Agnes Smith: a Victorian traveller through Greece and Cyprus

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The subject of this paper is a Victorian traveller whose connection with Cambridge University, and especially, as its benefactor, with Westminster College, was very close.

Agnes Smith and her twin Margaret were born in 1843 in Irvine, Scotland. Their mother died when they were three weeks old, and their father, a well-off lawyer, never remarried. They had attended Irvine Academy, the local school, and at the age of fifteen they went to boarding school at Birkenhead. They left the boarding school when they were eighteen for a finishing school in Kensington. The death of their father in 1866, when they were twenty-three years old, was an important, though painful, turning point in their lives, as they were left with no other close relatives and with no serious prospects of getting married, but with a substantial fortune which eventually allowed them to embark on their journeys to the East and to carry out their subsequent extraordinary scholarly achievements. The prospect of living a quiet provincial Scottish life, as their sex and pious Presbyterian upbringing would have otherwise suggested, was slowly but surely forgotten. Having already visited France, Germany and Italy, they decided to travel to the Middle East, accompanied by Grace Blyth, a teacher with whom they had become close friends at their Kensington school.[1]

[1] There is so far one biography of the twin sisters, written by A. Whigham Price (1985). Dr Janet Soskice, of Jesus College, Cambridge, has completed a new biography, which will be published in the near future. See also Riggs 2004: 35-7. D. K. Sakellaropoulos, the editor of the Greek monthly periodical *Απόλλων*, wrote a short biography of

That first journey in 1868, from London to Constantinople by train and subsequently to Port Said and Alexandria by boat, and eventually to Cairo and to a Nile trip, extended to Jerusalem and the Holy Places. The journey was described in Agnes Smith's first travel book, *Eastern pilgrims*, published in 1870; the itinerary was very similar to the road taken by several other travellers before them, in the tradition of the Grand Tour.[2] The mere title of Chateaubriand's famous *Itinéraire de Paris à Jerusalem*, first published in 1811, serves to characterize the journeys of these earlier travellers. However, the title of Agnes Smith's book suggests a trip with a primarily religious drive, despite the fact that the Holy Land occupies a relatively small place in the narrative. According to Johannes Fabian, we must distinguish between the travels with a religious purpose which took place before the eighteenth century, and the secular travels of the established bourgeoisie, which were carried out from that century onwards.[3] In the case of Agnes Smith, we cannot apply the distinction in such a clear-cut manner, because her first travel book combines religious with secular purposes, and this is due to her very strong Presbyterian convictions. The latter were to take an interesting shape in her book on Greece and, subsequently contribute to the development of her interest in biblical scholarship.

The interest of the twin sisters in the East never ceased after that first journey. On the contrary, it become more and more systematic, and it took the shape of a well-planned strategy, which included the learning of the relevant languages, starting with Greek. Mr Vice of King's College taught them, but their real teacher of Modern Greek was Professor John Stuart Blackie, who had been appointed Professor of Greek at Edinburgh in 1852. Through him, they acquired the modern pronunciation and the firm belief that the notion of Greek being a dead language was nothing but "an Oxford superstition". Blackie's views, a little at

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Agnes Smith, followed by a review of her book on Greece, *Glimpses of Greek life and scenery*: Sakellaropoulos 1885: 375-7.

[2] Smith 1870.

[3] Fabian 1983: 6.

odds with the British Classical tradition of the time, were highly praised by Constantine Cavafy, in his article, "Ο Καθηγητής Βλάκη περί της Νεοελληνικής", published in 1891.[4] It seems that the notion of continuity between the ancient and the modern Greek languages struck a sensitive chord, not only in certain intellectual circles in Greece, called in a somewhat ironical fashion "οι λογιότατοι", but also among the common people.[5] Konstantinos Dimaras, writing on the life and times of K. Paparrigopoulos, the major nineteenth-century Greek historian, has suggested that the extensive use of *katharevousa*, from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, reflected the wish of the Greeks to emphasize the continuity between the Ancient Greeks and themselves.[6]

Looking at the periodical press of the period, for example the monthly *Απόλλων*, published by D. Sakellaropoulos in Piraeus, we find articles expressing considerable interest in the subject.[7] This interest must be connected to the ideologies that shaped the Modern Greek nation and are best crystallized in Paparrigopoulos's *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους*, published between 1860 and 1874.[8]

