

Abstract

Hellenism, throughout its millennia of historical existence, has mainly been associated with the West: Athens, Rome, and Jerusalem are often regarded as providing the main pillars of “Western Civilization”, whatever the semantics attributed to this term might be. However, in this paper it is argued that, not only geographically, but also culturally, Hellenism might well have very strongly reciprocally influenced cultures that are usually classified as more “Eastern” – starting from Persia to Arabia and to the Islamic civilization, and moving all the way, through the Indian subcontinent, to Central Asia and the Far East. In this paper, through a collection of 12 moments and portraits, a first sampling of the spatio-temporal axis of the convolution of Hellas and the East is provided, with a special emphasis to the main ingredients of this most interesting living synergy: not only Times and Places, but most importantly People and Ideas.

Introduction

The arrival of the Proto-Greeks [1] to the southern tip of the Balkans, is usually dated at the end of the 3rd millennium BC. Since then, Hellenism has passed through many historical phases: From the Cycladic and the Minoan, through the Mycenaean, to the Classical, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, all the way to the modern Greek State. As witnessed by the three main names used when referring to the Greeks, there seem to always have been three different viewpoints towards them (“Greeks-Grece” when viewing Greece from the West, “Yunan-Yavan” [2] when viewed from the East, and “Hellenes-Έλληνες” when viewed from their own self). But apart from the auto- and hetero-images, it is worth noting that throughout their history, Greeks were never confined to the geographical limits of their traditional homeland; through commerce, merchant shipping, and exchanges of goods and ideas, they were always in contact with the rest of the world. Most importantly, through an active and dynamic worldwide diaspora, which nowadays [3] arguably accounts for as much as one third of the total greek population, they were present all over the earth, actively participating in their local communities, and in direct and fruitful interaction with Humanity.

One can argue that there exist multiple elements which constitute the core of the Hellenic Identity, throughout the ages. These might be either normatively or empirically defined. Any quick informal observation of the hetero-image of the Greeks might well include concepts such as “Sun”, “Beach”, “Islands” but also “Democracy”, “Philosophy”, “Olympic” as well as a semantic proximity to “Europe” and recently, and hopefully as a short-lived new addendum to the corpus, to “Crisis”. Hellenism has had numerous strongly fruitful interactions with the “West”, which have been instrumental to the birth of many of the central elements of Western Civilization, given a) the direct continuation of Hellenism within the Roman

civilization (from the Roman Pantheon to the education and initiation of Roman Nobility), b) the strong convolution of Hellenism with Judaism [4] (the blending of Platonic and Orphic terms with traditional Judaism, and mixing of populations, leading to Christianity) and c) Hellenism's strong underpinning of the European Renaissance [5] and the Enlightenment (from Chrysoloras to Plethon Gemistos to the birth of the Opera, to the classical underpinnings of the founding fathers of America [6] and beyond). Most importantly, the central position of "Democracy" and its associated core values in the Western system also create a strong link to Hellenism. Thus, overall, there exist many good reasons behind the traditional association between Hellenism and the West. However – the obvious question follows: as strong as this link might be, could one just exclude the possibility of equipotentially strong – albeit more subtle and less known – interactions with the East, too? Interactions which might have resulted to very strong mutual reshaping, and to highly interesting and important intellectual, cultural, and even human, offspring? This is the exactly the question that we will start exploring in this paper.

