

Greek Travellers and Travel Literature from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century*

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Although the western travellers who travelled in the territories of the Ottoman Empire between the fifteenth and the eighteenth century have been studied extensively, the opposite happens as far as concerns the peregrinations of Greek travellers, which are almost unknown and difficult to find. They have not enjoyed the attention of the neohellenists — philologists and historians — and most of them are found only in rare publications of the nineteenth century. We can separate them in two main categories, those which describe the East and those which refer to the West. In this paper we deal only with the second group of texts, because they constitute one of the sources of knowledge about the relations of Greeks with the West, relations that constitute the central problem of Modern Greek studies.

We begin our examination of Greek travellers in Western Europe and their texts with the consciousness that it is possible other similar works exist, which have not been located and which we hope to trace later. The only study which has been written upon Greek travellers and which solely records their texts, does not mention all that we examine (Aggelomati-Tsougaraki, 2000:155–80).

The fifteenth century commences with a very important traveller in the West, the emperor Manuel II, who visited European courts between 1400 and 1402 aiming at receiving military and economic help in order to cope with the Ottoman threat (Barker, 1969:167–99; Nicol, 1971:204–25). Unfortunately, neither from him nor from any member of his court do we have a report of his journey. Nicol (Nicol, 1974:199) argues that the accounts written by Laonikos Chalkokondylis in his *Αποδείξεις Ιστοριών* with regard to that travel (Chalkokondylis: 84–96) emanated from an oral or written narration of the facts by somebody amongst the attachés of the

* I have to thank the Alexander Onassis Public Benefit Foundation for its support of my research. But for its scholarship, this paper would not have reached its final version.

emperor who participated in it; nevertheless it is not a text of travel literature in either the narrow or the wide meaning of the term.¹

The sole text that Manuel II has left to us, which could be characterised as travel literature, is a description according to the Renaissance protypa and Byzantine “εκφράσεις” of a luxurious carpet he saw in Paris, with a landscape painted on it (Manuel II Palaeologus, PG 156:577–80). But no information concerning Europe or the travel is provided in it and accordingly it is useless for our research, even if it constitutes an indication of the artistic sensitivity of the emperor.

Around the fifth decade of the fifteenth century we trace the first travel text; it is the Tour of Kananos Laskaris (Lampros, 1881:705–19), who visited Northern Europe (Lundström, 1902; Vasiliev, 1914:397–402; Grabler, 1954:101–105; Svendsen, 1961:217–28) in the first half of the century. We do not know anything else about him, because no other work of his is extant (Hunger, 1987:377). The text is short and consequently offers little either to the investigation of the conditions of travelling, or to the perception of Europeans just before the fall of Constantinople.

From the mid-fifteenth to the mid-sixteenth century we find no textual description of a journey in Europe, then in the mid-sixteenth century we meet the most famous Greek traveller of the period, Nikandros Noukios from Corfu. His peregrination titled *Αποδημίαι*² and written in 1546–1547 (Noukios, *Αποδημίαι*) consists of three parts. It is a characteristic travel text and one which resembles more closely the western equivalents of the period (Ridder-Symoens, 1989:197–223). It focuses on the description of monuments and political institutions, while the narration is detailed and constitutes a description of the journey with frequent references to himself. Noukios writes in order to teach what Europe was and also how it functioned in his time. In the text there is a number of autobiographical elements and some details of the conditions of his travels.

Noukios was a typical example of a scholar of his time (Michailidis, 1970:220–22; Panagiotopoulou, 1990). Born in a Greek territory under Venetian occupation he lived and worked in Europe, where he encountered the principal political juxtaposition of the period, the struggle between Catholics and Protestants. He does not appear to sympathise with either side, because he considers both equally foreign. Although he lived in the West from 1537 until 1550 he does not cease to consider himself as a Greek and he perceives Europeans as “others” with a different grade of otherness in every case.

¹ As a travel text within the narrow significance of the term we can characterise any text that was written by a traveller with the sole aim of narrating his travel. But passages of wider works like autobiographies, letters and diaries, in which the travellers record their memories, are often described as travel texts with the wider significance of the term (Harbsmeier, 1987:345).

² Edited by J. A. Foucault, 1962. For the philological problems of that edition see Bouboulidis, 1965: 218–21.

