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‘The Real-and-Imagined Spaces of Philhellenic Travel’

Paul Stock

This article focuses on philhellenic travellers’ perceptions and experiences of Greece in the early nineteenth century, especially during the War of Independence in the 1820s. My central argument is that philhellenes – that is to say, supporters of Greek independence from the Ottoman Empire – understand Greece as a ‘real-and-imagined’ space. Greece is an ‘imagined’ location in the sense that philhellenic conception of it is shaped by certain rhetorical assumptions and priorities. But, evidently, it is also a ‘real’ space, not simply in the obvious sense that the landscape has a tangible existence, but also in that those rhetorical constructions have concrete consequences and expressions. These expressions are especially significant because philhellenic travellers conceive the region as both a literal and conceptual borderland on the edges of Europe. They consider Greece fundamental to European history, culture and self-definition; but because it is ruled by the Ottoman Empire, it is also an unfamiliar space at the margins of Europe. In other words, Greece is both within and outside European space, and its liminal position represents wider uncertainties about the conception of Europe in the early nineteenth century.

A few words are required to explain my use of the term ‘real-and-imagined’. In his influential book *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre expresses frustration that ‘space’ is often used either to denote ‘emptiness’, or to signify abstract concepts – for instance, ‘dream space’ or ‘national space’ – that have limited or unexplained connections to actual social practice. Instead he calls for new forms of analysis that can take full account of mental or conceptual spaces, physical sites, and societal behaviours: he wants to understand how particular spaces are looked at by observers, constructed in ideological terms, and actually lived in or

experienced. Discussing the medieval period, Lefebvre notes the concrete realities of place (landscape, buildings and road networks), the mental conceptions of spaces according to Christian doctrine (God’s heaven, or the spaces of hell), and the representational spaces of daily life (the village church and the local graveyard).¹ Crucially, these various perspectives are imbricated, so that one can speak of medieval religious spaces as both conceptual and actually existing. For instance, understandings of divine spaces (Heaven and Hell) affected how everyday church spaces were built, perceived and lived in: ‘a spatial code is not simply a means of reading or interpreting space: rather it is a means of living in that space, of understanding it, and of producing it’.² To clarify his argument, Lefebvre employs an ingenious analogy: a space can be both conceptual and material in the same way that an electronic financial transaction is abstract and disembodied but still possesses ‘real’ consequences. Furthermore, Lefebvre argues that ‘(social) space is a (social) product’. In other words, spaces are historically contingent: they are both produced and interpreted according to specific historical circumstances and mentalities.³

Lefebvre, of course, has become a key figure in the so-called ‘spatial turn’ in the humanities and social sciences, and many disciplines are increasingly concerned with the analysis and history of spaces.⁴ However, even Lefebvre’s most adamant admirers concede that *The Production of Space* is a somewhat ‘bewildering’ and ‘meandering’ volume which resists setting out a precise methodology. In his engagement with Lefebvre’s thought, Edward Soja tries to mitigate these problems by exploring ‘the spatiality of human life’ and ‘the meanings and significance of space’ in a specific contemporary context: the city of Los Angeles.⁵ Here Soja rejects a narrowly empirical focus on the ‘real’ world, but he is equally sceptical about perspectives exclusively concerned with ‘imagined’ or symbolic representations. Instead he argues that spaces are ‘real-and-imagined’: they are ideologically constructed

whilst also having concrete existence and political engagement. Soja’s objective is to show how material contexts and representational discourses can together show how spaces are lived in and understood. For example, he suggests that Edward Said’s ‘Orient’ is an archetypal ‘real-and-imagined’ space because it is a rhetorical construction which has tangible consequences in imperial practice.⁶

In this article, I want to show how the concept of ‘real-and-imagined’ locations contains rich implications for the study of historical spaces and mentalities. In particular, I am interested in philhellenic perceptions and conceptions of Greece in the early nineteenth century.

Philhellenes from this period draw on a much longer Hellenic tradition which admired and laid claim to ancient Greek history and culture. European travellers had begun to visit and write about Greece in ‘increasing numbers’ as early as the sixteenth century as part of wider Renaissance enthusiasm for classical civilisations and their legacies. As a result, it became commonplace to contrast Greece’s idealised past with its supposed present-day indignities, specifically Ottoman rule and Orthodox religious heresy.⁷ The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw a sharp rise in travellers to Greece for several interconnected reasons: growing commercial opportunities connected to Ottoman decline; the wartime inaccessibility of other Grand Tour destinations; increased intellectual interest in ancient Greece over Rome; a burgeoning ‘mania’ for archaeological research and collection; and, eventually, the War of Independence itself.⁸ In this article, I want to focus on those philhellenes associated with the London Greek Committee, an organisation ‘created in March 1823 to support the cause of Greek independence from Ottoman rule by raising funds by subscription for a military expedition to Greece and by raising a major loan to stabilise the fledgling Greek government’. Led by Edward Blaquiere, a former lieutenant in the Royal Navy, and John Bowring, the first editor of the *Westminster Review*, the Committee was

comprised mainly of ‘prominent Whig MPs’, though it also attracted classical scholars and those motivated by Christian fraternity or potential business opportunities in Greece. As well as supporting the Greeks financially, the Committee engaged in political lobbying and supplied agents to co-ordinate military and administrative initiatives.⁹ Significantly therefore, the Committee sought to facilitate practical change in Greece, and this offers a useful opportunity to explore the imbrication of ‘imagined’ representations and political engagement as expressed in understandings of a specific space.¹⁰