Twelve specific episodes, together with some of their main protagonists, where known, were chosen for our initial exploration. These range from 1500 BC to the 20th century – and starting from the Near East, move all the way to the Bering Strait and the Pacific Ocean. They involve many of the world's most significant civilizations: from Egypt, to Persia, to the Islamic caliphates and the Seljuk Empire, all the way to the birth of Buddhism, Central Asia, Siam, and to modern Japan. The exposition that will follow is at the pre-systematic stage: it mainly provides some attentional focal points to the reader, as sources for inspiration and further exploration. The material provided will hopefully produce offspring not only within the spheres of the scientific (history, history of science and philosophy, eastern and Hellenic studies), but also within the cultural sphere (history-inspired arts, such as the amazing re-paintings of ancient characters by Cavafy [7], documentaries, movies, theatre, interactive and electronic museum items), and within the diplomatic and humanistic spheres of bridge-building towards the increased consciousness of the strong dynamic and interactive interdependence and common heritage of Humanity as a whole. And thus, it will hopefully bring us one step closer, to the realization of the "Land Beyond" that is awaiting for us to enter - when the Mind's Eye can fluidly move beyond the here and now and self to the ever-increasing spatial and temporal extents of the history of our planet, and to realizing the world through millions of other eyes, past, present, and future, that could be participating in what Plato once referred to (as the Cosmic Being in *Timaeus* [8] and the *Anima Mundi*), and many other have glimpsed in multitude, throughout the Ages. Let us thus start our voyage!

Episode 1: 1500BC – Minoan/Cycladic trade with Egypt and Babylon

"...In the days of a unified Egypt and a strong Babylon, Minoan merchants were also based at Ugarit, and their so-called Kamaers pottery found its way along the trade routes to the Nile Valley...quantities of high-value items were exchanged for near-Eastern tin and Anatolian copper...Minoan connections reached out to the small

kingdoms of the Greek mainland; ... Minoan influence also stretched to the coast of Anatolia through the Cyclades” (P. Collins, From Egypt to Babylon: The international age 1550-500BC [9])

Ancient Egypt, first unified from upper Egypt and lower Egypt under the King Menes, together with Babylon, were the two strong poles of the ancient near east. The Minoans and Cycladits, through trading [10], had frequent and vital connections to both of these poles; and it was not only products that were flowing, but also Ideas and traditions. Even during the reign of the unique “apostate” Pharaoh Amenophis the 3rd (AkhenAton [11]), who changed the religious system of Egypt from Polytheism to a form of Monotheism, with the Sun Disk becoming the symbol of the Unique Divinity, and moved over the capital to Tel Amarna, in which a wealth of diplomatic correspondence exists, there is proof of the lasting effects of contact: arguably, the art of Amarna is much closer to Minoan style as compared to previous Egyptian art. However, Akhenaton’s reforms were not long-lasting: soon after his death in 1334BC, the old religion and system was quickly restored. Egypt was a key interaction partner to Hellas for a very long period: and it has a primary position in the next two Episodes, moving over from 550BC all the way to 1AD and later.

Episode 2: 550BC – Pythagoras studies in Egypt and Babylonia

“Here in Egypt he frequented all the temples with the greatest diligence, and most studious research, during which time he won the esteem and admiration of all the priests and prophets with whom he associated. Having most solicitously familiarized himself with every detail, he did not, nevertheless, neglect any contemporary celebrity, whether sage renowned for wisdom, or peculiarly performed mystery; he did not fail to visit any place where he thought he might discover something worthwhile. That is how he visited all of the Egyptian priests, acquiring all the wisdom each possessed. He thus passed twenty-two years in the sanctuaries of temples, studying astronomy and geometry, and being initiated in no casual or superficial manner in all the mysteries of the Gods. At length, however, he was taken captive by the soldiers of Cambyses, and carried off to Babylon. Here he was overjoyed to associate with the Magi, who instructed him in their venerable knowledge, and in the most perfect worship of the Gods. Through their assistance, likewise, he studied and completed arithmetic, music, and all the other sciences. After twelve years, about the fifty-sixth year of his age, he returned to Samos.” (Iamblichus, The Life of Pythagoras [12])

