our first example from the Byzantine poems. "Μανουὴλ Κομνηνὸς" (1905)[35] takes as its theme the death of Emperor Manuel I Komnenos in September of 1180. The source of the scene is the late twelfth-century historian Niketas Choniates.[36] Choniates describes the whole episode in a highly critical manner. Manuel, who was a fervent admirer of astrology, was suffering from a serious disease, but believed that he would live for another fourteen years. The astrologers around him were announcing blatant falsehoods. Finally, recognizing that he had no hope of living, he gave the patriarch a document rejecting astrology and asked for a monastic habit. But there was none to be found in the imperial apartments, so a black cloak was brought, which he put on. Niketas adds that the cloak was short and did not cover the emperor's legs. Everybody wept,

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[32] "They say" in v. 4 is obviously Plutarch.

[33] On Byzantium see H. Hunger, "On the Imitation (μίμησις) of Antiquity in Byzantine literature", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 23-24 (1969-70) 17-38.

[34] Helen Catsaouni, "Cavafy and the Theatrical Representation of History", *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 10 (1983) 105-16, is concerned with the "theatricality" of Cavafy's poems rather than "theatrical illusion" as both ideological construct and poetical device. See also G.P. Savvidis, "Ο Καβάφης περὶ ἐκκλησίας καὶ θεάτρου (1963)", in id., *Μικρά Καβαφικά B* (Athens 1987), pp. 31-48 on Cavafy's opinions about the theatre and his "dramatic" sensitivity.

[35] Savvidis (2nd ed.) I, p. 51.

[36] Nik. Chon. *Chron. Dieg.* 220.10-222.64 (van Dieten).

contemplating the ugliness of the human body at the hour of death and the vanity of human affairs.[37]

Cavafy condenses the scene. The critical statements of Choniates have been removed. The emperor remembers the pious customs of his youth and asks for the monastic habit, which is brought to him. He is content "ποὺ δείχνει | ὅψι σεμνὴν ἱερέως ἢ καλογήρου" (vv. 10-11). The statement at the end of the poem encapsulates the image of illusion created by the monastic habit. Manuel believes and ends his life in piety, but for himself. The poet leaves it to the reader to decide which role – emperor or monk – is the true one. What Cavafy does not do is to antagonize Choniates. The dramatic condensing and shift of imagery, while serving the purpose of the poet, does not cancel the Byzantine source.[38]

In contrast to Palamas's rejection of Byzantine literature, Cavafy takes this very issue as the subject of his poem "Βυζαντινὸς Ἄρχων, ἐξόριστος, στιχουργῶν" (1921).[39] The poem is a monologue by a fictional dignitary of the State.[40] The official excuses his composition of mythological epigrams on account of boredom in his place of banishment, following the machinations of Eirene Doukaina, wife of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos who usurped the throne in 1081, since the speaker was a trusted counsellor of the fallen Emperor Nikephoros III Botaneiates. He defends his compositions by insisting that a) he has an excellent knowledge of the Bible and patristic literature, thus pre-empting any suspicion about his faith, and b) he is a skilled metrician, which is probably the reason for his punish-

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[37] On Choniates's criticism of emperors in general see F.H. Tinnefeld, *Kategorien der Kaiserkritik in der byzantinischen Historiographie von Prokop bis Niketas Choniates* (Munich 1971), pp. 158-79 and on Manuel in particular see P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos 1143-1180* (Cambridge 1993), pp. 477-88; neither of them discusses the specific episode.

[38] For a full analysis of the poem and its motivic connection to "Ὁ Βασιλεὺς Δημήτριος" see Haas, *Problème religieux*, pp. 434-58.

[39] Savvidis (2nd ed.) II, p. 27.

[40] Mavrogordato's suggestion (C.P. Cavafy, *Poems*. Translated by J. Mavrogordato with an introduction by R. Warner [London 1951], p. 127) that the protagonist is Emperor Michael VII (1071-1078) is not supported by the poem's internal evidence (see Savvidis [2nd ed.] II, p. 113).

ment. At first sight the poem appears clear: a somewhat antiquated and probably silly gentleman has involved himself in some stupid political affair which ended with his banishment. He thinks that he is a poet but actually produces bad verse, and Cavafy is being ironic.

I would suggest that Cavafy stages here his theatre of illusions. The play is at the expense of the reader who cannot decode the text unless he is aware of Byzantine culture.[41] Four points make the text incomprehensible: 1) an understanding of the poem's historical frame is unthinkable without a good knowledge of late eleventh-century history; 2) the excuses of the speaker make no sense if the reader is not aware of the dangers involved in an accusation of paganism; 3) the reader does not understand why an intellectual in the eleventh century should compose poems on mythological subjects; 4) the reader cannot believe that quality of verse can be a reason for punishment.