Members of the London Greek Committee often possess certain assumptions and priorities which colour their experiences in Greece itself. Henry Bulwer, brother of the novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton, was sent out by the Committee to administer a loan to the Greeks. In describing his arrival he writes:

We are brought back to our boyhood by the very name of Greece; and every spot in this beautiful land reminds us of the days devoted to its classic fables, and the scenes where we were taught them. Methinks I see old Harrow Churchyard, and its venerable yews – under whose shadows I have lain many a summer evening.¹¹

Evidently, Bulwer’s understanding of Greece is shaped by his classical education and a set of expectations which cause him to see the landscape through a filter of personal recollections. Unsurprisingly, this is a common perspective for individuals raised on classical texts: in the early nineteenth-century Greek literature was still seen as a cornerstone of educational theory and practice, helping to develop the ‘character and moral education’ of pupils.¹² Lord Byron, himself an agent of the Committee, says that: ‘Greece has ever been for me, as it must be for all men of any feeling or education, the promised land of valour, of the arts, and of liberty throughout the ages.’ He even argues that, during an earlier journey to Greece, his actual experiences on the ground confirmed and reinforced those preconceptions: ‘the journeys I

made in my youth amongst [Greek] ruins certainly had not diminished my love for the heroes’ ancient land’.¹³ Introducing the memoirs of Leicester Stanhope, another Committee-funded administrator, Richard Ryan notes in 1824 that ‘we are taught to admire the energy and pathos of [ancient Greek] poets’ and that this provokes everyone ‘from the schoolboy to the statesman’ to lament Greece’s present misfortune.¹⁴ In this respect, Greece is an educational construct; memories of the classroom affect attitudes to the war and constructions of the landscape and its populace.

Others see their journeys in terms of Greek mythology. In the mid eighteenth-century, Robert Wood had advocated ‘poetical geography’, in which one visited ‘the most celebrated scenes of ancient story, in order to compare their present appearance with the early classical ideas we had conceived of them’.¹⁵ This is a task taken up enthusiastically by early nineteenth-century philhellenes. James Hamilton Browne, for example, visits the supposed ‘ancient stronghold of Ulysses’ and the site of Scylla and Charybdis, though he is disappointed when the evidence for such identifications proves less than overwhelming.¹⁶ A number of travellers are determined to seek the ‘true’ Greece uncorrupted by Ottoman government and redolent of ancient glories. Browne spies individuals’ ‘features cast in the Grecian mould’, perhaps following William Eton’s insistence that modern Greeks are physically unchanged from their ancient ancestors. ‘In walking through a market-place’, Eton says, ‘you may put together [...] the heads of Apollo and the finest ancient statues’; in other words, one can use the aesthetics of classical sculpture both to guide and to validate modern experiences.¹⁷ Bulwer, meanwhile, believes that Greek culture is timeless: ‘the manners of the Greeks are little changed since the fall of the Byzantine empire’.¹⁸ Similarly, Edward Blaquiere observes that modern Greek dances have not ‘experienced the smallest variation’ since ancient times and that, consequently, classical Greece is a living tradition. In

fact, he goes further, insisting that there is ‘scarcely a single Greek, however ignorant or illiterate’ who is not explicitly aware that ‘the torch ... which now illuminates the greatest portion of our hemisphere was first lighted up in Greece.’¹⁹ In case these living ancients were in short supply, William Leake assures potential travellers that such Greeks mainly lived in remote regions outside Turkish influence, where they employed farming methods ‘from the earliest ages’.²⁰

This recourse to educational and mythological analogies highlights the extent to which philhellenic travel is textually constructed – that is, mediated through a set of recognisable narratives and perpetuated through further written accounts. As Helen Angelomatis-Tsougarakis notes, ‘references to other travellers’ works are fairly common’ in philhellenic texts; ‘as far as we can judge, nearly everyone had read most, if not all, the major travellers of the past as well as the more recent travel books’. On one level this helps explain ‘the propagation and reproduction of certain opinions, ideas and perceptions’, especially in terms of recognisable and marketable expectations.²¹ But more significantly, it also suggests that that philhellenic experiences and texts are self-reflexive and mutually constructive. Put simply, philhellenes read books before and during their travels which frame and reinforce certain preconceptions gleaned from educational and classical culture. This, in turn, affects how they understood and presented their actual surroundings and experiences, and allows them to validate those preconceptions in further works for other philhellenic readers.

Given all this, it might be tempting to characterize supposed philhellenic experiences – especially those likening modern Greeks to their ancient predecessors – merely as imaginative flights of fancy generated by convention and expectation. After all, the philhellenes conceive of Greece according to particular conceptual priorities, specifically