Pythagoras, a historical figure of semi-mythical dimensions, was one of the major pre-socratic philosophers, and the person to which humanity owns the term “Mathematician”. He was born in the Aegean island of Samos, opposite to modern-day Smyrna in Asia Minor, before moving on to Croton in Southern Italy. He established the famous Pythagorean school, which contained both strongly-bound member (Mathematicians) who could both hear results as well as see the face of their teacher and learn the proofs behind the results, as well as lightly-bound members (Acusmatics) who could only hear specific results relevant to their craft,

without justification and connection to a more universal system of knowledge. Silence, in a metaphorical sense but also for a number of years, and often secrecy, were most important in the Pythagorean school, who sought to understand, explain, and predict the Universe through Number. Especially integer ratios, and the conception of Harmony and Microcosm-Macrocosm analogies, had a primary position within the system of Pythagorean thought.

The long and deep contact of Pythagoras through his trips, with the Egyptian and the Zoroastrian (Persian) priests (arguably also the Chaldeans), played a fundamental role in the cross-fertilization of ideas, and in the creation of his system. The Pythagorean school [13] continued long after Pythagoras himself, and further fertilized the main sequence of classical philosophers, through Plato, one of the two primary teachers of his (alongside Socrates) was a Pythagorean himself. And of course, through Plato, the academic descendancy lineage continues with Aristotle (a student of Plato), and then Alexander the Great (a student of Aristotle), who through his conquest of Egypt and the creation of a mixed Egyptian-Hellenic nobility, brings us over to our next stop: the magnificent Ptolemaic Alexandria.

Episode 3: 250BC – Ptolemaic Alexandria

The library of Alexandria was part of the Musaeum of Alexandria, the “house of the Muses”. And arguably, especially of “Calliope and Ourania, which comes after her, to which the crickets communicate which humans spend their time with Philosophy and pay tribute to this art”, in Plato’s words (from Socrates’s dialogue with Phaedrus [14]). The library functioned as a research institute, and the Musaeum also hosted facilities for studying anatomy, astronomy, and even had a zoo. Numerous amazing thinkers frequented the Musaeum, such as Euclid, Eratosthenes, Herophilus, Erasistratus, Hipparchus, Pappus, Hypatia, and Aristarchus of Samos.

Hellenistic Alexandria was indeed an amazing city – the center of learning of its times. So many interesting portraits to follow; from Euclid, the father of logical axiomatization and modern geometry, to Eratosthenes who also became the chief Librarian, to Hipparchus the Astronomer, to Aristarchus who first proposed the Heliocentric system – all had passed from the unique center. Even the ill-fated Hypatia [14], probably the most famous woman mathematician of ancient times, next to Pythagoras’s wife Theano. Furthermore, Alexandria is strongly connected to the survival and spreading of the ancient Jewish scriptures: with a large, strong and vibrant Jewish community the city herself, she facilitated the translation of the Scriptures to Greek (according to tradition, in the island of Pharos): an act which enabled the extensively Hellenized diaspora to continue its contact with them, and thus later underpinned the growth of Christianity. These were the days of Alexandria, where people would walk in beautiful streets decorated with the ancient robot-automata of Heron [15].

Episode 4: 200BC – Hellenistic Jordan and Syria

“Although the influence of Greek culture had been felt in Jordan previously, Alexander the Great’s conquest of the Middle East and Central Asia firmly consolidated the influence of Hellenistic culture. The Greeks founded new cities in Jordan, such as Umm Qais (known as Gadara) and renamed others, such as Amman (renamed from Rabbath-Ammon to Philadelphia) and Jerash (renamed from Garshu to Antioch, and later to Gerasa). Many of the sites built during this period were later redesigned and reconstructed during the Roman, Byzantine and Islamic eras, so only fragments remain from the Hellenistic period. Greek was established as the official language, although Aramaic remained the primary spoken language of ordinary people.” (Government of Jordan, A living tribute to the legacy of King Hussein I [16])