Now, Cavafy himself was very much aware of these things, not only because of his extensive reading of modern historians, but because of his interest in Byzantine literature, poetry in particular.[42] This is most obviously manifested by an article he wrote in 1892 entitled "Οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ Ποιηταί", where he presents Karl Krumbacher's *History of Byzantine Literature* to the Alexandrian public.[43] It is not accidental that Cavafy focused on the figure of Christophoros Mytilenaios, one of the best epigram poets of the late eleventh century and a high official of State. But to return to the poem. First of all, there is no question that the spatial distinction "place of exile"/ "Constantinople" is in favour of the latter. The banished official wishes very much to return to the capital. But above all, the fact

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[41] It is the trap into which G. Jusdanis (*The Poetics of Cavafy. Textuality, Eroticism, History* [Princeton 1987], pp. 55-7) has fallen in his interpretation of the poem.

[42] See the instructive remarks of Diana Haas, "'Στον ἐνδοξό μας Βυζαντινισμό': σημειώσεις για ένα στίχο του Καβάφη", *Διαβάζω* 78 (1983) 76-81 and ead., *Problème religieux*, pp. 95-137.

[43] "Οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ Ποιηταί", *Τηλέγραφος Ἀλεξανδρείας* 11/25-4-1892, reprinted in Κ.Π. Καβάφη, *Πεζά*. Σχόλια Γ.Α. Παπουτσάκη (Athens 1963), pp. 43-50. On this article and its context see Haas, *Problème religieux*, pp. 72-94.

that he insists on writing verses on subjects highly problematic at the time – it is exactly during these years that the philosopher Ioannes Italos is banished from the capital under the accusation of paganism[44] – and that these verses are recapturing the world of the past, is indicative of Cavafy's own aesthetic approach. To a certain degree the Hellenic intellectual identifies with the Byzantine administrator-poet (and Cavafy was himself poet and civil servant), who feels a stranger to the new intellectual trends prevailing around him. Byzantium becomes the curtain which hides or reveals the stage of the poet's thoughts. Here we detect yet another difference from Palamas, who minimalized the historical frame within an expanded concept, while Cavafy minimalizes his poetry in front of the historical background. Moreover, it becomes obvious that the irony of the poem's last verse (Αὐτὴ ἡ ὀρθότης, πιθανόν, εἶν' ἡ αἰτία τῆς μομφῆς) is not only directed by the poet towards the speaker, but through the speaker (*qua* poet) to the reader.

But how does Cavafy approach an actual text? In the poem "Ἄννα Κομνηνὴ" (1917),[45] Cavafy presents us with princess Anna Komnene, daughter of Emperor Alexios I and wife of Caesar Nikephoros Bryennios. Komnene, sometime after 1138, wrote a historical biography of her father, entitled *Alexiad*. The poem opens with a reference to the prologue of the *Alexiad*, where the princess painfully remembers the death of her husband. Cavafy actually quotes the text, merging it beautifully with his verse and style. Then he reveals that what Komnene is really mourning is the loss of kingship, which her brother managed to take away from her. Once again, Cavafy only indicates the events without a knowledge of which the reader cannot fully comprehend the situation.

Cavafy here, in contrast to our previous examples, makes the text the centre of his poem. A first thought is to go to the original. And indeed, in the last chapter of the prologue[46] we find the passages in question and also some expressions which

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[44] L. Clucas, *The trial of John Italos and the crisis of intellectual values in Byzantium in the eleventh century* [Miscellanea Byzantina Monacensia 26] (Munich 1981).

[45] Savvidis (2nd ed,) II, p. 26.

[46] Komn. *proem.* IV (I, 7-9 Leib).

are paraphrased. The obvious inference is that Cavafy read the *Alexiad* and, inspired by the reading, composed the poem. But this inference is wrong. Cavafy leads us to believe this by means of the quotations and the poem's focusing. But the actual source of his inspiration is a passage from Paparrigopoulos, whom Cavafy had read extensively.[47] Paparrigopoulos, at the end of his analysis of Alexios's reign, comes to speak about Anna and her younger brother Ioannes.[48] The historian criticizes Anna for intriguing to have her husband crowned, an intrigue for which she found support from her mother, the very Eirene Doukaina who had banished our poet-administrator. What strikes the eye of the reader are two words used by Paparrigopoulos: φιλαρχία for Anna's desire of kingship and προπετὴς for Ioannes's slanderous characterization by his mother.[49] They are also the key-words in the poem's third part. Cavafy has created a synthesis in which Anna's text is interpreted and "corrected" by the modern historian.