their sympathy for the Greek cause and their classical educational backgrounds. Indeed, they often do so with persuasive purpose, aware that certain representations are likely to resonate with readers. Blaquiere, for example, claims to be combatting the ‘ignorance of the real state of Greece’ throughout Europe, although, in practice, this involves presenting a particularised Greece instantly recognisable to classical scholars across the continent.²² There is certainly some awareness of the contrived nature of these portraits. In 1811, François-René de Chateaubriand openly admits that in going to Greece ‘*j’allais chercher des images [...] tantôt m’abandonnant à mes rêveries sur la ruines de la Grèce*’ [I went to seek images...sometimes abandoning myself to my dreams on the ruins of Greece].²³ Some later philhellenes are similarly self-aware. Thomas Gordon, a professional soldier and founding member of the London Greek Committee, notes wryly that many Europeans were motivated by ‘historical recollections’, imagining themselves to be refighting the ‘barbarians of Asia at Thermopylae, Athens, and Mycale’.²⁴ William Parry, an artillery expert sent out by the Committee, describes as ‘nonsense’ his colleagues’ wild enthusiasms for ‘the classic land of freedom, the birth place of the arts, the cradle of genius, the habitation of the gods, the heaven of poets’.²⁵ It was acknowledged that some travellers to Greece were fantasists, using the glamour of the war and location to imagine new lives for themselves: Olivier Voutier’s fictionalised heroic memoirs, for example, became notorious among other philhellenes for their exaggerations.²⁶ However, even an awareness of these tendencies could not always prevent travellers from seeing the landscape of their dreams. For the French philhellene M. C. D. Raffenet, Greece ‘*est une trop douce illusion pour que l’on puisse s’empêcher d’en être ébloui*’ [is too sweet an illusion that one cannot prevent oneself being dazzled by it].²⁷

It is not enough, however, to observe blithely that the philhellenes construct an imaginary ideal of Greece. Firstly, we need to understand their practices in the context of the

eighteenth-century picturesque tradition. This method of appreciating spaces, especially as articulated by the travel writer William Gilpin, encouraged enthusiasts to examine ‘the face of a country *by the rules of picturesque beauty*’; that is, a ‘particular kind of beauty which is agreeable in a picture’.²⁸ In other words, travellers should view and judge the natural world in terms of specific aesthetic standards and expectations, particularly seventeenth-century landscape paintings by Nicholas Poussin, Claude Lorraine and Salvator Rosa.²⁹ By the early nineteenth century, there were established connections between picturesque aesthetics and travel to Greece. Poussin himself had painted Athenian scenes based upon Roman architecture despite never having travelled to Greece, and some later artists and architects who did make the journey organised their observations in order to cohere with picturesque conventions. Julien-David Le Roy, for example, rearranged his compositions in order to make them ‘more harmonious’, and ornamented classical buildings with rococo decorations in accordance with contemporary taste.³⁰ For this reason, when Hugh William Williams declares that ‘the works of Niccolo Poussin [...] agree with the character of Athens’ or that ‘the distant views of Athens claim the style of Claude’, he is not simply suggesting that those artists have successfully captured the apparent qualities of the city.³¹ He also proposes that the space should be understood *as* a picturesque composition; in other words, that Athens actually expresses and embodies a set of aesthetic values and practices. In this respect, day-to-day experience of the landscape is inseparable from the artistic conventions which frame how it is conceived: Greece is a ‘real-and-imagined’ space, simultaneously observed and constructed. Indeed, for Antoine Laurent Castellan, observation of the Greek landscape is itself an act of painterly composition: ‘*le paysagiste apercevra dans la plaine fertile [...] et composer des tableaux dignes du Poussin*’ [a landscape painter may glance in the middle of a fertile plain ... and compose pictures worthy of Poussin].³² It is possible to understand

philhellenic travel writing as part a comparable tradition, with its own cultural and aesthetic priorities through which to comprehend certain spaces.

Secondly, dismissing philhellenes as idealistic fantasists does not sufficiently acknowledge either the political implications of their remarks, or the concrete action they took in pursuit of their ideals. Choiseul-Gouffier’s *Voyage pittoresque de la Grèce* (1782), for example, interweaves picturesque observations with overt laments on modern Greece’s oppression by the Ottomans, thereby annexing aesthetic observation to an explicit political agenda.³³ And for some radically-inclined philhellenes, Greece’s subjugation brought to mind Rousseauvian ideas about how enslavement can lead to moral and civil degeneration, thereby offering a material demonstration of political theory.³⁴ In this respect, imaginative constructions of Greece have important political subtexts – especially as a means to articulate or act out particular political convictions. More fundamentally, philhellenic understandings of Greece were sufficiently tangible to inspire long distance travel, sizeable financial donations, and the risk of injury and death.³⁵ The philhellenes did not simply imagine Greece; they also lived out that imagining – as evidenced by the actuality of travel and armed conflict during the War of Independence. Herein lays the significance of Bulwer’s vision of Harrow churchyard. Clearly this is an imagined construction of a space, produced by a combination of personal familiarity and wishful thinking. However, he also *experiences* Greece through the filter of those representations: they inspired him to act in the philhellenic cause, and also affect his attitude towards the landscape when he arrives. Constanze Güthenke has argued that, in philhellenic works, material experiences and imaginative idealisations ‘constantly merge and reflect one another’: Greece’s material attributes – for instance, its landscape and classical ruins – helps constitute idealised and aestheticized notions which in turn influence how the

real space is understood.³⁶ For this reason, Bulwer’s journey is both real-and-imagined: Greece is imagined in specific ways, and then experienced in terms of those conceptions.