Alongside many other ancient civilizations of Shaam, such as the Nabateans [17], which created monuments such as Petra, a most important period in the history of Jordan and Syrian, starts in Hellenistic times. Not only a wide mix of populations arises in the region, but also city structure becomes strongly Hellenized; gyms and theatres, as well as open agoras become central features. Quite a number of interesting stories and figures exist from this period. The extent of Hellenization though also creates reactions, when it starts to threaten long-lasting traditions. For example, the Jewish festival of Hannukah, one of the major festivals of Judaism, commemorates the “Maccabean revolt” [18]: During the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, the Seleucid king of the region, a large number of Jews was strongly adopting Greek customs, and getting distanced from the traditional Jewish values and way of life. Furthermore, according to the Torah, Antiochus demanded to be worshipped not only as King but as a deity himself. In reaction to this, the pious family of the Maccabees, organized a revolt, and thus helped preserve their traditional values and way of life.

Episode 5: 300BC to 300AD – Hellas in Central Asia

“δέκα ἐτῶν πληρη[...]^{ων} βασι[λ]εὺς Πιοδασσης εὐσέβεια[ν ἔδ]ε[ι]ξεν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, καὶ ἀπὸ τούτου εὐσεβεστέρους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐποίησεν καὶ πάντα εὐθηνεῖ κατὰ πᾶσαν γῆν καὶ ἀπέχεται βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐμψύχων καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ δὲ εἴ τινας ἀκρατεῖς πέπαυνται τῆς ἀκρασίας κατὰ δύναμιν, καὶ ἐνήκοοι πατρὶ καὶ μητρὶ καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων παρὰ τὰ πρότερον καὶ τοῦ λοιποῦ λῶιον καὶ ἄμεινον κατὰ πάντα ταῦτα ποιοῦντες διάξουσιν.” in the words of King Ashoka, translated to:

“Ten years (of reign) having been completed, King Piodasses (Ashoka) made known (the doctrine of) Piety (εὐσέβεια, Eusebeia) to men; and from this moment he has made men more pious, and everything thrives throughout the whole world. And the king abstains from (killing) living beings, and other men and those who (are) huntsmen and fishermen of the king have desisted from hunting. And if some (were) intemperate, they have ceased from their intemperance as was in their power; and obedient to their father and mother and to the elders, in opposition to the past also

in the future, by so acting on every occasion, they will live better and more happily." (King Ashoka, Edict of Kandahar, Trans. by G.P. Carratelli)

It is widely known that Alexander reached as far as the Hindu Kush [19]; that he fought fierce battles with Elephants, and that he was willing to reach the end of the world. It is much less known, though, how long and lasting was the presence and effect of Hellenism in the subcontinent and Central Asia. From 300BC to 300AD (and arguably also later), there are multiple aspects of this exciting period:

1) The Greco-Bactrian kingdom: After the dissolution of Alexander's empire to the states of the diadochi (Ptolemies, Seleucids, Antigonids), and despite the mass marriages and the mixed nobility, soon the core of the Persian empire reverted back to the old religion. However, Bactria (close to modern-day Afghanistan), retained its Hellenistic character for a much longer time [20].

2) The Indo-Greek kingdom: A Hellenistic Kingdom covering the northwest region of the subcontinent, with Punjab, Taxila and other cities serving as capitals [20-23]. The Indo-Greek monarchies used a mixture of both Indian (Hindu and Buddhist) as well as Greek symbols and religions. Numerous famous monuments of Greco-Buddhist art (such as the Bamiyan Buddhas, intentionally blown up by the Taliban regime [24]) arise from this period, which finishes when the Scythians invade around 10AD. However, Greek-speaking as well as hellenized populations remain though certainly all the way through to the Kushan empire, which we briefly mention below.

