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Greekness (*Ελληνικότητα*) and Germanness (*Deutschtum*) during the Interwar: An Entangled History of Colonization of the Past

The interwar period was a fertile period of intellectual debates and exchanges between intellectuals in the North and South Europe, despite the regional tensions and inequalities. The essay discusses the quest for the meaning of *Greekness* and *Germaneness* in the years of the interwar crisis and identifies the mutual points of intersection between two seemingly different stories. It focuses on cultural exchanges that deploy uses of classical antiquity and its adjustment to the present to remedy the identity-crisis that experienced Germany and Greece respectively, by examining the entangled ‘topography’ of *Germanness* and *Greekness* and by analyzing the writings and program of the German poet Stefan George as well as his influence on Greek intellectuals. The essay analyzes the intellectual foundations of George’s program and the attempt to redefine *Germanness* through classical antiquity, while it also documents George’s reception by Modern Greek thought. The reception of George’s ideas and the exploration of the writings of his Greek counterparts raise issues concerning the cultural and spiritual excavation of antiquity and the ensuing antagonism regarding the interpretation and meaning of this tradition. Intellectuals on both sides attempted in different terms to establish a dominant Greek/German universality, by dictating a borderless and ecumenical vision of their spiritual hegemony across Europe.

Keywords: Humanism, Classical Antiquity, Roman Antiquity, Greekness, Germanness, Stefan George, Intellectuals, Idealism, Interwar period

Introduction: An influential Hellenophile movement in *fin de siècle* Europe

The cultural program of the ‘Third Humanism’, which privileged an ahistorical vision of Greek antiquity as the ideal model for the renewal

of post-war Germany in the early twentieth century, somehow mirrors, on the one hand, the intellectual and cultural intersection between the Weimar Republic and the Second Hellenic Republic, and, on the other, the entanglement of two seemingly different stories during a politically turbulent and transitional era of both nations. By exploring the intellectual colonization of Greco-Roman Antiquity by German writers and the reflection of such an appropriation by Greek thinkers during the interwar period, this essay focuses on the quest for the meaning of Greekness (*Ελληνικότητα*) and Germanness (*Deutschtum*). The cultural exchanges between intellectuals, artists, and poets of Northern Europe from the Mediterranean, which deploy uses of Greco-Roman imperial images and the standards and values of classical antiquity, were adjusted and offered as a remedy to the identity-crisis that Germany and Greece were experiencing.

Several scholars, including Barbara Stiewe and Helen Roche, have made the case that one of the most influential Hellenophile movements in *fin de siècle* Europe was the George-Kreis, the circle of artists, poets, and intellectuals gathered around the German poet, Stefan George (1868-1933).¹ Central to the circle was the proclaimed attachment to classic Greco-Roman standards. This essay will consider in depth the influence of Greco-Roman antiquity on the work of George and his perception of Germanness and will investigate his impact and the Georgians in general on those Greek intellectuals who took inspiration from for their program for Greekness.²

¹ Stiewe, Barbara. *Der 'Dritte Humanismus': Aspekte Deutscher Griechenrezeption Vom George-Kreis Bis Zum National-Sozialismus*. Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 2011; Roche, Helen. "The peculiarities of German Phihellenism", *The Historical Journal*, 61 (2), 2018, 541-560.

² On the influence of classic antiquity on George, a vast bibliography is already available. See for example, Marwitz, Herbert. "Stefan George und die Antike", *Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft* 1 (1946), 226-257; Müller, Paul. "Stefan George und die Antike", *Das Gymnasium* 48 (1937), 9-24; Varthalitis, Georgios. *Die Antike und die Jahrhundertwende. Stefan Georges Rezeption der Antike*, Diss.masch. Heidelberg, 2000.