In early January 1883, Agnes and Margaret Smith, aged 40, embarked on a trip to Greece. They stayed in the country until May of the same year, accompanied once more by Grace Blyth. This journey led Agnes to write her second travel book, which was published in 1884, under the title *Glimpses of Greek life and scenery*.[9] They arrived in Piraeus on 14 February 1883 and were taken immediately to Athens by carriage, by "the commissionaire from the Hôtel d'Angleterre", where they stayed until 8 April. Having already visited Aegina, Sounion and Marathon, they

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[4] Reprinted in Cavafy 2003: 53-7.
[5] Politis 1993: 107-10.
[6] Dimaras 1986: 83ff.
[7] "Βλαίκιος περί της συνεχείας της Ελληνικής γλώσσης", *Απόλλων* 66 (Ιούν. 1890) 1022-5, "Περί της προφοράς της Ελληνικής γλώσσης", *Απόλλων* 67 (Ιούλ. 1890) 1038-42.
[8] Dimaras 1986: 96ff., 181 and Politis 1993: 36-47.
[9] Smith 1884.

continued around the Peloponnese, starting from Corinth and going via Mycenae, Argos, Tripolis, Sparta, through the Messenian plain to Vassai, Olympia, Mega Spelaion, Kalavryta and Lepanto. They subsequently crossed the Gulf of Corinth and continued to Galaxidi, Delfi, Arachova, Chaeronia, Orchomenos, Thebes, Eleusis and back to Athens. They then decided to leave Greece, in May 1883, "as Athens was getting intolerably hot", and took the Austrian Lloyd's boat to Trieste. This gave them the opportunity to have a very brief look at the town of the island of Corfu, as the boat made a three-hour stop there.

The book extends to 352 pages and is divided into twenty-one chapters. Four chapters are devoted to Attica, including Athens, which is examined in two separate chapters. Interestingly, in the two final chapters of the book the author discusses in a rather matter-of-fact, if not academic, manner "The language and character of the Modern Greeks" and draws a "Comparison of Syrian and Grecian travel". Finally, the book includes five illustrations and a very detailed map with their itinerary marked in red ink.

Here we should look briefly at one aspect of the European literary landscape in which Agnes Smith's book was written: a background of European prejudice against the young Greek Kingdom.[10] Such a prejudice sprang primarily from political considerations. In 1883 Philhellenism was definitely not the dominant sentiment in Britain, as it had been a few decades previously. The severely critical attitude towards Greece was due first of all to the unwise manner – to British and European eyes at least – in which the Kingdom of Greece was conducting its internal and external affairs, as a young, semi-democratic state with an important geostrategic position facing the Ottoman Empire. The problem was mainly its irredentist aspirations codified under the term *Μεγάλη Ιδέα*: the grand political purpose of enlarging the territory of the Kingdom by including all the unredeemed Greek-inhabited territories still occupied by the Ottoman Empire. That policy was the

[10] Dimaras 1986: 93.

main trend in Greek political thought from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards.[11] Its more serious debacles were the defeat of Greece by the Ottoman Empire in the war of 1897 and the Asia Minor Campaign and the disastrous events of 1922. But in the 1880s it was the most important political issue in Greece and dominated the country's internal political life. It was also a source of friction with the European powers; the latter did not want further instability in the area. The Greeks, instead of concentrating on organizing the country as a modern European state, albeit a small one, aspired to gain more territory.[12] Thus to the Peloponnese and Sterea, the two regions of which the kingdom was originally composed, they added the Ionian Islands, given by Britain in 1864, and Thessaly and part of Epirus, granted to them in 1881.[13]

The negative European attitude towards Greece is also evinced in the travel literature of the period. The turning point was Edmond About's famous *La Grèce contemporaine* of 1854, translated into English in 1857, and the same author's *Le Roi des montagnes*, published in 1865.[14] These two books were followed by the acerbic comments of the American Mark Twain in *The Innocents Abroad*, published in 1869, and of William Thackeray, which feature in his book *From Cornhill to Cairo*, published in 1846.[15] Of course there were exceptions to this anti-philhellenic sentiment, but even these people sometimes expressed the feeling that Greece was "un singulier mélange de féodalité et de démocratie. [...] Aussi la Grèce est-elle, en politique, le pays des faits bizarres, des cas étranges, des aventures fabuleuses", as Pierre Antoine Grenier politely put it in his book *La Grèce en 1863*.[16] Nevertheless, there had been a considerable change in the King-