3) Greco-Buddhism: (330BC-300AD): With the rich contact between greek, hindu, and buddhist elements in the Indo-Greek kingdoms and beyond, cultural syncretism flourished, resulting to Greco-Buddhism. Both the artistic as well as spiritual-philosophical dimensions of Buddhism, especially for the case of the Mahayana branch, were affected. More specifically, the contact between philosophers [25] accompanying Alexander and Indian ascetics, described as Gymnosophists in Greek sources, played a very important role in this bi-directional transformation. Pyrrho (360-270 BCE) became the first Skeptic after returning to Greece: "Nothing really exists, but human life is governed by convention, Nothing is in itself more than that" (Diogenes Laertius IX.61). Diogenes Laertius also states that Pyrrho's ideas were greatly influenced by his Indian experiences. Another very interesting document pointing to direct religious interaction between Greek and Buddhist thought is the "Milinda Panha" [26], a dialogue written in Platonic style, between the Greco-Bactrian King Menander (Milinder) and the Buddhist monk Nagasena. Also, during Menander's times, a Greek Buddhist Monk named Mahadharmaraksita, led 30,000 monks from Alexandria (one of the cities that Alexander founded in Central Asia) to Sri Lanka, according to the Mahavamsa [27]. And, apart from active involvement of Greeks in Buddhism, there were also many greek-language Buddhist inscriptions, and quite importantly, Greco-buddhist art, as mentioned above.

4) The Kushan empire (30AD-375AD): The last generally accepted stronghold of Hellenistic elements in South Asia. Kushan was an empire centered around the Hindu Kush and the Pamir mountains, but with borders that sometimes reached as far as Kashgar and Turfan in China's Xinjiang: "Kushan also spelled Kusana, a line descended from the Yuezhi, a people that ruled over most of the northern Indian subcontinent, Afghanistan, and parts of Central Asia during the first three centuries of the Common Era. The Yuezhi conquered Bactria in the 2nd century BCE and divided the country into five chiefdoms, one of which was that of the Kushans (Guishuang). A hundred years later the Kushan chief Kujula Kadphises secured the political unification of the Yuezhi kingdom under himself." [28] The Kushanite coins use Greek characters; and they refer to a mixture of Greco-Roman, Zoroastrian as well as Buddhist deities. The official language seems to have switched at one point from Greek to Bactrian, an eastern Iranian language, written however using the Greek script. Greek though was certainly spoken though from part of the population, well into the 4th century AD.

Episode 6: 530AD – Plato's Academy in Persia

In 529 AD, two years after the rise of Emperor Justinian to the Byzantine throne, Justinian closed the revived Neoplatonic Academy, which Proclus reports to have visited during his arrival in Athens in the decade of 430. Damascius was the last scholar, and the primary remaining source of this event is Agathias. A number of academics sought protection under the Persian King Khosrau I of the Sassanid dynasty. There is speculation also that some academics might have travelled to Harran [29], and a second academy might have survived for three or more centuries, connecting it to the Baghdad translation movement.

Despite the short-lived revival of the ancient religion by Julian the Apostate, by the sixth century AD Christianity was clearly dominant in almost every aspect of the life of the Eastern Roman - Byzantine Empire. Ancient schools, which contained metaphysical assumptions that might be thought of as alien to mainstream canonized Christianity, or which contained social structures that could be thought of as dangerous when it comes to their operational power, were often not tolerated. Thus, the academicians needed to find a new home – and Sassanid Persia, under the enlightened Khosrau the 1st, also called Anushervan (the Immortal Soul), seemed like an appropriate home to some of them. The very few sources that we have regarding their trip and fate indicate that it was not as successful as they might have thought of, initially; however, their strong contact catalyzed a new era of learning for the region: and it was not long before the university of Gondishapur was formed, and later paved the way for the very important translation Era of Baghdad, that took place three centuries later.

