



HELLENIC LINK–MIDWEST Newsletter

A CULTURAL AND SCIENTIFIC LINK WITH GREECE

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Upcoming Events

What does Athens have to do with America?: Recovering hope in community dialogue

On Sunday, February 24, 2013, Hellenic Link–Midwest presents Professor Jennifer Hockenbery in a lecture titled “*What does Athens have to do with America?: Recovering hope in community dialogue*”. The event will take place at 3 pm at the Four Points Sheraton Hotel, 10249 West Irving Park Road at Schiller Park (southeast corner of Irving Park Road and Mannheim Road). Admission is free for HLM members and \$5 for non-members.

In the headlines, in Congress, in our schools, and in our public forums there seems to be a consensus that there is a crisis of community dialogue in the U.S. today. On one hand, this is a political crisis as our leaders struggle to find common ground to move our country forward towards debt reduction, a stronger economy, and a safer environment. On the other hand, this is a very personal crisis, as individuals lose hope at finding truths and values from conversations with their neighbors and colleagues. The depth of this crisis is profound if we believe, as Aristotle did, that all humans are, by nature, political animals with the desire to know. If our flourishing depends upon our ability to maintain healthy communities in which we can seek knowledge, we must regain hope in community dialogue.

Dr. Jennifer Hockenbery is Professor of Philosophy and chair of the philosophy department at Mount Mary College, where she teaches courses in Plato, Aristotle, and Ethics. She came to philosophy through her Classics major at Bowdoin College, and strengthened her love of Greek philosophy by studying in Athens for a collegiate year. She obtained a PhD in philosophy from Boston University, where she wrote a dissertation titled: *Redeeming Philosophy: Philosophy in Augustine's Confessions* in which she discussed the intersection of Greek Philosophy and Christianity in the late antique world.

Greek Independence Day Celebration: Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, the First Great “National Historian” of Greece

In celebration of the Greek Independence Day, Hellenic Link–Midwest presents on Sunday, March 17, 2013 Dean Kostantaras in a lecture titled “*Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos: the First Great ‘National Historian’*

of Greece”. The event will take place at 3 pm at the Four Points Sheraton Hotel, 10249 West Irving Park Road at Schiller Park (southeast corner of Irving Park Road and Mannheim Road). Admission is free for HLM members and \$5 for non-members.

Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos is frequently regarded as the first great ‘national historian’ of Greece, a distinction that largely rests on the fame of his fifteen volume *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους — History of the Greek Nation*. In this work, Paparrigopoulos traced the history of the Greek people from ancient times to his own day, portraying the vital sense of national consciousness and apartness that served to sustain the nation over the course of the many political changes to which it was subject. Paparrigopoulos sought furthermore not only to bring together and connect all the chapters of the Greek past, but to redeem and rehabilitate them, including periods such as the Byzantine and Ottoman that had been held in low esteem by his predecessors. In exploring these and other aspects of Paparrigopoulos’ work, the lecture will describe the people, events and ideas which appeared to influence him, giving particular attention to the important, if often difficult relationship which he and his fellow Greek authors maintained with the wider world of European scholars.

Dean Kostantaras is a Visiting Scholar in the Department of History at Northwestern University and a Lecturer in the Departments of Classics and Mediterranean Studies and History at the University of Illinois, Chicago. His publications include the monograph *Infamy and Revolt: The Rise of the National Problem in Early Modern Greek Thought*, and research articles published or forthcoming in *European History Quarterly*, *Nations and Nationalism*, *The Journal of Early Modern History* and the *European Review of History*. He is currently working on a new book, which analyzes the rise of national movements in Greece and other parts of Europe and the European colonial world over the period 1789–1848.

In Brief

Six-month break from austerity

To avert default, in May 2010, Greece accepted a package of bail-out loans from the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, known collectively as the troika, under the condition of the imposition of severe austerity measures. Since then the country has fallen into

a severe recession that has driven unemployment close to 27%.

According to the Greek newspaper *Kathimerini* (Jan 19, 2013) the representatives of Greece's international creditors – the troika – have decided on a six-month moratorium on the imposition of any new austerity measures while insisting that the country should stick to its promises.