During his lifetime, Stefan George was one of the most influential poets in Germany as well as an iconic figure.³ Indeed, he can hardly be conceived strictly as a poet.⁴ He was also a philosopher, an editor (he had founded and edited the influential literary magazine *Blätter für die Kunst*, published between 1892 and 1919), and head of the *George-Kreis*, an influential group of German academics and thinkers in the first decades of the twentieth century. His many activities were consistent with his aims to help to reform the *Lebenswelt* (world of the lived experience) of modernity. George's archive in the Württembergische Landesbibliothek demonstrates that more than fifty members enrolled in the circle, both women and men. Among the most prominent members were Friedrich Wolters (1876-1930), Friedrich Gundolf (1880-1931), Georg Simmel (1858-1918), Max Kommerell (1902-1944), Edgar Salin (1892-1974), Ernst Kantorowicz (1895-1963), the poet Karl Wolfskehl (1869-1948), Ludwig Klages (1872-1956), Helmut von den Steinen (1890-1956)⁵ and other towering figures of literature, philosophy, sociology, history, psychology, and economics in German universities. The activities of the circle left a lasting effect on several fields of the humanities and the social sciences.⁶ Among the younger members were the three Stauffenberg brothers the most famous of whom, Claus, organized the attempted assassination of Hitler in July 1944. George himself had

³ The importance of George is also seen in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's movie *Satansbraten* (1976), where the model of the main character, the classicist Walter Krands, is Stefan George. See, on this, Ruehl, Martin A. "Aesthetic Fundamentalism in Weimar Poetry: Stefan George and his Circle, 1918-1933", in Gordon, Peter and McCormick, John (eds.). *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013, 241.

⁴ By 1899 (in the age of 31 years old) he had established himself as an important poet. He was mostly influenced by French symbolists such as the symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé, who George met in Paris in 1888.

⁵ After the Second World War, Helmut von den Steinen taught as a Professor of German Language and Literature at the Technical University of Athens. He also translated Hesiod's *Works and Days* and he also translated into German the works of the Greek poet Konstantinos Kavafis. See Kambas, Chrysoula and Mitsou, Marilliza (eds.). *Hellas verstehen Deutscher-griechischer Kulturtransfer im 20. Jahrhundert*. Köln Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2010.

⁶ Fleming, Paul and Hohendahl, Peter Uwe. "The Poet and the University: Stefan George among the Scholars. Introduction", *Telos*, 176 (Fall 2016), 1-5.

dedicated two of his most important poems (*Das neue Reich*, ‘The new Empire’, and *Geheimes Deutschland* ‘Secret Germany’) to Berthold Stauffenberg. Some of the above scholars and artists were members of the Munich Cosmic Circle and exponents of Viennese modernism (Wiener Moderne), an avant-garde movement in the arts, philosophy, music, literature and architecture that flourished between the 1890s and 1910s.

By 1899, George was well-established as an important German poet and was recognized internationally as a significant figure. At the time, seeing himself as a pedagogue in his own right, George worked to transform his circle from a group of fellow intellectuals into a ‘clan’ of devoted disciples, who referred to George as their ‘Master’ (‘dem Meister’). On his part, he preferred to think of the members and friends of the Circle as ‘the state’ (‘der Staat’).⁷ Soon afterwards, George discovered the theme on which his work would focus hereinafter, that is, the Secret Germany. During the 1920s, as Martin Ruehl has argued, George’s ‘educational ideals, notably his critique of scientific positivism and his call for a holistic form of Bildung’ came to be ‘based on the ancient Greek model of the master-disciple relationship’ and were ‘designed to inspire the vital, creative impulses of a new intellectual elite’.⁸

George’s thinking was more than welcomed by young scholars of his day. In 1921, when Karl Mannheim arrived in Heidelberg, he noted that the city’s ‘spiritual life’ was built around ‘two polar opposites. One pole consists of the sociologists [e.g. Max Weber] and the other, the Georgians’;⁹ or, as Ruehl cites, ‘the twenty-nine-year-old Walter Benjamin would wait for hours outside Heidelberg Castle just to catch

⁷ Norton, Robert. *Secret Germany: Stefan George and his Circle*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002; Norton, Robert E. “From Secret Germany to Nazi Germany: The Politics of Art before and after 1933”, in Lane, Melissa S. and Ruehl, Martin A. (eds.). *A Poet’s Reich: Politics and Culture in the George Circle*. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2011, 240. As Norton stresses, the emphasis was Socrates’ response to Glaucon’s remark that the state they were discussing existed only in their words.

⁸ Norton, “From Secret Germany to Nazi Germany”, 241.