[11] Dimaras 1985: 405-18; Kitromilides 1984: 107-21.
[12] Politis 1993: 163-4.
[13] Dertilis 1983: 145-74.
[14] About 1857 and 1865.
[15] Eisner 1993: 125, 145-7, 167-8.
[16] Berchet 1985: 222.

dom of Greece and especially in Athens, between its establishment in 1833 and the 1880s.

It is evident that despite and because of these critical views of Greece, Agnes Smith's book was greeted as belonging to the tradition of Philhellenism, which had been interrupted now for several decades. The Philhellenism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century derived not only from the rediscovery of the Classical ruins of Greece but also from a Neoclassical idealism which suggested that the liberation of the Greek people from Ottoman rule would be the means of reviving the cultural glories of Ancient Greece. The French Revolution, in particular, inspired European travellers and other writers to picture Greece as a land which could develop and flower culturally and politically through the freedom of thought and expression which would result from the expulsion of the Ottomans. Even so, reservations were expressed as to whether the ignorant, disorganized and factious Greeks could be the agents of such a restoration.

By the mid-nineteenth century such Philhellenism was a thing of the past. On the other hand the impact in Greece of the new European contempt for that country, which had taken two decades to develop, seems to have been sudden. Edmond About's two books (published in 1854 and 1865 respectively) caused such a furore that the Greeks themselves wrote books to restore the damage done, admittedly not explicitly avowing that purpose.[17] Greek reviewers of European books on Greece tend to focus on the question of the fairness or otherwise of their depiction of the country.[18] Such an approach led to a simple categorization of the books under review as either philhellenic or antihellenic.

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[17] See for example the very thorough *La Grèce telle qu'elle est*, written in French by Petros Moraitinis and published in Paris in 1877.

[18] See for example a review published in *Εβδομάς* in 1885: "Υπό τον τίτλον *Η Ελλάς τω 1883* εδημοσιεύθη άρτι υπό M. B. Girard μελέτη περί της Ελλάδος, ήτις δεν είνε έργον φαντασίας αυτού προς επίδειξιν πνεύματος, αλλά σοβαρόν έργον, εν ω εξετάζεται η Ελλάς πολιτικώς, διοικητικώς, οικονομικώς, στρατιωτικώς και εμπορικώς". *Εβδομάς*, Β', 64 (19 Μαΐου 1885) 237.

The Greeks naturally saw Agnes Smith's book as an attempt to put the record straight, and it was their approval which was gained in the first place. In the Greek newspaper *Ἔσπερος*, which was published in the German city of Leipzig, we read:

> Ελάβομεν εκ Λονδίνου βιβλίον τα μάλιστα ενδιαφέρον ημάς τους Έλληνας, τίτλον φέρον *Glimpses of Greek Life and Scenery*. Του βιβλίου τούτου συγγραφεύς είναι η λογία Σκωτίς δεσποσύνη Agnes Smith [...]. Η Κυρία αύτη, περιηγηθείσα προ δύο περίπου ετών την Ελλάδα, εμφορουμένη υπό φιλελληνικωτάτων αισθημάτων, κατέθεσε εν τω βιβλίω τούτω τας εντυπώσεις της και έκρινε τα παρ' ημίν λίαν ευνοϊκώς. Ο ακραιφνής αυτής φιλελληνισμός την προέτρεψε να εκμάθη και την νεωτέραν ελληνικήν γλώσσαν, ην μετά πολλής ευχερείας γράφει.[19]
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> We have received from London a book which is very interesting for us Greeks, entitled *Glimpses of Greek Life and Scenery*. The author of the book is the Scottish littérateur Miss Agnes Smith [...]. This lady toured Greece approximately two years ago. Full of fervent philhellenic sentiments, she has put down her impressions of our country. Her judgements are very favourable. Her extreme philhellenic sentiment has also led her to learn the modern Greek language, which she writes with great facility.