The aim of the moratorium is to give the Greek government a chance to implement a series of measures and structural reforms committed to in exchange for continued rescue funding, but also to ensure that Greece and its debt problems do not become a pre-election issue in the upcoming elections in Germany next September.

According to *Kathimerini*, at a recent meeting in Brussels troika officials were particularly concerned about lagging efforts to crack down on tax evasion, and expect tax collection targets to be met before the approval of any further rescue funding. The troika was particularly displeased that last year Greek tax authorities conducted only about 30 percent of the tax inspections that they had agreed to.

It is hoped that the imposition of the moratorium on austerity, will help the Greek government to focus on the implementation of tax collection measures and on the opening up of closed professions, without sparking further social unrest and losing even more political capital with the introduction of the new reforms.

The IMF, in a country report on Greece released recently, expressed concern that this year the Greek authorities may face a backlash from austerity-weary citizens.

Germans, who have invested the most in Greece's bailout, will be reluctant to hear about fresh resistance to austerity in Greece as speculation mounts about another haircut, and the Greek economic crisis may become a hot issue in the upcoming elections in Germany.

In an interview with Sunday's *Kathimerini*, IMF chief Christine Lagarde said that creditors could approve another haircut for Greece, if the country would meet its commitments.

Austerity fatigue

As the Greek people are hit by a continuing barrage of austerity measures, the unemployment rate keeps rising to new records, with the latest data putting it to just below 27 percent. A decreasing number of people, about 3.6 million, are working to support the rest of the 11 million population. The unemployment in the private sector is much higher since layoffs in the public sector are rare. More than half of those in unemployment are without work for more than 12 months, and they have lost access even to the country's small unemployment benefits. Joblessness among the young continues to climb, forcing the most educated, and perhaps talented,

to seek a better future abroad, depriving Greece of precious human capital.

The unemployment rate in the Eurozone has climbed to about 12%, the highest since records began in 1955, while the jobless rate in Germany holds to about 7%.

According to the Greek newspaper *Kathimerini*, the biggest risk to the austerity program imposed by the troika appears to be the inability or/and unwillingness of a growing number of households and companies to pay their taxes and their social contributions to the social care programs in addition to serving their loans. Arrears to the public sector grew by more than 13 billion euros last year, while the state owes more than 9 billion euros to the private sector.

In December 2012, the government's debt to the private sector started to drop as the government started to pay off part of its debts to the private sector using money from the latest disbursement of a tranche of the bailout loans to Greece. Even though, private health care providers announced that from February 1, 2013, they are suspending credit to the Greek National Organization for the Provision of Healthcare Services (EOPYY). Patients referred to these providers by EOPYY would have to pay for their medical care and then submit a claim to EOPYY. Some providers have said that they are refusing services to EOPYY in protest for delays in settling overdue payments. They demand immediate payment of overdue debts for 2012, and a time schedule for payments of overdue debts for 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2013.

The Athens-Attica Hotel Association reported that 41 hotels have closed down as a result of the economic crisis that has engulfed the country. In 2012, the average room occupancy rate fell by 31.9%, while the revenue per available room dropped by 39.9%. In Athens, the average room occupancy rate did not exceed 55%. Tourist arrivals in the Athens airport fell by 27% in 2012, compared to 2007, while in 2012 the average room price fell by 11.8%.

The president of the Pan-Hellenic Federation of Hoteliers said that the closing of hotels in Athens was not mainly the result of the economic crisis, but the result of a depreciation of Athens as a travel destination, because of a rise in crime and other illegal activities in the center of the city.

With more restrictive fiscal measures in queue for 2014–2016, the ordeal of excessive austerity may have a long way to go in Greece.

Meanwhile, in an interview to *Kathimerini* (February 2, 2013), Greece's finance minister Yannis Stournaras predicted that Greece would recover from the five year recession as early as next October. He said "The gap between what we could be producing and what we are producing is higher than 25 percent." He believes that Greece is on track to produce a primary surplus

(revenues minus expenditures excluding interest on debt) this year, and said “We have agreed that 70 percent of the excess will go to social benefits or to tax cuts.”