⁹ Kettler, David and Loader, Colin. “Weimar Sociology”, in Gordon and McCormick (eds.). *Weimar Thought*, 27.

a glimpse of “the Master”¹⁰ while many scholars share the view that Max Weber’s notion of ‘charismatic rule’ was inspired by Stefan George’s role in his Circle.¹¹ Unlike Ruehl, Ulrich Raulff presumes that the Circle’s impact on society was overestimated and that ‘at most, the Circle offered a few vague notions of a freer, more festive, more poetical, generally enhanced existence’.¹²

However, the ideals and values of the ‘Secret Germany’, especially in the aftermath of the First World War and the Versailles Treaty, reflected cosmopolitan intellectuals’ and poets’ change of disposition into a more inward and nationalistic tone and their demand to redefine and restore the German nation’s cultural uniqueness, that seemed to decline in a dramatically changing world. George’s elaboration of Secret Germany, by integrating an eschatological threat for Germany and an inherent teleology for the future of the nation, outlined a nationalist conception of Germanness. This conception, however, as Ruehl has argued, was not identical to the ideas of the radical Right. It was not a racist and authoritarian nationalism. Above all, it was about a ‘broader’ and more ‘universal vision’, one that proclaimed Germany’s belonging ‘to a larger European, indeed Mediterranean civilization’.¹³

The appropriation of Greco-Roman antiquity by George-Kreis

The influence of classical scholarship and Roman and Greek antiquity on George and his Circle was remarkable. Indeed, classical antiquity meant for George ‘a place largely without inner turmoil and conflict in which fate or destiny, in whatever forms, was unquestioningly obeyed’.¹⁴ In his vision of *Germanness*, he combined in a harmonious

¹⁰ Ruehl, Martin A. “Aesthetic Fundamentalism in Weimar Poetry: Stefan George and his Circle, 1918-1933”, in Gordon and McCormick (eds.), *Weimar Thought*, 241.

¹¹ Ruehl, “Aesthetic Fundamentalism in Weimar Poetry”, 242. See also, Karlauf, Thomas. *Stefan George: Die Entdeckung des Charisma*. Munich: Blessing, 2007, 410–418.

¹² Raulff, Ulrich. *Kreis ohne Meister: Stefan Georges Nachleben*. Munich: C. H. Beck Verlag, 2009.

¹³ Ruehl, “Aesthetic Fundamentalism in Weimar Poetry”, 249.

¹⁴ Vilain, Robert. “Stefan George’s Early Works 1890-1895”, in Jens Rieckman (ed.). *A Companion to the Works of Stefan George*. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2005, 67.

way the legacies of fifth-century Athens, the Roman Imperial Age and modern-era Christianity, in an imaginary kingdom where George himself was ‘the prophet and priest of an eternally youthful deity’.¹⁵ The idea of this realm of the will, this secret realm as an extension of the circle of his followers, was clearly projected and celebrated in his circle.

George’s poetry and his vision of *Germanness* were incontrovertibly imbued by a philhellenic spirit. In *The Books of Eclogues and Eulogies*, for example, the title of which included two Greek words, eleven portraits of George’s friends, disguised with Greek names, are celebrated as examples of the timeless friendship. So, for one, Kallimachus represents the polish poet and translator, Waclaw Rolicz-Lieder, Antinous is Edmond Rassenfosse, and so on.¹⁶ Indeed, Mediterranean images and concepts, with an emphasis in Roman imperial culture and Greek classical antiquity were intense in George’s entire work.¹⁷ From the 1890s to the 1900s, George’s ideal of a ‘Roman Germany’ (‘römisches Deutschland’) and the exaltation of classical beauty as the symbol of *Germanness*, closer to the southern Mediterranean standards than the Prussophile patriotism at the time,¹⁸ emerged in his collections *Hymnen* (*Hymns*, a Greek word, 1890), *Algabal* (1892), *Das Jahr der Seele* (*The Year of the Soul*, 1897), *Der Teppich des Lebens* (*The Tapestry of Life*, 1899), *Tage und Taten* (*Days and Works*, 1903), which was also inspired by Greek poet Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, and *Der Siebente Ring* (*The Seventh Ring*, 1907).¹⁹ Likewise, several other poets of the Circle used stories and myths from the Ancient Greek tradition and

¹⁵ Vilain, “Stefan George’s Early Works”, 67-68.

¹⁶ Vilain, “Stefan George’s Early Works”, 66.