This notion of the ‘real-and-imagined’ is useful for analysis of travel writing – and, indeed, all writing about places – because it allows us to explore the imbrications of the real and imagined in the understanding and experience of specific spaces. Rather than attempting to distinguish between ‘reality’ and ‘invention’ in such writing – a epistemologically problematic process at the best of times – we can instead investigate their mutual construction: how material and other contextual circumstances give rise to certain imaginings, and how those perspectives help shape the construction and experience of actual sites. By talking about ‘real-and-imagined spaces’, we can study how places are built, not only using physical materials, but also in rhetorical and societal terms. We can explore the cultural mentalities – the historical circumstances and audiences – that permit, facilitate and inspire such conceptions. But we can also investigate the consequences of those constructions, that is, begin to appreciate their concrete effects and the realities that they direct and influence. To illustrate this, I want to show how the real-and-imagined spaces of philhellenic travel writing impact on nineteenth-century conceptions of identity and politics. In particular, I want to show how Greece is central, firstly, to early ideas of national and European identities and, secondly, to related controversies in the enactment of radical politics. Crucially, it is the spatiality of Greece which facilitates these interventions and perspectives.

To begin, I will discuss how philhellenic spaces frame discussions of early nationalism and the classical and European ‘legacies’. Between 1809 and 1811, John Cam Hobhouse, a politician and founding member of the London Greek Committee, went on an extended tour

of the Near East. His published account of this trip reveals a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards Greece, albeit one circumscribed, I shall suggest, by convention. He praises Greek culture, remarking that ‘Europe is indebted to this once famous country’ for many intellectual accomplishments and influences; he notes, for example, that its language and literature has inspired ‘all the civilised nations of Europe’. However, under Ottoman sovereignty the region has pathetically declined: modern Greeks have acquired ‘the habits of living and the manners which we are accustomed to call Oriental’ and in recent times have produced ‘no useful invention [...] transmitted to the West’.³⁷ Hobhouse defines Greece in terms of its ambiguous spatiality: it is both part of and excluded from European space, poised between classical civilisation and Ottoman degeneracy. This ‘schismatic’ view of Greece – in which it is concurrently a European ‘point of origin’ and ‘non-Western, different [and] exceptional’ – dates back at least to mid sixteenth-century travel writing: ‘the interplay between the vision of classical antiquity and the image of modern Greece [...] was the overarching theme of all travelogues on prerevolutionary Greece’.³⁸ Hobhouse’s appraisal of Greece’s legacy and significance is therefore embedded firmly within this traditional framework. He constructs a glorious teleology in which particular cultural achievements – poetry, oratory and philosophy for example – originated in Greece, but are now most fully realised in modern Europe and have thus become fundamental to contemporary European identity. However, this argument simultaneously requires a set of derogatory assumptions about present-day Greece, now positioned at the edges of European civility and partly overwhelmed by supposed Ottoman barbarity. The ‘foolish and incautious’ modern Greeks are ‘in possession of the key of a treasury, whose stores they were unable to use’; their ineptitude is so great, in fact, that they cannot even pronounce their own language correctly. Fortunately though, modern scholars are well placed to study and reclaim ancient Greek culture and language. Indeed, Hobhouse ascribes a crucial role to the British, praising ‘our great countryman’ the sixteenth-century

classicist Sir John Cheke, whose insights and methods apparently possessed ‘the boldness of a Briton’.³⁹

The idea that Britain is Greece’s cultural heir has itself a long legacy, and is perhaps most famously expressed in James Thomson’s long poem *Liberty* (1735-6), itself directly inspired by a tour of Europe.⁴⁰ This work and others like it, such as William Collins’s ‘Ode to Liberty’ (1744), ‘recount the Whiggish progress of European civilisation [...] from classical times to the present, conveniently ending in contemporary Britain, the last and therefore best model of civilisation and government’.⁴¹ By the early nineteenth-century, this notion had become exceptionally commonplace, widely reproduced in popular introductions to historical and geographical knowledge such as William Guthrie’s *Geographical, Commercial and Historical Grammar*, a commercially successful text which ran to forty-five editions between 1770 and 1827.⁴² Given the ubiquity of this thesis, it is not surprising that other philhellenic travellers use variations on the argument. Lord Elgin, whose appropriations of Greek artefacts remain controversial, claims that ‘the exertions I made in Greece were wholly for the purpose of securing to Great Britain, and through it to Europe in general, the most effectual possible knowledge.’⁴³ He proposes that the contents of Greek space – particularly its architecture and statues – are the shared legacy of all European countries. However, he also believes that, as Greece’s most advanced heir, Britain is entitled to take possession of the classical tradition by collecting and relocating objects. Elgin’s opponents construct their arguments with similar tools, stressing Greece’s European relevance as well as specific national supremacy. Byron, for instance, describes the Parthenon frieze as a former symbol of classical civilisation’s resistance to ‘Goth, and Turk, and Time’ – though, thanks to Elgin, it is now ‘defaced [...] / By British hands’ and plundered from its rightful place in ‘fair Greece’.⁴⁴ Elgin’s and Byron’s assertions are, in part, reflections on how to interpret (the

relationship between) Greek and European spaces. Are Greece and its contents the intellectual inheritance of all Europe, embodying a common heritage and representing a borderless zone of cultural exchange? Or are alleged national priorities – either of Greece or Britain – ultimately more compelling, an argument which posits a Europe of spatial divisions and mutual exclusivity? As different as Elgin’s and Byron’s attitudes seem to be, their arguments, like the Whiggish ideas about progress which precede them, interweave the idea of a shared European culture with a more nationally-specific understanding of history and space.