Episode 7: 650AD – Nestorian Christians in China

Together with the state-adoption and the expansion of Christianity, also came various schisms. Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople from 428-431, held the

view that the two natures of Jesus, human and divine, were highly disjoint – a form of dyophysitism. At the council of Chalcedon, Nestorianism was condemned; and soon its supporters went to Persia, which was under Sassanian rule, and integrated with the Christian community that already existed there, bringing their new doctrine with them. Strong missionary activity took place afterwards, directed towards the East; the biggest part of the outcomes of which was wiped out by the subsequent advancement of Islam and Buddhism. However, under the Tang Dynasty (618-907), Nestorian Christian communities existed as far away as China [30], with a last revival in the 13th century under the Mongol empire.

Episode 8: 820AD – The translation movement in Baghdad

“..from about the middle of the eighth century to the end of the tenth, almost all non-literary and non-historical secular Greek books that were available throughout the Eastern Byzantine Empire and the Near East were translated into Arabic. What this means is that all of the following Greek writings, other than the exceptions just noted, which have reached us from Hellenistic, Roman, and late antiquity times, and many more that have not survived in the original Greek, were subjected to the transformative magic of the translator’s pen: astrology and alchemy and the rest of the occult sciences; the subjects of the quadrivium: arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and theory of music; the entire field of Aristotelian philosophy throughout its history: metaphysics, ethics, physics, zoology, botany, and especially logic—the Organon; all the health sciences: medicine, pharmacology, and veterinary science; and various other marginal genres of writings, such as Byzantine handbooks on military science (the *tactica*), popular collections of wisdom sayings, and even books on falconry—all subjects passed through the hands of the translators” (Gutas 1998, “Greek Thought, Arabic Culture” [31])

One of the most important observations about the translation movement, which essentially preserved a big part of the ancient Greek knowledge, and retransmitted it later back to Europe, was that it was certainly not ephemeral: it had a duration of two and a half centuries. Furthermore, according to Gutas, it was supported by the whole of Abbasid Society, and although it was a huge undertaking with rigorous scholarly attitude, it also served very practical purposes, when it comes for example to the organization of legal-religious argumentation, and of official functions. Originally, it was mainly Syrian Christians as well as Greek-speaking Persians that were among the foremost translators; and although each might have come into the project with his own reasons and inclinations, called upon of course by the Caliph, the project served the core of the Caliphate as a whole.

Episode 9: 1000 AD – From the Tocharians to Ibn Sina

“...the Hellenistic tradition in Afghanistan and the Transoxiana region never totally diminished. In spite of the many invasions and immigrations passing through the region and political and religious changes there, Greek, Persian, and Indian academic traditions survived. From the mid-8th to the mid-11th centuries, the land

of cultural crossing natured many versatile brains who either went to Baghdad or stayed there to explore knowledge. Some of them made essential contributions to the culture of the Islamic world, and left great legacies to the intellectual history of the entire world. ...Therefore, in Tukharastan, the written language could not be anything else but Greek. Literary tradition impressed Xuanzang to the extent that he claimed that the literatures were even more numerous than in Sogdiana, the homeland of the famous trading community of Central Asia. Thus the region, by the mid-seventh century, was still a stronghold of Greek literature. “ (Xinru Liu, “Hellenistic Residue in Central Asia under Islam” [2])

The above fragment comes from a novel proposal by Xinru Liu, which aims to bridge the gap between the last known Hellenistic residue in Central Asia and the flourishing of Bukhara and greater Persia, in the 11th century, which produced world-class polymaths such as Ibn Sina. Ibn Sina is a prime example of the so-called “Islamic Renaissance”: he was a doctor, philosopher, and scientist, which absorbed and extended a wide range of traditions – firmly basing himself upon Aristotle and Galen, but also using Indian, Arab, Persian as well as many other elements. His “canon of medicine” was the foremost medical textbook in European Universities for almost three centuries after his death. After the 11th century, quickly, the dark ages seem to fall upon the Islamic world – for reasons that can be partially attributed to the Mongol invasion, but are thought of as being much more complex than just that.