This notice is followed by a letter from Agnes Smith herself (in *katharevousa*), addressed to the editor of *Ἔσπερος*; immediately afterwards comes a translated extract from *Glimpses* itself, for the benefit of the periodical's readers ("χάριν των ημετέρων αναγνωστών"). It is not surprising then that the book was very soon translated into *katharevousa* and published in Leipzig in 1885, by Ioannis Pervanoglou, the editor of *Ἔσπερος*.[20]

Let us turn now to the book itself. Its interpretation depends heavily on a basic question, that of the motives and purposes of a middle-class Scottish Presbyterian woman travelling in the Greece

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[19] *Ἔσπερος* 68 (Φεβρ.1884) 306-7. Most probably the review and translation are by the editor I. Pervanoglou.
[20] Smith 1885.

of the 1880s. This woman provides us with a partial answer, in the first page of her narrative:

> Returning from the Holy Land in 1869, I spent a few days in Athens. The sight of its wonderful ruins, and of that vigorous national life which contrasts so strikingly with the desolations of Asia Minor, aroused in me an irrepressible wish to learn more of the country and people. (1884: 1)

The "wonderful ruins" provoke her admiration on many occasions, especially in Athens. Besides Murray's and Baedeker's travel guides, she quotes Christopher Wordsworth, the nephew of the poet, who was well known in England for his two books, *Athens and Attica* (1836) and *Greece: pictorial, descriptive and historical* (1840). The ruins, which remained a constant attraction for all travellers, apart from being the standing witnesses of ancient Greek civilization, were significant in Agnes Smith's case for yet another reason: they were known as stations of St Paul's journeys in Greece. St Paul had preached the Gospel in places such as the Areopagus and Corinth:

> Across the road rises the Areopagus, while betwixt it and you lay the Agora, so full of most sacred memories. Down there Socrates was wont to stroll of a morning. There Paul lifted up his voice to warn the idol-loving city. [...] Here the seeds of truth were sown in minds which centuries had prepared for their reception. Christianity had Palestine for its cradle, but it came to manhood in the schools of Attica. (1884: 39)

The passage is important because it sums up Agnes Smith's defence of Greece as the school in which Christian belief matured. In her view, the ground had already been prepared, allowing Christianity to flourish there. In several passages she juxtaposes St Paul with Socrates, since, as she says, "the Spirit who spoke to Paul, spoke also, though less clearly, to Socrates." In the same vein, she quotes verses from Sophocles and especially Euripides, which demonstrate that the basis of monotheism already existed in

the Classical period.[21] This is an interesting justification for the importance of classical studies in the British curriculum. The thorough study of classical letters and history allowed comparisons between the Athenian and the British Empire.

> We are, in some respects, the modern representatives of these Athenians. We have the same passionate love for freedom, and we have inherited a maritime empire. [...] And can we avoid their mistakes? [...] Shall we yield to an insane lust for military glory, until we find a second Syracuse? Will the love of luxury and pleasure make our children the ready slaves of another Philip? Surely, our purer faith will keep us from such a fate! (1884: 15)

Between these lines an anxiety for the future of the British Empire can also be read. The issue was much discussed in Britain at the time. The 1880s witnessed the replacement of mid-Victorian confidence with pessimism and uncertainty about the future. Such an anxiety had been expressed earlier by writers such as Carlyle, who condemned the evils of democracy, free trade, franchise and political corruption in his famous article "Shooting Niagara: and after?", published in 1867 in *Macmillan's Magazine*.[22] Agnes Smith holds a more optimistic view than Carlyle as to the future of Britain, based on the strength of Christian faith.

There is indeed a tendency in the travel writing of the period to validate biblical truth on the spot, and thus the previous interest in the Greek classical heritage shifts to the geographical area of the Holy Land.[23] Agnes Smith's *Eastern pilgrims* definitely follows that trend. But in her *Glimpses of Greek life and scenery* we get an insight into the views of a Scottish Presbyterian woman, who, perhaps not surprisingly, is very sympathetic to the Greek

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[21] Interestingly, similar ideas are expressed by Petros Vrailas-Armenis, in his book *Περί της ιστορικής αποστολής του Ελληνισμού*, published in 1872 in Corfu. See Moutsopoulos 1970: 122-7.

[22] Carlyle 1869: 340-80. See the discussion on the ideologies in the period of British high imperialism in Roussou-Sinclair 2002: 57-63.