To summarise so far then, early nineteenth-century philhellenic travellers make two closely connected arguments which generate significant tensions within conceptions of Greece. Firstly, they locate Greece both at the centre of European culture *and* at the margins. It represents an idea of European self, mainly due to the important role of classical civilisation as a supposed point of origin for all Europe. But the presence of Ottoman despotism and the spectacle of alleged Greek deterioration also cause it to represent non-European otherness. Secondly, Greece embodies both a shared transnational culture which unites Europe *and* a nationalist perspective, in which a specific national identity – Greek, or British, say – assumes priority over certain spaces and objects. These different notions of Greek space are significant, not only because they affect philhellenic perceptions and actions during the War of Independence, but also because they expose tensions in developing nineteenth-century ideas about Europe. What I want to suggest is that Greece and Europe are inseparable concepts in philhellenic thinking: ideas about Europe justify and motivate involvement in the Greek war and, conversely, ideas of Greece organise and refine particular definitions of Europe.

Philhellenes in the London Greek Committee typically use three arguments to justify their support for the war, all of which require certain assumptions about a wider European commonality. Firstly, they see the war as a defence of classical and modern civilisation against Ottoman barbarism; secondly, as a religious imperative; and thirdly, as a political opportunity (most usually a chance to implement radical political ideas, though some argue that involvement would be geopolitically or commercially advantageous). Occasionally, these ideas are applied and fused together in an almost contradictory fashion: some philhellenes, like Blaquiere, base their argument around Christian fraternity, even though their political radicalism usually mandated a weakened role for religion in any reformed society.⁴⁵ The Committee’s own promotional material, for example, incorporates a number of ideas: its ‘Address’ of May 1823 - a kind of manifesto and recruitment document – appeals to a ‘fellow Christian’ community whilst calling for Greece’s national ‘awakening’ or independence; it promotes the latent progress of ‘knowledge and virtue’ in the region, but reminisces nostalgically about Greek antiquity.⁴⁶ The result is a multi-faceted conception of Greece which acts concurrently as a Christian state, a fledgling nation, a radical ideal, and a common progenitor. And because conceptions of Greece are so closely tied to wider ideas about the whole of Europe, this also reveals key problems at the heart of European self-conception. There is much to say about how philhellenic rhetoric reveals deep complexities in nineteenth-century understandings of European religion and civility: the extent to which one can define European ‘civilisation’ in terms of Greece, or the continuing role of Christianity in conceptions of Europe.⁴⁷ Here, however, I want to concentrate on philhellenism and politics, because this shows how ‘real-and-imagined’ understandings of Greece have a concrete impact on political practice. The actions and arguments of many philhellenes reveal disputes about the purpose and practicality of political engagement – in particular the best method to achieve radical change in Europe.

Many philhellenic travellers associate the Greek Revolution with radical politics: they see the conflict as a practical chance to overthrow flawed governmental systems, and to implement new ideas about society. Tapping into the European tradition of anti-monarchical and republican thought, radical philhellenes associate events in Greece with recent, exemplary rebellions against ruling elites.⁴⁸ Byron makes comparisons with the American Revolution, soliciting intellectual credibility and practical help from the United States consul in Geneva: ‘an American’, he says, ‘has a better right than any other to suggest to other nations – the mode of obtaining that Liberty which is the glory of his own’.⁴⁹ Similarly, Edward Blaquiere draws parallels with ‘the events of the French revolution’ and ‘the great and glorious work of South American independence’. Indeed, Blaquiere consistently supported ‘struggles for freedom and national independence’ throughout Europe – in Spain and Italy as well as Greece – looking to ‘an international community of liberals to lead the struggle for national self-determination’.⁵⁰ On one level, therefore, Blaquiere conceives the War as ‘a nationalist movement on the European model’: Greece is part of a new political opportunity in which independent states throw off the shackles of oppression and re-shape Europe.⁵¹ Additionally though, commitment to this cause helps unite an international community of like-minded individuals: it is a cross-border exercise in common purpose. In this way, Greek national independence is premised upon certain European values shared and exported by international radicals.

In the light of this, it is instructive to consider the role of the constitutional theorist Jeremy Bentham in philhellenic thought and practice. Though he did not travel to Greece himself, Bentham was a key figure in the London Greek Committee, not only as a founding member, but also because his literary executor and acolyte John Bowring played a crucial role in the

Committee’s organisation and direction.⁵² According to Bentham, Greece is a space in which imagined ideals could find real expression: the Revolution is an opportunity to implement new constitutional theories outside the conventional restraints of contemporary Europe. In a letter to Greek legislators, he portrays the region as a blank slate for radical experimentation. He tells the Greek government that ‘obstacles which in other nations set up a bar to good government, and that an insuperable one, have no place in your case. You are not cursed with Kings. You are not cursed with Nobles. Your minds are not under the tyranny of Priests. Your minds are not under the tyranny of Lawyers’.⁵³ The Greek Revolution therefore is a glorious opportunity to remould the very basis of European social thought and political practice. These ambitious possibilities also occurred to early nineteenth-century revolutionaries themselves: some – for example in Spain, Portugal and Latin America – even solicited theoretical advice as a ‘signal’ of their ability ‘to establish a government [...] within the European political tradition’.⁵⁴ In this way, Bentham’s recommendations serve a reciprocal objective: he wants Greece to construct itself according to prescribed European political philosophy, partly so that it can become a practical example to the rest of Europe and thereby help reshape its overall governmental systems.