Episode 10: 1250 AD - Neoplatonism and Islamic Mysticism

ايلا ابوبسي كند مو، خرسى كرا (Original: Greek written in Arabic script)

”Ελα απόψε κοντά μου, Χρυσή Κυρά!” (Modern Greek)

“Come near me tonight, Golden Lady!” (English)

(Dedes, 1993, translation of Gazal 582,
original in Konyali Greek written in Arabic Script,
from Sultan Waled’s Rababname)

Jalaleddin Mowlana al Rumi, usually known in the west as Rumi, is the founder of one of the world’s most prominent sufi orders, the Mevlevis, alongside the Bektashis, the Naqsbandis, and others. Apart from the Konyali poems of Rumi and his son Sultan Valed, which are written in Greek using Arabic script [32], there are multiple mentions to the “Yunanis” in his poems and in his most famous collection, the Masnevi [32]. Also, numerous accounts exist regarding his friendships and his life in Ikonium, which included numerous Greeks intellectuals, ranging from Architects to the Clergy [34]. In the works and the mystical philosophy of Rumi, as well as in numerous other Sufi traditions, there are strong Neoplatonic elements. Aflaki describes the philosophical discussions of Rumi with the monks of the Monastery of Saint Chariton (mentioned as “Deire Aflatun”, which literally means “the Monastery of Plato”).

Episode 11: 1680 AD – Constantine Gerakis in Siam (Thailand)

“Born 1647, Cephalonia, Ionian Islands, Greece—died June 5, 1688, Ayutthaya Thailand: Greek adventurer who became one of the most audacious and prominent figures in the history of 17th-century European relations with Southeast Asia. Phaulkon signed on an English merchant ship in Greece at 12 years of age and sailed to Thailand. He learned the Thai language quickly, and this ability—combined with his knowledge of Portuguese, Malay, French, and English—rendered him invaluable as an interpreter; in this capacity he served with the English East India Company in the years 1670–78. He cultivated a friendship with King Narai and offered his services to the Thai court. He rose quickly to become acting minister of finance and foreign affairs (phrakhlang), and by 1685, as virtual prime minister, he took the leading role in shaping Narai’s foreign policy.” (Encyclopedia Britannica, entry on Constantine Phaulkon)

Constantine Gerachi remains a controversial – yet amazing – figure. For some he is the exemplification of the opportunist; for others the prototype of western influence - a Greek agent of the French in Thailand. Yet for others he is a marvelous cosmopolitan Hellene, a true citizen of the world, married to Maria Guyomar, a Catholic woman of mixed Japanese-Portuguese-Bengali ancestry, and living in his classical-styled vila outside Lopburi, while offering services of high value to King Narai. Constantine came from a family that claimed noble origins; his father was a priest and noble governor of the island of Cephalonia, and his mother claimed descent from the “Phoca” imperial bloodline of Byzantium. However adventurous his life though, and however marvelous his achievements, he suffered inhumane torture and an “Oriental” murder when a plot against him succeeded. In the words of Father Marcel le Blanc, as cited in the comprehensive thesis [35]:

“...Utilizing a burning technique, the skin of the foreign minister’s (Constantine’s) soles was stripped from his feet, and screws were forced into his temples using a semi-circular head clap device. In addition, his whole body was shredded with blows from a rattan whip, and finally, Phra Pi’s head (the freshly beheaded King’s adopted son) was hung around his neck, symbolizing the fate of the current royal dynasty...”

According to [35], Constantine Gerachi’s relatives have been traced in modern Greece, several generations later.

Episode 12: 1900 AD – Lafcadio Hearn in Japan

“Lafcadio Hearn, also called (from 1895) Koizumi Yakumo (born June 27, 1850, Levkás, Ionian Islands, Greece—died Sept. 26, 1904, Ōkubo, Japan), writer, translator, and teacher who introduced the culture and literature of Japan to the West. Hearn grew up in Dublin. After a brief and spasmodic education in England and France, he immigrated to the United States at 19. He settled in Cincinnati, Ohio, working at various menial jobs and then on the Trade List, a business weekly.

