The Lure of Greece

Irish Involvement in
Greek Culture, Literature,
History and Politics

A selection of papers presented at a Conference organised by
the Irish Institute of Hellenic Studies at Athens, and held in
the National University of Ireland, Galway
19–21 September 2003

Editors
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The Irish Institute of Hellenic Studies at Athens held its first conference on the topic of ‘Irish Involvement in Greek Culture, Literature, History and Politics’ in the National University of Ireland, Galway, on 19–21 September 2003, and the papers in the present volume are drawn from some of the sessions at that meeting.

The organization of a conference and the subsequent preparation of papers for publication is always the work of many hands, and it is a great pleasure on behalf of the Institute to express thanks to the many individuals who helped to make both the conference and publication possible. The National University of Ireland, Galway, offered a most hospitable location for the conference, and a very appropriate one since the meeting also marked the centenary of George Thomson (Seoirse Mac Thomáis), Professor of Greek through Irish at Galway (1931–4), whose own researches spanned the key themes of the conference. We thank NUIG President Iognáid Ó Muircheartaigh for opening the conference, Professor Brian Arkins for a delightful keynote speech, and our colleagues from Galway’s Department of Classics for their help: Brian Arkins, Andrew Erskine,
Anne Neville, and, in particular, Edward Herring for his assistance with practical matters and for marshalling students to help. In the earlier stages Conn Murphy played a key role with ideas and practical help, Gay Conroy gave generously of her time in helping with bookings over the summer of 2003, and Peter Liddell and Jason O’Brien also provided support at key moments.

The sessions from which the papers presented here are drawn were organized by Christine Morris (on Travellers and Philhellenes), by Christina Souyoudzoglou-Haywood (on Antiquarians, Artists and Collectors), and by John Dillon and Christine Morris (on The Classical Tradition in Ireland). We express our thanks to all the speakers for their papers and to everyone who attended for making the conference such an enjoyable occasion.

John Luce, who also spoke at the conference, kindly offered his services to work with the Institute on preparing papers for publication. The Institute is deeply grateful to him for his belief in the importance of this project and for his devotion to the task. He has worked closely with our publisher, Ross Hinds, who has undertaken the production of the volume and given most generously of his time and expertise.

The starting point for exploring the links between Ireland and the Greek world is always W. B. Stanford’s masterly survey, Ireland and the Classical Tradition. The current volume explores a selection of relevant themes in greater detail, yet it is also clear that we have only scratched the surface of these intriguing connections. It is to be hoped that these studies will stimulate many more explorations of the myriad personal, political and scholarly threads and connections between these two cultures.

Dr Christine Morris
Chair
Irish Institute of Hellenic Studies at Athens
x
June 2006
The Lure of Greece is a fine theme with which to inaugurate what I hope will prove to be a prolific series of publications of the Irish Institute of Hellenic Studies in Athens. This volume, the product of a conference held in Galway in September 2003, brings together the papers delivered in one of the two sections into which the conference was divided, the other concerning Greek influences in Irish literature¹.

Under the able chief editorship of J. V. Luce, himself a major authority in the field, there has been assembled here an impressive panorama of case-studies of the interaction between Irishmen (including honorary Irishmen such as George Thomson, and the Rev. Basil Zula) and Greece over the last two centuries and more, which constitutes a study of a significant part of the Northern European love affair with Greece — or perhaps more accurately, the idea of Greece — during that period. This is not to say that the realities of the new Greece that

¹ This latter topic, fascinating and fruitful though it is, will probably not merit a distinct Institute volume arising out of the conference, since it has been, and is being, so well covered already in a series of publications by Prof. Brian Arkins of Galway, a valued member of our Managing Committee.
was emerging in the 1820s and 1830s were entirely neglected: Sir Richard Church, after all, on whom we have a fine study in this volume by Patrick Comerford, played a key (if slightly cantankerous) role in the establishment of the modern Greek state; but it is fair to say the main focus of interest of our philhellenes was the glories of ancient Greece.

John Luce himself has contributed a most enlightening study of that remarkable Meath man, Robert Wood, who made a significant contribution, prior to the more generally celebrated German scholar Friedrich August Wolf, to our understanding of how the Homeric poems were composed, as well as conducting extensive travels in Greek lands, and as far afield as Palmyra, wherein he was ably supported by the artistic genius of Giovanni Battista Borra, on other aspects of whose work Michael McCarthy has contributed a fine essay.

That other great traveller in Greek lands, James Caulfeild, Lord Charlemont is celebrated, amongst others, in Aideen Ireland’s contribution on collectors and collecting in 18th and 19th century Ireland. While the removal of antiquities from the lands to which they belong is an activity now rightly frowned upon, it has to be recognised also that in earlier days many precious objects were rescued from a fate worse than removal, and an appreciation for the artistic glories of Greece and Rome was thus introduced among the publics of Northern European lands; so one must see the great collectors in their historical context.