Bentham is all the more significant because a number of philhellenes claim to have drawn inspiration from his proposals for concrete change. Blaquiére sees Greece as an opportunity to oppose ‘despotic systems of government’ and to build foundations for ‘higher walks of politics and legislation’; while Stanhope identifies modern Greece as the ideal space to enact anti-monarchical republican objectives.⁵⁵ A central method here is to establish new schools, museums, and utilitarian societies ‘in communication with all those [...] which profess the same principles in other quarters of the world’, presumably another appeal to international communities of radical sympathisers.⁵⁶ Some scholars have interpreted these remarks as

early expressions of interest in 'proto human rights', though it is equally possible to detect imperialist assumptions and priorities at work.⁵⁷ Stanhope, for instance, is hopeful that 'foreign settlers' in Greece 'will bring with them capital, knowledge, industry and civilisation,' a view which probably derives from his military career in India and his desire to civilise 'natives' according to European mores.⁵⁸ Others even see Greece as a launch-pad for wider colonial enterprises: Blaquiere hopes to 'extend the blessings of instruction throughout Greece, thence perhaps to spread into Asia and Africa'; while Parry suggests that the Greeks themselves might 'extend European civilisation [to...] the borders of Hindostan'.⁵⁹ In some ways, these are vainglorious boasts about philhellenism's irresistibility, but they also reconceptualise European space, not as a patchwork of discrete nation states, or even as a circumscribed area of shared 'civility', but as an ever-expanding and potentially limitless zone gradually assimilating everywhere in its own image.

All of this might suggest that Greece is a triumphal space in which philhellenes were able to realise dreams of political reform and progress. This, however, would be deeply misleading, not simply because such ambitious imperial plans failed to reach fruition, but also because radical philhellenism was riven with disagreement about how best to help the Greeks. This has several important consequences. Firstly, it encourages doubts about very purpose and practicality of radical politics. And secondly, it invites debate about the definition and future trajectory of Europe; as I have been arguing, Greece is an ideological testing ground for debate about the best form of European government. For instance, George Finlay and Thomas Gordon, both veterans of the War, wrote retrospective histories in which they discuss the conflict's effect on international politics. Gordon argues that, far from unifying Europe, it instead exacerbated ideological tensions. Reactionary governments – especially in Russia, Prussia and Austria – saw rebellion against Ottoman rule as a dangerous assault on

legitimacy, while radicals dreaded increased Russian involvement in the region.⁶⁰ Indeed, he diagnoses the politics of the period in rather dualistic terms: ‘active struggle had been going on in Christendom betwixt two opposing principles, the Liberal and the Conservative; or to use a formula their disciples applied to each other, those of anarchy and despotism’.⁶¹ Similarly, Finlay distinguishes between ‘two camps forming in hostile array, under the banners of despotism and liberty’.⁶² In other words, Greece does not unite Europe behind a singular cause, but rather intensifies existing controversies and rivalries. Greek affairs are inseparably bound up in the ideological disagreements of post-Napoleonic politics: if there are different forms of European government striving for supremacy, then the idea of Europe itself is open to dispute.⁶³

Importantly, these debates do not merely expose ideological differences between rival governmental systems; they also reveal anxieties within the purposes and methods of ‘liberal’ attitudes towards Greece. What particular radical objectives should be pursued in Greece and what conceptions of Europe’s past and future should underpin those objectives? Stanhope, for example, hopes to construct and export to Greece his own idea of the perfect liberal government, a project which he presents in terms of opposition to monarchical ‘tyrants’. This can be achieved, he says, by ‘the establishment of free presses and free discussion’, measures which would apparently ‘engraft English and Anglo-American principles on the minds’ of the Greeks.⁶⁴ For Parry, however, these initiatives make no valuable contribution to the war-effort: they are irrelevant luxury-projects which ‘gratify [Stanhope’s] own whims’. A mere ‘schemer and talker’ obsessed with ‘world-reforming pretension’, Stanhope is more concerned with a theoretical goal – pursuing a ‘European political object’ – than with more immediate practical challenges.⁶⁵ Byron also attacks Stanhope’s various newspapers which he felt were overly doctrinaire and would inhibit Greece from receiving international

recognition and practical assistance.⁶⁶ Apparently, his arguments with Stanhope took on the language of ideological rivalry, Byron accusing him of ‘Ultra-radicalism’ and in return being harangued for his supposed ‘despotic principles’.⁶⁷

It would be tempting to see these disputes in farcical terms – as trivial bureaucratic squabbles or personality clashes. However, the attempt to paint radical European ideas onto the Greek canvas in fact exposes conflicts about the purpose and method of radical politics. For some Committee members, Greece is a space in which radical prospects, like classical ideals, can potentially be realised. However, their very activities also foreground the practical difficulties of those ambitions; real-and-imagined Greece represents both the possibility and the challenges of implementing political ideas. Furthermore, these problems intersect with wider ideological disputes in post-Napoleonic Europe: arguments between philhellenes are not just minor quarrels about newspaper articles, they are also disagreements about how to understand and influence the direction of modern European politics. As Stathis Gourgouris observes, the Greek uprising ‘became an affair internal to the wider geopolitical configuration of Europe – which was itself at that time being constantly redrawn’.⁶⁸

In summary then, philhellenic travellers imaginatively construct Greece as a space to articulate concerns about national and European politics. As the diplomat Sir Charles Napier writes in 1821: Greece ‘is a white sheet on which the legislator, the statesman and the soldier may write whatever is good [...] he may give to her everything that the experience of Europe and America has approved’.⁶⁹ But crucially, Greece is also a real space in which those concerns can be acted out. Certain imaginings give rise to actual behaviours; and ideas about identity and politics find expression in the circumstances and activities of Greek travel and conflict. In this sense, one can speak of philhellenic Greece as ‘real-and-imagined’.