¹⁷ Görner, Rüdiger. “The poet as Idol: Friedrich Gundolf on Rilke and Poetic Leadership”, in Lane and Ruehl (eds.), *A Poet’s Reich*, 96. According to Görner, in George’s poem “Burg Falkenstein” German and Latin, North and South are also united, while George’s vision in this poem, as Ray Ockenden claims, “embraces the whole of Germany as well as the Mediterranean south”. See Ruehl, “Aesthetic Fundamentalism in Weimar Poetry”, 252.

¹⁸ Ruehl, Martin A. *The Italian Renaissance in the German Historical Imagination, 1860-1930*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 174.

¹⁹ For George’s praise of Italy in these early collections, see Gundolf, Elisabeth. *Stefan George und der Nationalsozialismus*. Amsterdam: Castrum Peregrini, 1965,

literature in their works. A good indication is Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* (1904), *Ödipus und die Sphinx* (1906), and his libretto *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1928). The Circle's journal *Blätter für die Kunst* (1899-1919) also offered a plethora of ancient myths. Karl Wolfskehl's poems, such as 'Ariadne', 'Helios', and 'Persephonia', August Öhler's 'Kalypso', Friedrich Gundolf's 'Hermes Psychopompos', Henry von Heiseler's, 'Aus Anikate Maxan', inspired by Sophocles' *Antigone* are all good examples. Inherently a note of the editorial board, in the 1912 issue, was an essay entitled 'Das Hellenische Wunder' ('The Hellenic miracle').

The Georgeans became emblematic of the qualities and teaching of Plato and Plutarch. One of the characteristic themes both in Plutarch and Plato's works is the appreciation of the teacher, the praise of the ethical pedagogy for the strengthening of virtue, and the bonds between the teacher and his pupils.²⁰ The Platonic realm, in particular, denotes the qualities that render a man/teacher a competent leader of his community, whereas in Plutarch, as Sophia Xenophontos has argued, 'the same notion is widened to include human moral excellence in the form of self-exploration that ranges freely over various domains of human life and not just politics'.²¹ That said, it is worth noting that Plutarch participated actively in politics. He was appointed *magistratus* in Cheronia, and later in his life he was appointed by the Roman Emperor *procurator* (commissioner) of Achaia. In the shaping of his political thought, Plutarch was influenced by the political legacy of Plato and Aristotle. He believed that political involvement in day-to-day public affairs offered public men the opportunity for ethical edification.²²

Melissa Lane, in her work, underscores the major influence of Plato and especially the platonic politics in the George Circle. 'Some twenty-

and Gundolf, Elisabeth. *Stefan George: Zwei Vortraege*. Amsterdam: Castrum Peregrini, 1965, 60-63.

²⁰ Xenophontos, Sofia. *Ethical Education in Plutarch: Moralising Agents and Contexts*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016, 16-17.

²¹ Xenophontos, *Ethical Education in Plutarch: Moralising Agents and Contexts*, 2016, 16-17. See also, Liebert, Hugh. *Plutarch's Politics: Between City and Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Also see, Tritle, Lawrence A. "Plutarch in Germany: The Stefan George Kreis", *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 1/3 (Winter 1995), 109-121.

²² Xenophontos, *Ethical Education in Plutarch*, 128.

six books about Plato were published by members of the Circle', Lane notes. The Circle itself 'as a "staat" was a deliberate invocation of Plato's Republic'.²³ The importance of Plato for the Circle was due to the fact that the members highly valued and stressed the pedagogic eros and esoteric method drawn from him, and that George himself wished to revive the model of the Platonic Academy within his Circle.²⁴ Central to the impact of Plato's work on the Circle was the fact that George himself combined his activity as an educator in the founding of the Academy with his work as a poet and writer, just as Plato insisted that the fundamental laws of any political community should prescribe its music, poetry, and education. Thus, as Lane argues, 'Plato both created and embodied the model of a founder-legislator-leader-master-poet-lover-educator, who reforms society by reforming its art, and simultaneously by inculcating new values through the erotic cultivation of an elite group of youth, as both preparatory to and constitutive of a broader political revolution'.²⁵