The next text is the *Οδοιπορικόν* of Jacob Miloitis (Miloitis, *Οδοιπορικόν*) written before 1588.³ He appears to have composed also a tour of Egypt (Miloitis, 1971; Viggopoulou – Polykandrioti, 1993:93), and he also dealt with the problem of the calendar (Miloitis, 1590). As he informs us, he was born in Patmos and travelled a lot not only in the West but also in the East. It appears that he was interested in Protestantism and he dedicated his work to Martin Crusius, the famous German theologian and humanist.

In the eighteenth century tours and contacts with Europe increased. International relationships became stronger and thus more Greeks travelled as diplomats or tradesmen from the Ottoman Empire to the West. Travel to a foreign country continued to take place infrequently and only a few socially and economically powerful people could practise it. But we note a spread of a travelling mentality in wider social layers, as we can assume also from the western travellers in the Ottoman Empire in the same century.

The first travel text of the eighteenth century, which concerns a journey that was realised in the last years of the seventeenth century, is the *Περιηγηματικόν Πυκτάτιον* (Michael, *Περιηγηματικόν Πυκτάτιον*) of Anastasios Michael, from Nausa. The text has the misleading subtitle: “Tour of Europe”. The unique copy of the first edition, which was kept in the National Library of Greece, has been lost and the work is found in photographs in the Centre of Study of New Hellenism of the Academy of Athens. There is no record of the cover, the title page and the rest of the text after page 216. The part of the work that we know is a peregrinatio, but in no case a peregrination through Europe.⁴ Although Michael moves in the West, and especially in Germany, he mainly describes the schools teaching Greek letters there and in other regions. The work constitutes a geography of Greek education. Due to the condition of the text the date and the place of publishing are vague. Tsougaraki suggests as the date of publication the year 1706 and as the place the town of Amsterdam (Aggelomati-Tsougaraki, 2000:160). From internal evidence of the text we are obliged to consider 1710 as the year of publication.⁵

Very little is known about the writer. The fact that Germany, and especially Halle, constitutes the centre of his travels, prompts us to believe that he maintained good relations with the Protestants. Another work of his is known, the *Βασιλικόν Θέατρον*, which is an “anthem” dedicated to Peter the Great of Russia.⁶ These two facts can be combined, as Peter imported into Russian ecclesiastical life many changes deriving from Protestant criticism and practice.

³ In the manuscript there is a note by Martin Crusius mentioning the date 16 January 1588 (Papa-georgiou, 1882:632).

⁴ The lost part of the work, of which we do not know the extent, might justify the title.

⁵ It is more probable that the copy that existed in the National Library of Greece and now exists only on film in the Academy of Athens belongs to the second edition, which according to Benesevic was published in Berlin in 1710 (Benesevic, 1933:360).

⁶ Concerning his relations with Russia see Benesevic, 1933:363–66.

The next traveller of that century is Vasileios Vatatzis (Minaoglou, 2002:233–46). A Romios tradesman from Constantinople, he represents a particular type of scholar of the eighteenth century. In his *Περιηγητικόν* (Vatatzis, *Περιηγητικόν*) he provides more autobiographical information than any other of his colleagues. He was born in 1694, the sixth child of his family. His father was a priest and in particular served as great oikonomos of the Patriarchate. He was primarily educated in Constantinople, which he left at the age of fourteen in order to become a tradesman and to travel in Russia. Passing through the Danubian Principalities and Russia, he reached Isfahan in Persia in 1715. Following the same route he returned to Constantinople in 1720. He left Constantinople again in 1727 and taking the same route he continued his road to the East as far as Kabul. From there, he retraced his footsteps back through Russia not only in order to return to Constantinople, but also in order to continue his travel in Western Europe, where in 1732 in England he printed his map of Central Asia.

Beyond the two tours and his map we know also his *Περσικά*, which narrate the history of Persia at the period of the government of Nadir Sahi, for whom he undertook diplomatic missions. Specifically, it includes the period from 1694 to 1747. The work, which has been saved in more than one manuscript, constitutes for its period an interesting historical, religious and ethnographical text.

It deserves to be pointed out that the *Περιηγητικόν* is written in verse. This form is not the usual one for the period, and it is due to the writer's choice to remain loyal to the Greco-Roman tradition, which insists on composing these texts in the heroic hexameter or some other poetic form. Vatatzis used as a prototype the work of Dionysius the Traveller, a writer of the second century, who uses this model.