Furthermore, the significance of this real-and-imagined Greece lies in its complex spatiality. In some respects, Greece’s privileged position as Europe’s supposed ‘cultural catalyst’ makes it especially ‘fertile ground’ for the cultivation of ideas about national sovereignty and changing European politics.⁷⁰ In others though, its importance resides in its liminality, located within and outside Europe. In reflecting on states and sovereignty in Europe, Étienne Balibar contests that: ‘border areas – zones, countries, and cities – are not marginal to the constitution of a public sphere but are rather at the centre. If Europe is for us first of all the name of an *unresolved political problem*, Greece is one of its centres, not because of the mythic origins of our civilisation, symbolised by the Acropolis of Athens, but because of the current problems concentrated there.’⁷¹ Balibar’s reflections are useful for their figurative and expansive use of spatial language. In our contemporary discourse, ‘central’ is sometimes used as a synonym for ‘important’ – the opposite of ‘marginal’ or ‘tangential’. But what Balibar makes clear is that centrality and marginality are neither diametric opposites, nor implicit statements of significance. Instead, Greece’s ‘centrality’ has far richer implications, suggesting a revolution around a set of problems, or a focal point imbricated with the haziness and lack of definition of the periphery.

In the context I have been discussing, the figurative and literal space of Greece – in terms of both *where* it is, and *what* it represents – facilitates various rhetorical approaches to certain historical, political and intellectual problems. Depending on where and how it is located in conceptual terms, Greece can be described as a common originator, or a degenerated ‘other’, the scene of a radical political cause, or of its failure. This spatial ambiguity inspires contrasting notions of identity – from a shared European heritage, to a medley of states enmeshed in rivalry. However, if spatiality can influence (the understanding of) political ideas, then the reverse is also true, because philhellenes experience the reality of Greek space

in terms of their prior ideological expectations. This is why, for instance, the Greek landscape reminds Henry Bulwer of Harrow churchyard, or James Hamilton Browne of *The Odyssey*. The resonances of an apparent ‘heritage’ constructed from the classics lend the space a metaphorical richness which, for philhellenic travellers and combatants, can become a real-and-imagined experience. In this respect, philhellenes imagine and view Greece as a place of cultural encounter and confrontation, as an intellectual homeland and a hostile territory, and in doing so, they engage with urgent questions about how to comprehend and shape Europe in the post-Napoleonic period. They use Greece to explore the vagaries of European divisions and borders, whilst also trying to articulate apparently secure (if problematic) ideas about European government and historical tradition. Put simply, philhellenic travel writing shows how conceptions of space, history and politics are all mutually constitutive. But no less crucially, it highlights that Greece is both marginal and central to the construction of a real-and-imagined Europe.

¹ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 1, 3, 6, 11, 31-3, 40-5.

² Lefebvre, 47-8.

³ Lefebvre, 26-7.

⁴ For an overview of these developments see Warf and Arias, *Spatial Turn*.

⁵ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 8, 9-10, 1.

⁶ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 6, 11-12, 22, 135. See also Said, *Orientalism*.

⁷ Augustinos, *French Odysseys*, ix, 1-48; Tsigakou, *Rediscovery of Greece*, 11-20.

⁸ Angelomatis-Tsougarakis, *Greek Revival*, 2-4.

⁹ Rosen, ‘London Greek Committee’. See also St Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free* and Bass, *Freedom’s Battle*, 76-87.

¹⁰ The London Greek Committee is not, of course, the only example of political engagement inspired by philhellenism. As Suzanne Marchand notes, for example, in the southwestern German states ‘the Greek war opened a new age of bourgeois-liberal political organisation, preparing its supporters for the more openly political battles of the 1830s and 1840s’ (Marchand, *Olympus*, 33).

¹¹ Bulwer, *Autumn in Greece*, 62.

¹² Wallace, *Shelley and Greece*, 10,

¹³ Byron to Andreas Londos, 30 Jan 1824, in *Byron’s Letters*, 11:103.

¹⁴ Richard Ryan, ‘Preface’ to Stanhope, *Greece in 1823 and 1824*, vi-vii.

¹⁵ Wood, *Palmyra*, ii; *Genius of Homer*, i. For more on Wood’s significance see Eisner, *Antique Land*, 72-3.

¹⁶ Browne, ‘Narrative’, 392.