Eventually he became a reporter for The Cincinnati Enquirer and later for The Cincinnati Commercial, where he contributed prose poems and scholarly essays on themes unusual for that time, such as life among urban blacks... In 1890 Hearn traveled to Japan for Harper's. He soon broke with the magazine and worked as a schoolteacher in Izumo in northern Japan. There he met Setsuko Koizumi, a Japanese lady of high Samurai rank, whom he married in 1891. Hearn's articles on Japan soon began appearing in The Atlantic Monthly and were syndicated in several newspapers in the United States. These essays and others, reflecting Hearn's initial captivation with the Japanese, were subsequently collected and published in two volumes as *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (1894) [36]... (Encyclopedia Britannica, entry on Lafcadio Hearn)

Lafcadio, the son of the Kytherean Rosa Antoniou Kasimatis and Sergeant Major Charles Bush Hearn who was stationed in Lefkada during the British occupation of the island, had a turbulent life, finally settling down in Japan at the age of 40. He was taken away from his mother at the age of 2, relocating to Ireland, with his mother suffering from the separation, and moving to the USA at the age of 19. A widely open mind, he was able to assimilate, participate, observe through multiple viewpoints, and bridge Japanese culture through the eyes of a Greek, an Anglo-Saxon, a naturalized Japanese, as well as a citizen of the world. His numerous works include essays, memoirs, collections of tales (such as the famous "Kwaidan" collection of Japanese ghost stories, which has also been transformed to a movie) and more. Lafcadio Hearn passed away in 1903. A small procession transferred his remains to an ancient temple. Behind it, two young children carried living birds in small cages which they would let free, symbolizing the escape of his soul from its shackles. The gravestone which his students created wrote: "To Lafcadio Hearn, whose pen was even stronger than the sword of the glorious nation that he fell in love with, a nation whose greatest honor has been that it was able to receive him in its arms as a citizen, and which also offered to him, alas, his grave."

Epilogue: Architects, Dragomans and Fanariots, Bridge Building in Persia

Apart from the above 12 episodes, countless other interesting stories remain to be heard, scholarly studied, and enjoyed. The role of Greeks in Constantinople also presents a very important and related field of inquiry: from the Phanariots [37] (the intellectuals of the Fener) to the Dragomans (a word arising from the Arabic "tarjome", i.e. translators and members of the foreign service of the Ottomans, such as Stephanos Carathodory [38] the father of the famous mathematician Constantine), and their role to spreading ideas of the Enlightenment as well as in numerous other important interactions, and beyond.

Many open research questions regarding Greek in the East also exist: a countless list of possibilities arises. For example: in what way are the Hellenes of the East contrasted or related to the Hellenes of the West? What is and was the mental image and brand of Hellas in different parts of the East, and vice-versa? And most

importantly, how can we use this long heritage in order to build strong mutually beneficial human bridges towards a better future? And much more.

I will thus close with a metaphor, starting from the literal and the local, and hopefully extending to the much more universal and global. In the beginning of the 21st century, bridge-building masons and craftsmen from Ipirus, where we are at the moment, were actually called to go to Persia, in order to use their unique crafts and artful skills, so that they build the bridges on which the trans-Iranian railway would be built [39], connecting Thessaloniki to Constantinople through lake Van next to Armenia to Teheran in Persia, thus facilitating a major route for bringing the East and the West together. A clear possibility thus seems to be represented in this metaphor:

Hellas needs to realize and fully mobilize its delicate yet very important position between what has been termed the “East” and the “West”. There exists a yet not fully known amount of Hellenic Memes in both; and of course, there exist a very important part of both the “West” and the “East” within Hellenism. We all three are in need of each other, and of our fruitful and consciousness-expanding interaction. And maybe part of this very delicate balancing and vitalizing role between the two poles of this archetypal bipolar system could be Hellenic.

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