Indeed, the story of Professor Henry Browne, and his role in the creation of the fine archaeological museum attached to the UCD School of Classics, told here by Christina Haywood, as well as William Dunlop’s account of K.T. Frost’s contribution to that in Queen’s University, Belfast, are part of this story also. Both Browne and Frost were Englishmen, but the Fates contrived that they both contributed significantly to the Classical holdings of their adopted country. In connexion with Queen’s, the more recent contribution of such a figure as Henry Campbell McElderry, is also rightly emphasized by Dunlop.

To go back somewhat in time, we are indebted to Jo Day for a delightful account of that extraordinary figure, the Rev. Basil Patras Zula, Moravian pastor at Kilwarlin, Co. Down, and his creation of a ‘Thermopylae Garden’ in the

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2 His house in the Plaka, currently being restored from a ruinous state, remains the object of a distant dream of the Institute, as an ideal base for its operations.
1830s, just as his homeland was attaining its freedom. From the latter part of the
century, Patrick Sammon, himself a distinguished philhelle, brings us a study
of what Greece meant to Oscar Wilde, while Andrew Smith dwells on the very
different figure of Gerard Manley Hopkins, (another adopted Irishman, and not
an entirely comfortable one), as well as giving us further insights into Fr. Henry
Browne.

A contemporary of Hopkins and Browne, but very much of a hands-on
philhelle, is rescued from obscurity in a fine study by Christine Morris. James
David Bouchier, from Co. Limerick, became very much of a hero to the people
of Crete in the 1890s and later by reason of his support for the cause of Cretan
independence through his eloquent articles as correspondent of The Times. As a
friend of both Sir Arthur Evans and Prince George of Crete, he was instrumental
in obtaining permission from the latter to allow the former to dig at Knossos.

More recent figures, both remarkable in their way, are celebrated by Peter
Gathercole and Brian McGing. George Thomson, alias Seoirse Mac Thomáis,
discussed by Gathercole, was a romantic British Marxist Classical scholar, who
came over to the West of Ireland in the 1920s in search of indigenous peasant
culture, and found it triumphantly in the Blasket Islands, where he actually
stimulated the publication of two of the classics of Modern Irish literature, while
himself becoming lecturer in Classics in University College, Galway before
going back to Britain to preside over a most innovative Classics programme in
the University of Birmingham. Peter Gathercole actually concentrates mainly on
an incident from Thomson's later career, but one that illustrates admirably what
manner of man he was.

Lastly, Brian McGing contributes a portrait of a rather different figure, my
distinguished predecessor William Bedell Stanford, Regius Professor of Greek at
Trinity College from 1940 to 1980, who, besides contributing significantly to
Greek studies in Ireland, fostered ties between Ireland and Greece to such an
extent that he was in 1980 accorded the rare honour, for a foreigner, of being
granted by the Greek Government the title of Higher Commander of the Order
of the Phoenix. Brian McGing well brings out the ways in which Stanford, like
Mahaffy before him, was innovative, while speculating illuminatingly on why he
was not as effective as he might have been in other areas of scholarship. From
the philhellenic perspective, however, the most important feature of his life was probably his long-standing relationship with Swan’s Hellenic Cruises, in the course of which he introduced a generation of well-heeled visitors to the glories of Greece.

I have certainly found much enlightenment and entertainment in this series of studies, and I have no doubt that this will be the experience of every reader of them. Of course, this cannot aspire to being a complete survey of the relations between Ireland and Greece: two figures that spring to mind who figure only incidentally in this collection are Lord Charlemont and John Pentland Mahaffy, but they have both had biographies devoted to them. However, what we have here is a fine conspectus of the range of characters involved in the area of Irish philhellenism, and I am glad to welcome it on behalf of the Irish Institute at Athens.

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Like Portugal, Greece is committed to bringing its economy up to speed with the rest of the European Union as part of its plan to introduce the single European currency by the end of the decade. Unfortunately, Greece is finding it harder to make progress. Hamstrung by government borrowing at 118 percent of gross domestic product, inflation above 10 percent and GDP growth of only 1 percent, there seems little obvious hope of the Greek stock market taking off. But news this week that the Greek government plans to privatize part of the state-owned telecommunications monopoly, OTE, was greeted warmly. Greece comes out as a colorful picture, tinted with the personal multiple identities of travelers visiting the country between the 15th and 19th centuries. Admission fee is €7 and opening hours are Wednesdays and Fridays from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Thursdays and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to midnight and Sundays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Greece was torn apart by the National Schism, a division of the country into irreconcilable camps supporting either King Constantine I or his prime minister, Venizelos. The immediate grounds for tension were differences between the king and the prime minister as to Greece's alignment during World War I, although there were deeper causes underlying the split. The king advocated neutrality, while Venizelos was an.