The influence of classical scholarship on George is also mirrored in the way he experienced and communicated his homosexuality. Not only scholars such as Adam Bisno, Helen Roche, and Barbara Stiewe stress the Circle's 'passionate concern' for Plato (dubbing the Kreis a 'secret kingdom', led by George as a 'founder-legislator-leader-master-poet-lover-educator'); they also explore the circle's idealization of

²³ Lane, Melissa S. "The Platonic Politics of the George Circle: A Reconsideration", in Lane and Ruchl (eds.), *A Poet's Reich*, 133: "Some twenty-six books about Plato were published by members of the Circle, culminating in *Platon: Der Kampf des Geistes um die Macht* (1933) by the medical doctor and philosopher Kurt Hildebrandt. Yet even before Hildebrandt's book was published, external discussion about Plato's importance for the Circle had already begun with Franz Joseph Brecht's 1929 *Platon und der George Kreis*. It is well known that Friedrich Wolter's reference to the Circle as a "staat" was an explicit invocation of Plato's *Republic*".

²⁴ Lane, "The Platonic Politics of the George Circle: A Reconsideration", 133. See also, Roche, "The Peculiarities of German Philhellenism", 13, where she mentions that George and the members of the Circle saw themselves as part of the philosopher's Republic. They also explored the circle's idealization or homoeroticism through the educative relationship between lover and beloved.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.

homoeroticism through the educative relationship between lover and beloved, a staple of Plato's *Symposium*. Homoeroticism was seen as synonymous to a predisposition 'to feel most deeply the historical continuity from antique Athens, through classical German literature, to the present-day German nation, as they shared the sense that German society had lost touch with its Greek roots'. The Greek ideal of male beauty therefore had to be sought out, recreated, and celebrated within a modern context to revive Hellenic cultural standards. As Bisno has noted, Stefan George never called himself a homosexual and yet the main subject of his work was love of men and boys: 'Everyone who knows anything about Stefan George knows perfectly well that he was a homosexual', wrote Cyril Scott.²⁶ His contemporaries were very well aware of his failed affair with the Austrian poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal in 1891/2, and in the first decade of the twentieth century the deification of the young Maximilian Kronberger ('Maximin'), who died of meningitis at the age of sixteen. George's first experience, according to Bisno, 'entailed a substantial dose of sexual revelation, [as he] finally recognized his desire for what it was and understood the dangers surrounding it'.²⁷ In the second case, after Maximin's death 'the application of philhellenism, male supremacy, and elitism to a new religion of redemption came to define George's homoeroticism. Its creation was the first step on the road to the Secret Germany, which contained potent appeals to a Greek ideal of male beauty and a Christian concept of redemption'.²⁸

The circle's cosmopolitan outlook and its veneration of Roman antiquity, inspired one of his followers, the historian Ernst Kantorowicz and his representation of Frederick II not as a Teutonic hero, but as a Roman Emperor, and in Dantesque rather than Wagnerian terms. According to Ruehl, George himself had suggested a biography of the medieval emperor, insisting that Frederick's history be written 'as the myth of the entire [German] nation's longing for the unification

²⁶ Bisno, Adam. "Stefan George's Homoerotic *Erlösungsreligion*, 1891-1907", in Lane and Ruehl, (eds.), *A Poet's Reich*, 37.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁸ Bisno, "Stefan George's Homoerotic *Erlösungsreligion*", 38-39. See, also Stiewe, *Der 'Dritte Humanismus'*, 128.

of North and South'.²⁹ For George Frederick II not only embodied the people's yearning for the unification of North and South, but also represented a typical German heroic figure. But the decisive impulses came from George, who as an Italophile had translated parts of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and evidently viewed himself as a reincarnation of the Italian poet.³⁰ He was also an admirer, and translator of the works of the Italian poet, Gabriele D'Annunzio. When D'Annunzio ominously predicted the coming of the 'Third Rome', in 1928, George entitled his volume of verse, *Das neue Reich (The New Reich)*, evoking in it, along similar lines as D'Annunzio's, the dream of a secret realm ruled by beauty and culture.