The next text is in our opinion, for a variety of reasons, unique. It is the *Περιγραφή της Φράντζας* of the Ottoman dignitary and diplomat Iyirmi Sekiz Tzelempi Mehmet Efendi (Göçek, 1987:7–23), which was translated into Greek by a Phanariot called Sotiris, as we learn from the tradition of the text (Mehmet Efendi, *Περιγραφή της Φράντζας*). We do not know anything else about the translator; the text must have been translated in the second quarter of the eighteenth century (Kechagioglou, 2001:504). The work was written in 1721, when Mehmet Efendi returned from France to Constantinople (Aksan, 1995:191); he himself declares that it constitutes a report of his travel to the Sublime Porte (Mehmet Efendi, *Περιγραφή της Φράντζας*: 143).

We decided to consider this description among the Greek travel texts of eighteenth century for two reasons. Firstly, because it was translated early and functioned among the Greeks as did similar Greek texts of that period which were originally composed in Greek⁷ and secondly because it resembles the descriptions

⁷ It appears that it was read widely, because it exists in three manuscripts. By contrast, all the other remaining travel texts of the period are found in fewer copies, with the exception of Noukius' *Αποδημίας* which is also found in three manuscripts.

of two Greek diplomatic employees of the Ottoman Empire, Konstantinos Karatzas and Panagiotis Kodrikas. The comparison between these three travellers, who emanate from the same state, but differ in mentality and education, shows many of the differences in culture between Greeks and Turks.

Two of the travellers in the eighteenth century who wrote down their travel experiences not only travelled in Europe, but also stayed and lived there. They are Ioannis Prighos and Panagiotis Kodrikas. The first, a well-known tradesman in Amsterdam, composed a narration of the Greek community of the town, which remained known under the title that was attributed to it by its first publisher: *To Χρονικόν του Άμστερνταμ*. He also wrote a number of travel notes in the books which he sent to his birthplace, Zagora (Skouvaras, 1964).

So we have a Greek tradesman in Europe, who also travelled in other regions beyond Holland. With a lack of education, but a sincere love for learning, he tried to place his homeland in the orbit of European education using all possible means, such as books and donations. He was also an active member of the Greek community of Amsterdam.

In the beginning of the last decade of eighteenth century Konstantinos Karatzas, better known as Banus, because of his rank in the Danubian Principalities, travelled in Europe as interpreter of the Ottoman embassy in Berlin (Karatzas, *Εφημερίδες*). Son of komisus Nikolaos Karatzas, he was made a secretary of the prince Gregory Ghica I in Walachia in 1769. He lived mainly in the Principalities and for short intervals in Constantinople. He successively occupied the rank of great komisus, ispravnik, great spatar and great banus (Kechagioglou, 2001:815). He was a typical example of a Phanariot who made a career as an administrative employee. His peregrinatio is delivered to us in the form of a diary that he was keeping during his travel, that is to say from 1790 to 1792. Unfortunately, it remains unpublished even though, according to L. Vranousis, G. Kournoutos was preparing an edition of it.⁸

The final traveller of eighteenth century, Panagiotis Kodrikas, was well-educated. This Athenian scholar was secretary to Michael Soutsos and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, a high Christian officer of the Sublime Porte and later a French diplomat. At the same time, he was the most important opponent of Koraes in the language question and one of the main tutors of the Enlightenment in the East.⁹

He provides us with his peregrinatio as part of his *Εφημερίδες* (Kodrikas, *Εφημερίδες*). It is a kind of diary, in which he recorded whatever had happened to him.¹⁰ The journey was undertaken in 1797 and aimed to create an Ottoman

⁸ Vranousis, 1995:586. We are preparing an edition of this work.

⁹ For a concise presentation of the life of Kodrikas see Dimaras, 1998:348–61.

¹⁰ Kodrikas appears to have begun composing an official report of the embassy, of which only certain pages have been preserved (Herbette, 1902:9). Herbette's study is important, because many French diplomatic documents are contained in it, concerning the reception of the diplomatic mission in which Kodrikas participated.

embassy in France, of which he was appointed the first interpreter. Kodrikas later chose to remain in France and change his employer, passing from the Ottoman to the French diplomatic service.

The Greek travel texts referring to Europe, which were written during the period of the Ottoman Occupation, provide the historian with various data about Europe. The most important is that these texts present the image and perception of Europe that the Greeks had in that time; an image and perception continuously changing during these four centuries.

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