[23] Eisner 1993: 128.

Orthodox Church.[24] On encountering a funeral procession in Athens, she comments that "there is something very touching in their simple way of doing it. I, at least, felt as if a Greek funeral were more Christian, in some respects, than a British one" (1884: 55). As for the prospects for unification between the Protestant and the Orthodox churches, she finds it highly unlikely, "as so many [of the latter's] prayers are addressed to the Virgin" (1884: 57). There are many instances in the narrative where the author makes favourable remarks about the Orthodox Church. One possible explanation for such a standpoint is the common ground of anti-Catholicism. Despite the fact that the Orthodox Church is ritualistic, its ceremonies evoke a simpler spirit, closer to the original practices and beliefs of Christianity. The simpler spirit which Agnes Smith sees in Orthodox ceremonies is in turn far distanced from High Church rituals. Behind Agnes Smith's sympathy for the Orthodox Church it is perhaps possible to read her disapproval, as a fervent Presbyterian, of the High Anglican Church's ritualism.[25]

What of her philhellenic sentiments, so much praised by the editor of *Εσπερος*? She admires the Greeks as a people who gained their freedom through a revolution. She holds them up as an example demonstrating the potential for the nationalities composing the Turkish Empire (as she puts it) to liberate themselves. She notes that the Greeks have been called the English of the East: this compliment is based on their love of both order and liberty and on their commercial enterprise. She notes that Greece's geographical position favours commercial development. She admits that the Greeks have not come up to the expectations held for them in Byron's day, and that the Greek state suffers from certain disadvantages: small size, the absence of manufacturing industry, foreign debts. But she asserts that alone among eastern nations

[24] In the biographical sketch published in *Απόλλων*, mentioned above (n. 1), we read that she learnt Modern Greek in order to be able to read the New Testament in the original.
[25] Wilson 2002: 365-9.

(the classification is interesting) the Greeks are open to western ideas (1884: 336ff.).

During the second half of the nineteenth century the travel books on Greece display, side by side with their interest in the monuments and other aspects of the classical heritage, a concern for the condition of the modern country – its politics, its economic condition and other matters. This concern is due to the significant and rapid changes that had taken place in Greek life from 1832 onwards, and of course to the fact that Greece was a new – albeit small – nation-state, trying hard to overcome the difficulties caused by four hundred years of Ottoman rule.[26]

Another issue which considerably blackened the country's image in Europe was that of attacks on travellers by brigands. The unfortunate events of the Dilessi murders in 1870 caused a real turmoil in the relationship between Greece and Great Britain, and turned British public opinion against the Greeks. These events left such an impression on the consciousness of European travellers that Agnes Smith, thirteen years later, points to the "spot where the brigands seized the Englishmen" (1884: 77); and in another instance: "Now, it happened that we had still a lurking fear of brigands, not being yet aware that the Greek shepherds are a most simple and kindly race" (1884: 77). But this fear is soon completely forgotten and discussed in a manner which mocks the heavily romanticized Byronic ideal of Greece:

> "As for danger", said Edith, "there is more in London. I have actually been asked if I do not fear returning to a country where I may be blown up by dynamite at any moment. Byron's lines about the Acro-Corinthus are magnificent", she continued, "but they are slightly exaggerated. It is impossible that all the blood shed around it could cover the plain of the isthmus, or the bones of the slain make a hill to rival it in bulk." (1884: 111)

Agnes Smith follows the above-mentioned trend of European travel writing in her book, something that is also suggested by her

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[26] Politis 1993: 15-29, 90ff.

title. Furthermore, both she and her sister are so eager to get into the spirit of the place that they take every opportunity, especially when in Athens, to do so. They stroll in the streets of Athens conversing with the shopkeepers; they go to the Greek Parliament twice to attend the sessions and to the philological society *Παρνασσός* to hear a lecture by a certain Archimandrite; and they pay a visit to Heinrich Schliemann's house. On the other hand, they are able to read newspapers and periodicals in Greek, and this greatly enhances their insight into the life and current affairs of the period. They read *Έσπερος, Αιών* and *Εστία.* As for the language of these publications, "One might indeed take a number of *Αιών*, or of the *Εστία*, without being able to tell whether they were written in the ancient or in the modern tongue" (1884: 333). By "modern tongue" she means the *katharevousa* and not the vernacular spoken by ordinary people. Agnes Smith also mentions a satirical newspaper, which they avoid reading (after a first exposure) and whose name they do not even mention: "the only comic print we saw was vulgar and not too moral" (1884: 333).