¹⁷ Browne, ‘Narrative’, 400; Eton, *Turkish Empire*, 355

- ¹⁸ Bulwer, *Autumn*, 116.
- ¹⁹ Blaquiere, *Narrative*, part one, 58; Blaquiere, *Report*, 13
- ²⁰ Leake, *Historical Outline*, 7-8.
- ²¹ Angelomatis-Tsougarakis, *Greek Revival*, 9-12.
- ²² Blaquiere, *Narrative*, part two 117.
- ²³ Chateaubriand, *Itinéraire de Paris a Jérusalem et de Jérusalem a Paris* (1811), in *Oeuvres*, 2:701-2 (my translation).
- ²⁴ Gordon, *Greek Revolution*, 1:314.
- ²⁵ Parry, *Last Days*, 187-9. Parry’s volume purports to record Byron’s opinions and much of the text is presented as the poet’s direct speech. It would be incautious to take this at face value so I treat the ideas presented in the book as Parry’s and not as Byron’s. Furthermore, the book was most likely ghostwritten by Thomas Hodgskin (see St Clair, ‘Postscript’, 4-7).
- ²⁶ Voutier, *Mémoires*. Voutier’s exaggerations are the subject of an anecdote in Millingen, *Memoires*, 63.
- ²⁷ Raffanel, *Histoire*, 11 (my translation).
- ²⁸ Gilpin, *Observations*, 1; Gilpin, *Essay*, x.
- ²⁹ For more on picturesque tourism see Andrews, *Search for the Picturesque*; Copley and Garside (eds.), *The Politics of the Picturesque*.
- ³⁰ Stoneman, *Luminous Land*, 3-5; Tsigakou, *Rediscovery of Greece*, 19.
- ³¹ Williams, *Travels*, 2:338-9.
- ³² Castellan, *Lettres*, 115-16, cited and translated in Tsigakou, *Rediscovery of Greece*, 26-7.
- ³³ Stoneman, *Luminous Land*, 5-6.
- ³⁴ Tsigakou, *Rediscovery of Greece*, 31.
- ³⁵ See Spencer, *Fair Greece*, vii.
- ³⁶ Güthenke, *Placing Modern Greece*, 4-7, 62.
- ³⁷ Hobhouse, *Journey*, 544, 265, 540.
- ³⁸ Güthenke, *Placing Modern Greece*, 241-2; Augustinos, *French Odysseys*, ix-xi, 61.
- ³⁹ Hobhouse, *Journey*, 584, 542-4.
- ⁴⁰ Thomson, *Poetical Works*, 413.
- ⁴¹ Levine, ‘Whig Progress’, 553-4.
- ⁴² Guthrie, *Geographical Grammar*, xxvi, xxxiii; Sitwell, *Four Centuries*, 273-84.
- ⁴³ Quoted in St. Clair, *Lord Elgin*, 260.
- ⁴⁴ Byron, *Child Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812), in *Poetical Works*, canto 2, lines, 101, 130-1, 127.
- ⁴⁵ Blaquiere, *Greece and Her Claims*, i; Roessel, *In Byron’s Shadow*, 35.
- ⁴⁶ ‘Address of the Greek Committee, 3 May 1823’, in Gordon, *History*, 2:85-6.
- ⁴⁷ For more details of how ideas about Europe, civilisation, Christianity, and politics intersect in the philhellenism of the 1820s see Stock, *The Shelley-Byron Circle and the Idea of Europe*, esp. 175–97. Examples and materials discussed in this volume and redeployed in the present article are reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan. The full published version of Paul Stock, *The Shelley-Byron Circle and the Idea of Europe*, 2010, Palgrave Macmillan, is available from: <http://us.macmillan.com/theshelleybyroncircleandtheideaofeuropa>; and <http://www.palgraveconnect.com/pc/doi/10.1057/9780230106307>.
- ⁴⁸ For a thorough discussion of republicanism’s role in European political thought see Van Gelderen and Skinner, *Republicanism*.
- ⁴⁹ Byron to Edward Church, 21 June 1823, in *Letters*, 10:202.
- ⁵⁰ Blaquiere, *The Greek Revolution*, 17; *Greece and Her Claims*, 1; and *Narrative*, part 1, 43; Rosen, *Bentham, Byron and Greece*, 133.
- ⁵¹ St Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free*, 9.

- ⁵² Rosen, ‘London Greek Committee’.
- ⁵³ Bentham, “To the Greek Legislators,” in *Securities Against Misrule*, 193.
- ⁵⁴ Rosen, *Bentham, Byron and Greece*, 96.
- ⁵⁵ Blaquiere, *Narrative*, part 1, vi, ix; part 2, 67; Stanhope, *Greece in 1823 and 1824*, v, x-xi, 14-15, 22
- ⁵⁶ Stanhope, *Greece in 1823 and 1824*, 142.
- ⁵⁷ Bass, *Freedom’s Battle*, 48, 79.
- ⁵⁸ Stanhope, *Greece in 1823 and 1824*, 169; see also Dimaras, ‘The Other British Philhellenes’, 210-12
- ⁵⁹ Blaquiere, *Greece and Her Claims*, 22; Parry, *Last Days*, 177
- ⁶⁰ Conservative governments – particularly in Britain and Austria – were also suspicious of Russian involvement in Greece: see Schroeder, *Transformation*, 638-41.
- ⁶¹ Gordon, *Greek Revolution*, 1:315; 2:279.
- ⁶² Finlay, *Greek Revolution*, 2:162.
- ⁶³ For more about the conflict’s effects on European politics see Schroeder, *Transformation*, 637-65.
- ⁶⁴ Stanhope, *Greece in 1823 and 1824*, 234, xi, 137. See also 101, 142.
- ⁶⁵ Parry, *Last Days*, 190, 243-6, 235, 276.
- ⁶⁶ See Gamba, *Byron’s Last Journey*, 102, 140.
- ⁶⁷ Byron to Samuel Barff, 19 March 1824, in *Letters*, 11:139.
- ⁶⁸ Gourgouris, *Dream Nation*, 73-4.
- ⁶⁹ Napier, *War in Greece*, 11-12.
- ⁷⁰ Gourgouris, *Dream Nation*, 74.
- ⁷¹ Balibar, *We, the People of Europe*, 2. For another example of how marginal spaces are used to construct ideas of Europe see Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, esp. 1-16.

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