He blamed former premiers George Papandreou and Costas Karamanlis for failing to take bold measures to avert the economic meltdown. He criticized Karamanlis for overseeing a massive increase in public spending. He said “The period after 2006 can only be described as a derailment,” noting that government spending in 2009 skyrocketed to 53.8 percent of gross domestic product.” He criticized Papandreou for ignoring Karamanlis’s belated appeal for cutbacks to state spending and for seeking to honor his pre-election promises despite the dire economic situation. He said that “If he had taken measures immediately, we would certainly have had better terms,” in the first bailout. “We might have entered the memorandum with terms as those imposed on Portugal or Ireland.”

It should be noted that previous predictions by the troika as well as by the last prime minister Papademos about the recovery of the Greek economy have fallen greatly off the mark.

From Our History

The Massacre at Distomo, June 10, 1944

The Head of the International Red Cross in Greece, the Swede Sture Linner, in his book “My Odyssey” writes:

We were married on June 14. Emil Santrom, chair of the Greek Relief Committee, organized a wedding banquet for the occasion. Late in the evening he approached me and pulled me aside to a corner, away from the laughs and voices, to talk privately.

He showed me a telegram he had just received: The Germans had been slaughtering for three days the people of Distomo, near Delphi, and then they burned the village down. If there were any survivors, they would be in need of immediate assistance.

Distomo was within the region of my responsibility for the supply of food and medicines. I passed on the telegram to Cleo to read. She winked and we immediately departed discretely from the festivity.

About an hour later we were on our way in the darkness of the night. It took several agonizing hours to travel the ravaged roads and pass several roadblocks. It was dawn by the time we finally reached the main road that led to Distomo.

Vultures were rising slowly and hesitantly at a low height from the sides of the road when they heard us coming. For hundreds of yards along the road, human bodies were hanging from every tree, pierced with bayonets – some were still alive.

They were the villagers, who were punished this way - they were suspected of providing help to the guerillas of the region, who had ambushed an SS unit.

The odor was unbearable.

In the village the last remnants of the houses were still burning. Hundreds of dead bodies of people of all ages, from elderly to newborns, were strewn around on the dirt. Several women were slaughtered with bayonets, their wombs torn apart and their breasts severed; others were lying strangled with their own intestines wrapped around their necks. It seemed as if no-one had survived...

There! An old man at the end of the village! He had miraculously survived the slaughter. He was shocked by the horror around him, with an empty gaze, his utterances incomprehensible. We descended in the midst of the disaster and yelled in Greek: “Red Cross! Red Cross! We came to help!”

From the distance a woman approached with hesitation. She told us that only a handful of villagers managed to escape before the attack begun. Together with her we started searching for them. It was after we had set off in this search that we realized she was shot in the hand. We operated on her immediately with Cleo performing the surgery.

It was our honeymoon!

Not long after this horrific massacre, our connection with Distomo would conclude with this remarkable epilogue.

When the German occupation forces were forced to leave Greece, things did not go as planned for them. A German unit was surrounded by guerillas exactly in the same area, at Distomo. I thought that this might be taken by the Greeks as an opportunity for a bloody revenge, especially when considering that for quite a while the region had been cut off from any food supplies. I loaded with food necessities a few lorries, I wired to Distomo word of our planned arrival, and we found ourselves on the same road, once again, Cleo and I.

When we reached the outskirts of the village, we were met by a committee led by the elderly priest. He was an old fashioned patriarch, with a long, wavy, white beard. Next to him the guerilla captain, fully armed. The priest spoke first and thanked us on behalf of everybody for the food supplies. Then he added: “We are all starving here, both us and the German prisoners. Now, though we are famished, we are at least in our land. The Germans have not just lost the war; they are also far from their country. Give them the food you have with you, they have a long way ahead.”

At this phrase Cleo turned her eyes to me. I suspected what she wanted to tell me with that look, but I could not see clearly any more. I was just standing there weeping....

REFERENCE:

Sture Linner, *Min Odyssey*, (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1982)

From the Riches of Our Cultural Heritage

Γιάννης Ρίτσος

ΓΥΝΑΙΚΕΣ

Είναι πολύ μακρινές οι γυναίκες. Τα σεντόνια τους μυρίζουν καληνύχτα.

Ακουμπάνε το ψωμί στο τραπέζι για να μη νιώσουμε πως λείπουν.