She expresses no doubt as to the continuity between those who fought at Thermopylae and Marathon on the one hand and those who fought in the Greek Revolution on the other. In so doing, she aligns herself with the Greek historiography of the period, which defended the continuity between Ancient and Modern Greece as the ideology with which to bind together the new nation.[27] The attacks of Jacob Fallmerayer rebutting the classical provenance of Modern Greeks were a severe blow to the Greek self-image in that respect. Fallmerayer had argued that after the many influxes of Slavic peoples during the Middle Ages there was very little left of true Greek blood. Interestingly, Agnes Smith seems to be a little surprised when she comes across people who speak the Albanian dialect in some villages in Attica and the Peloponnese. She notes the fact but does not comment on it:

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[27] Veloudis 1982.

> Angelo told us that the people here speak an Albanian dialect, which is passing strange, seeing that we are in Attica. (1884: 64)
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> The tongue which they themselves use is Albanian, the reverend father knowing just enough of Greek to read the service. [...] Mother and daughter wear the national dress, as indeed do all the Peloponnesian peasants. [...] Edith showed them the Alphabeterion and the New Testament, but they could read neither. (1884 106-7)

In the same vein, the issue of continuity between the Modern Greeks and their ancestors provides Greek historiography and political thought of the period with a justification for the pursuit of the *Megali Idea*. The author comes across these views by reading "A History of the Revolution", written for the use of schools in Athens, and subsequently presents us with her own views on the *Megali Idea*:

> And Greece dreams now not only of freedom for her still enslaved sons, but of an Eastern Empire ruled by a Constantine born in the purple of King George's nursery. To attain this, she must have a princely leader, possessing a strong arm, a clear brain, and determined will.
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> What will Europe say to the ambitious design? We cannot tell; but we, who believe that Greece's true glory existed before the age of Macedonia's Philip, would confine ourselves in the meantime to a strong sympathy with the wish of a heroic little people to bring back to their common hearth all who speak the same beautiful tongue. (1884: 225)

There is some evidence in the text that Agnes Smith supports the policy of the *Megali Idea*, completely antithetical to British policy, because she is Scottish. She readily compares Greeks and Scots, finding many affinities between the two nations. This is perhaps another vein of her philhellenic sentiment. On the other hand, her strong Presbyterian convictions allow her to understand

and appreciate the connection between the mission of Hellenism and Providence.[28]

Trying to correct the negative aspects that dominate the views of many European travellers of the period (particularly Edmond About and Mark Twain), she dedicates a whole chapter to the "language and character of the Modern Greeks". This chapter attempts to rebut the various reports and descriptions which blackened the image of the country and its people. Agnes Smith, in her book on Greece, tries to revive the image of a country possessing "wonderful ruins" and "vigorous national life". She attacks one by one the accusations that tended to be a sort of common joke in European circles: that the Greeks are filthy, dishonest, unworthy of their classical heritage and unfit to maintain a stable political life; that their country is unsafe, full of brigands, with no resources and hopelessly impoverished.

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Let us now turn briefly to the next travel book by Agnes Smith: *Through Cyprus*, published in 1887. This is of interest here as a book concerning a people in many ways comparable to the Greeks of Greece itself, but now living under British rule. The present author has already examined *Through Cyprus* within the framework of Victorian travel writing on the island after its annexation by Britain in 1878.[29] By the Cyprus Convention of 4 June 1878, which was concluded secretly between the Porte and Great Britain, Cyprus passed from Ottoman to British control. Under the terms of the Convention, Britain was merely to administer the island. *De iure* sovereignty remained with the Ottoman Empire, and until the First World War Britain never sought to deny or

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[28] See on the subject the perceptive comments of Dimaras: "Η *Αποστολή* είναι, πολύ πέρα από τα ελληνικά προβλήματα, ένα από τα πλέον ρωμαλέα θέματα της ευρωπαϊκής ρομαντικής νοοτροπίας. Εύκολα βλέπει κανείς την συσχέτιση με τον *ευσεβισμό*, και συνεπώς, με την συγγενική έννοια της *(θείας) Προνοίας*." Dimaras 1986: 141-2.