George's poetry is eloquent about the allure exerted by significant men of the Roman Empire. His collection *Algabal* is named after Heliogabalus, the notoriously sybaritic Roman Emperor who reigned from the age of fourteen, in A.D. 218, until he was murdered by his own Praetorian Guards in 222, in disgust at his cruelty and debauchery. George was aware of some of the historical sources on Heliogabalus's life. Despite the fact that his reign had become a synonym of decadence for French writers, according to Robert Vilain, George's *Algabal* was not characterized by decadence in the sense of moral collapse; on the contrary, it displayed moral indifference, subordinating ethics to aesthetics, while the main characteristic of Heliogabalus are authoritative power, wealth, and an eye for expensive artworks. In a much less decadent manner, and with some ambivalence, George's *Algabal* is stylized into a hieratic figure of priestly dignity and unworldly alterity to symbolize the high call of poetry.³¹

²⁹ Norton, Robert E. "From Secret Germany to Nazi Germany: The Politics of Art before and after 1933", in Lane, Melissa S. and Ruehl, Martin A. *A Poet's Reich. Politics and Culture in the George Circle*. Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2011, 253.

³⁰ Ruehl, Martin A. *The Italian Renaissance in the German Historical Imagination, 1860-1930*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 172.

³¹ Vilain, Robert. "Stefan George's Early Works, 1890-1895", in Rieckmann, Jens (ed.). *A Companion to the Works of Stefan George*. New York: Camden House, 2005, 59-60.

This re-evaluation of the relationship between Germany and the civilization of ancient imperial Rome and ancient Greece was in accordance with the highly patriotic *Antikenrezeption* (appropriation of classical antiquity) by his peers within his circle.³² Kommerell, for instance, considered Klopstock's encounter with classical Greek poetry as a step towards the renewal of German culture and its liberation from Western falsification. Vallentin, in a similar vein, has observed that for Winckelmann, 'Antiquity, Rome, were not the final objective [...] but a way to lead the German back to himself, to get him to incarnate his spirit, to make it visible'. For Kantorowicz, too, Rome was a means, rather than the measure of German culture.³³ And George believed that through the forging of an elitist, philhellenic, divine, transcendental, and idealistic realm Germany could transcend the frigidity and maladies of modern civilization. In this vision of Germanness, their ideal 'Hellas' had very little in common with either ancient/modern Greece or Italy, as almost none of them ever visited those countries. Athens and Rome were a kind of ideal as an ab-sense or 'a somewhat empty transcendence'.³⁴

Before the First World War, George seemed to have regarded this process of wider regeneration as imminent and he conceived of it in European terms. However, after 1918, the Circle's cosmopolitan spirit gradually evaporated and gave way to more narrowly patriotic sentiments. During the war, George became more critical of society and his poems became political in nature, particularly his 1917 collection *Der Krieg* (*The War*) and his 1928 collection *Das neue Reich* (*The New Empire*). Henceforth, in his poetry philhellenism and classicizing art provided spiritual protection against the anarchy and nihilism of the age of anxiety and cultural pessimism as a remedy from the carnage and humiliation of the

³² Vilain, "Stefan George's Early Works", 68.

³³ Robertson, Ritchie. "George, Nietzsche, and Nazism", in Jens Rieckman (ed.), *A Companion to the Works of Stefan George*. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2005, 198.

³⁴ Güthenke, Constanze. *Placing Modern Greece: The Dynamics of Romantic Hellenism, 1770-1840*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, 8. In similar terms, Helen Roche claims that the ancient Greece of the German imagination existed neither as Athens nor Sparta, nor any other historical city-state, but rather as "noble simplicity and sedate grandeur"; see, Roche, "The Peculiarities of German Philhellenism", 243.

war. Although in the early 1930s his poetry's themes and his philosophies appealed to German nationalists, George withheld his explicit support towards the Nazi party and rejected several offers of state honors. George died in Locarno in 1933. Nevertheless, he is numbered among those poets that helped pave the way for the aestheticization of politics, which many critics identified as a particular trait of fascism and Nazism.³⁵

Greek intellectuals' appropriation of Stefan George: Towards the recovery of the classical will in the interwar crisis