This triangular relationship of poet/medieval author/ modern historian forms the basis of our last example, which represents the final synthesis of memory, mimesis and melancholy in Cavafy's Byzantine world. "Ἀπὸ ὑαλὶ χρωματιστὸ" (1925)[50] is one of the two Byzantine poems whose title does not reveal its Byzantine subject.[51] The speaker begins by saying that he is strongly moved by a detail in the coronation of Ioannes and Eirene Kantakouzenos in May of 1347. They had only a few jewels left and so used artificial ones. Coloured pieces of glass adorned their crowns. These are, in the speaker's opinion, a pro-

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[47] See Diana Haas, "Cavafy's reading notes on Gibbon's 'Decline and Fall'", *Folia Neohellenica* 4 (1982) 25-96; on Paparrigopoulos in particular ibid. p. 27.

[48] K. Paparrigopoulos, *Ἱστορία τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ Ἔθνους ἀπὸ τῶν ἀρχαιοτάτων χρόνων μέχρι τῶν νεωτέρων* (Athens [2]1885-7), IV, pp. 510-11. Paparrigopoulos closely follows the remarks on Anna and Ioannes by Choniates (*Chron. Dieg.* 4-6 van Dieten).

[49] The adjective προπετὴς is used by Choniates (*Chron. Dieg.* 5.92-3 van Dieten), a point seen by Mavrogordato (see his translation p. 115), but not φιλαρχία or φίλαρχος for Anna.

[50] Savvidis (2nd ed.) II, p. 50. 1925 is the date of publication; the date of composition is unknown (see Savvidis [2nd ed.] II, p. 129).

[51] The other one is "Ἴμενος" (1915).

test against the unjust wretchedness of the royal couple; they are the symbols of what they should have had at their coronation.

The speaker is consistent in distancing himself as reader from his unnamed source and in placing himself within the context of the Byzantine State, thus distancing himself from us as well. The immediate source for this "detail" is a passage from *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon.[52] Cavafy had a copy of the voluminous work in his library and had annotated it extensively.[53] Gibbon maliciously describes the disgrace of the Roman Empire. In a footnote, he reveals his source and quotes from it a line about the pieces of glass. This source is the historian Nikephoros Gregoras from the mid-fourteenth century.[54] He describes the coronation of the imperial couple at the Blachernai Church. Nikephoros was a close associate of Kantakouzenos. He concludes the scene with the statement: "Thus did flow away and were erased and brought low the matters concerning the ancient happiness and splendour of the Roman State; so that I cannot narrate them but with a sense of shame."

Cavafy as reader proceeded in two phases: he read Gibbon, his inspiration was caught by the scene, he went to Gregoras and, merging medieval and modern historian into one, contradicted them by changing the very object of the theatrical illusion into the symbol of truth instead of falsehood. What is, unquestionably, remarkable in the poem is the speaker's intervention about the poverty of "our wretched state" (v. 5 τοῦ ταλαιπώρου κράτους μας ἦταν μεγάλ' ἡ πτώχεια). I believe that, as in the case of the banished administrator, the speaker is partly Cavafy. Such a statement, concealed under the cloak of the historical setting, is the expression of Hellenic ideology, aware

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[52] E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* Edited by J.B. Bury (London 1898), VI, p. 503. This was already detected by Mavrogordato, p. 145.

[53] See Savvidis (as above n. 1) and Haas (as above n. 47) *passim.*

[54] Nik. Greg. *Rhom. Hist.* XV.11.3 (II, 788.15-789.8 Bonn). See also the analysis of the scene in Nikephoros Gregoras, *Rhomäische Geschichte.* Übersetzt und erläutert von J.L. van Dieten. Dritter Teil: Kapitel XII-XVII [Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur 24] (Stuttgart 1988), pp. 170-1.

of the futility of an ecumenical dream and intent on preserving through *mimesis* the cultural heritage of the past.

Cavafy's understated image of Byzantium is thus far more Byzantine in concept and expression than Palamas's grandiose and orientalist *Byzantine Rhapsody* about the Helladic "Great Idea". It was, however, this latter image that defined the reception of Byzantium in twentieth-century Greek literature, as numerous works by N. Kazantzakis, A. Terzakis, A. Vlachos, K. Kyriazis and others only too clearly demonstrate.

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