Τότε καταλαβαίνουμε πως φταίξαμε. Σηκωνόμαστε απ' την καρέκλα και λέμε:

«Κουράστηκες πολύ σήμερα», ή «άσε, θ' ανάψω εγώ τη λάμπα».

Όταν ανάβουμε το σπύρτο, εκείνη στρέφει αργά πηγαίνοντας

με μίαν ανεξήγητη προσήλωση προς την κουζίνα. Η πλάτη της

είναι ένα πικραμένο βουναλάκι φορτωμένο με πολλούς νεκρούς—

τους νεκρούς της φαμίλιας, τους δικούς της νεκρούς και τον δικό σου.

Ακούς το βήμα της να τρίζει στα παλιά σανίδια

ακούς τα πιάτα να κλαίνε στην πλατοθήκη κι ύστερα ακούγεται

το τραίνο που παίρνει τους φαντάρους για το μέτωπο.

Ρίτα Μπούμη-Παπά

ΣΚΕΥΟΦΥΛΑΚΙΟ ΜΝΗΜΗΣ

Αν είχα κατορθώσει να σταματήσω τον καιρό

και ν' αποκρυσταλλώσω τους ήχους

στα πλαίσια μιάς πρόωρης ανοιξής

θάμενε για πάντα εκεί σο προαύλιο

κομματιασμένη σαν από μαχαίρι

η φωνή της Μητέρας μου

όταν παιδούλα μ' αποχαιρετούσε,

το βλέμμα της

που δεν με ξαναείδε πιά ποτέ.

Αν είχα κατορθώσει να σταματήσω τον καιρό,

τις ώρες που αλλάζουν τα πρόσωπά μας

θα υπήρχε ακόμα η μεγάλη ανοιχτή τζαμαρία

με το Φλεβάρη γαλάζιο φόντο

η μικρή ανθισμένη μυγδαλιά.

Θά υπήρχε θαμπό απ' τα κλάμματα

το αμάξι, οι βαλίτσες, το πλοίο,

εκείνη η φωτεινή στιγμή

που θάφερνε απ' τη θάλασσα τα χελιδόνια.

Όμως ούτ' ένα φύλλο δεν μπορείς να σταματήσεις

στην περιπέτεια της ζωής. Κι' έτσι γερνώντας

υπερασπίζω απλώς ό,τι μ' απόμεινε από Κείνη:

τα γράμματά της, ένα λεπτό σκελετωμένο γιασεμί

και μιά βυζαντινή εικόνα που γλυκοφιλούσε.

Κάνω ό,τι μπορώ να τα διατηρήσω

και τάχω σώσει από πολλούς κατακλυσμούς...

Όμως γνωρίζω, πως όλα θα χαθούν

όταν πεθάνω και με διαδεχτούν άλλοι στο σπίτι.

Yiannis Ritsos

WOMEN

Women are very distant. Their bedsheets smell of good-night.

They leave bread on the table so we won't feel they've gone.

Then we understand we were to blame. We get up from the chair and say:

"You've overtired yourself today" or "Don't bother, I'll light the lamp myself"

When we strike a match, she turns slowly and goes toward the kitchen with an inexplicable concentration.

Her back

is a sad, small mountain laden with many dead—the family dead, her dead, and your own death.

You hear the old floorboards creaking under her footsteps, you hear the dishes weeping in the dishracks, and then that train

is heard taking soldiers to the front.

Rita Boumi-Papa

VESTRY OF MEMORY

Had I succeeded in stopping time

and crystallizing the sounds

in the frame of an early spring

there in the front yard it would remain forever

cut up as if by a knife

the voice of my mother,

when a little girl, bid me farewell

her gaze

that never saw me again.

Had I succeeded in stopping time

the hours that change our faces

the large open glass doors would exist still

with the blue background of February

the small almond tree in bloom.

It would exist dimmed from weeping,

the carriage, the suitcases, the boat,

that luminous moment

that would bring the swallows from the sea.

Yet not a single leaf can you stop

in the adventure of life. And thus, growing old

I defend simply whatever remained from Her:

her letters, a thin skeleton of jasmine

and a Byzantine icon that she would kiss dearly.

I do what I can to preserve them

and I have saved them from many floods. ...

Still, I know they will all be lost

when I die and others succeed me in the house.