[29] See Roussou-Sinclair 2002.

cover up the Ottoman Empire's ultimate rights to Cyprus. Soon after the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 Cyprus was annexed to Britain and the Cypriots became British subjects. During our period, the island was not therefore a British colony but rather a British-administered territory. It became a British colony in a formal sense, not in fact at the annexation during the First World War, but only in 1925.

Agnes Smith visited and wrote about Cyprus eleven years after the British occupation of the island. The first part of the voyage, described in the book's first five chapters, included Cairo, Alexandria and Beirut. Many of the subjects discussed in her Greek narrative come up again in the book on Cyprus. The greatest difference is that because Cyprus is administered by the British, she is somewhat more careful about expressing views which would tend to undermine the justification for British rule. Although she remains sympathetic to the Cypriots' wishes to unite with Greece, she advises them not to take such a course of action for the time being. Instead, through the medium of education, they should appreciate the benefits of being part of the British Empire:

> I would by no means object to this feeling on the part of our Cypriot fellow-subjects, but I would wish that some one would at the same time, put into the hands of the rising generation books which should tell them in their own tongue something of the greatness of that empire into which they are now incorporated; tell them how Great Britain has been for centuries the true foster-mother of modern freedom [...] (1887: 128)

In many instances she notes that there has been significant improvement from the time that Britain occupied the island. The annexation then takes in her eyes the form of a sort of an experiment, which shows the difference that would be made when a part of the Ottoman Empire was administered by a modern European power like Britain.

Her enthusiasm for the Ancient and Modern Greeks does not take the same shape when she discusses the Cypriots, and maybe

this is due to the fact that no revolution had taken place in which the Ottomans were successfully driven out:

> The history of the island is not heroic. The great deeds that were done in it were the deeds of foreigners. St Paul's footsteps have left a track of glory from Salamis [...] to Paphos. He seems to have followed the road that we took. His companion, Barnabas, was born in the island. But, with this exception, no Cypriot's name can make the pulses thrill except that of Evagoras, the self-made man, the liberator and tyrant of Salamis. (1887: 127)

Similarly, there were no standing temples of the Classical period in Cyprus to attract her admiration, as there were in Greece; the exceptions were the temple of Aphrodite in Paphos and the ruins of the city of Curium, which at the time were not adequately excavated. The numerous passages that she quotes, from Homer to Euripides and from Pausanias to Plutarch, nevertheless put the island within the framework of classical tradition.

For Agnes Smith it was far more important that a Christian nation should be saved from the "utter barbarism" of oppressive Ottoman rule. The contradiction here is that in her case, although she recognised the bonds between Greece and Cyprus, she thought the latter should be allowed to unite with the former only if Britain decided that she no longer wanted Cyprus. Agnes Smith's position vis-à-vis the Cypriots is in itself very contradictory. Her familiarity with the Modern Greek language and the young Greek Kingdom give her an insight into the issues involving Cyprus which is not shared by other British travellers. But she remains hesitant to express views that would justify the irredentist aspirations of the Cypriots, because those aspirations, naturally, contradict British foreign policy of the time. For that reason, she proposes a half measure and advises the Cypriots to wait for more favourable circumstances for their union with Greece.

Travel books can tell us much, not only about the countries visited, but also about the mentalities, beliefs, ideologies and prejudices of their authors. In the case of Agnes Smith, we get an interesting insight into the Greece and Cyprus of the 1880s, which

were respectively a newly founded state within the sphere of influence of Great Britain and a territory recently occupied by Britain. The difference in their political status creates different narratives, which have nevertheless interesting common features. If for Agnes Smith Greece's main attraction as a country is its "wonderful ruins and vigorous national life", Cyprus on the other hand is "an island which yields to none of our British possessions in beauty, in fertility or in importance".

Agnes Smith became famous for her Sinaitic discoveries and her numerous biblical publications. Undoubtedly her long life, her scholarly achievements and her Cambridge days should be examined together with those of her twin sister Margaret. In my presentation, I have deliberately left these aside, because I wished to discuss the two lesser known travel books. These works nevertheless contain a foretaste of the erudite and enterprising scholars the sisters would eventually become.

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