Having studied philosophy and philosophy of law in Heidelberg during the 1920s, the Greek intellectuals Ioannis Theodorakopoulos and Panayotis Kanellopoulos got acquainted with the poetry and thinking of Stefan George.³⁶ On their return to Athens in the late 1920s, they would later become the chairs of philosophy and sociology at the University of Athens. Both were inspired by the archetype of the promethean hero, which lingered between a spiritual aristocrat and a god. They defined, accordingly, their beliefs about the role of intellectual, who should stand out for his titanic will, like Plato and Goethe.³⁷ They both endorsed the view that, being the prime (ἀριστος) in society, the intellectual is the 'instrument' of history and, as such, he undertakes the pedagogical duty of bringing universal reason within society and thus serve the common good. By adopting such aristocratic and elitist beliefs, both Theodorakopoulos and Kanellopoulos were implicitly denouncing social equality, for they believed that people are different in biological and spiritual terms and, therefore, they should not be placed, physically or socially, on a par. For this reason, they claimed that spiritual men refute democratic equality and condemn as demagogues those who promise to the masses equality and freedom.³⁸

³⁵ Huckvale, David. *Visconti and the German Dream: Romanticism, Wagner, and the Nazi catastrophe in Film*. North Carolina and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2002.

³⁶ George was particularly admired by neo-Kantian philosophers, as his poetry and philosophy consisted in a mixture of romantic and normative orientation.

³⁷ Theodorakopoulos, Ioannis. "Ο Πνευματικός Άνθρωπος", 30 January 1930, no publ. 66, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 1935.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

This perception of the intellectual as an interpreter of the meanings and values of his time, clearly indebted to the romantic and idealistic tradition, within which the ancient Greek myths are intertwined with the Christian tradition, does in part reflect the intermediated aristocratic beliefs and the great influence of Stefan George's thinking.³⁹ Theodorakopoulos and Kanellopoulos became acquainted with his work mostly through Neokantian philosophers, such as Friedrich Gundolf, whose courses they had attended in the University of Heidelberg; Gundolf was a close friend of George and a member of his Circle. Gundolf held that George created the spiritual kingdom that Hölderlin had foretold and had highlighted the common spiritual roots of Greece and Germany.⁴⁰ The aim of the poet's Circle, according to Gundolf, was '[t]he creation, through a new creative love, of the animation of the archaic apollonian spirit towards the creation of a new community and state of men'.⁴¹ Kanellopoulos viewed George as a personality with a Hellenic frame of mind, a poet who attempted to revive ancient Greece in modern society by demonstrating as no other poet did in modernity the flame of the classical will.⁴² For this reason, as Peter Gay has claimed, George aspired to become the king of a mystic Germany, a hero seeking other heroes in an anti-heroic time.⁴³

³⁹ The importance and impact of Stefan George's work in Greece can be seen in the many articles and tributes published in his honor. In 1934 the weekly *Εργασία*, published an article under the title "Οι Μεγάλοι που εκλείπουν. Στέφαν Γκέοργκε. Ο μεγάλος λυρικός της Γερμανίας", 211 (14 January 1934), 49-50. Panayotis Kanellopoulos also published in the journal *Τα Νέα Γράμματα* translated poems of George entitled, 'Stefan George', 6-7 (July 1937), 466-472. See also, Papari, Katerina. *Ελληνικότητα και αστική διάνοηση στον Μεσοπόλεμο (1922-1940). Το πολιτικό πρόγραμμα των Π. Κανελλόπουλου, Ι. Θεοδωρακόπουλου και Κ. Τσάτσου*. Athens: Asini publishing, 2017.

⁴⁰ Hoffmann, Peter. "Brothers Stauffenberg, Stefan George's Circle and Greece: Background of the Conspiracy against Hitler", in *Proceedings of the First Historical Conference: Greece 1936-44, Dictatorship, Occupation, Resistance*. Athens: Cultural Foundation of the Agricultural Bank, 1989, 391-400.

⁴¹ Kanellopoulos, Panayotis. *Η κρίσις της εποχής μας και ο σοσιαλισμός*. Athens: Eleftheroudakis, 1929, 28.

⁴² Kanellopoulos, Panayotis. *Ιστορία του Ευρωπαϊκού Πνεύματος*. Athens: I Fili Tou Vivliou, 1947, 417.

⁴³ Gay, Peter. *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider*. New York, London: W. W. Norton, 2001.

George, without being aware of it, had a small group of acolytes in Greece. Apart from the tributes to his work and translations of his poems in Greek journals, Kanellopoulos devoted to George an entire chapter of his ambitious *The History of the European Spirit*, written in the early 1940s.⁴⁴ In it he exalted George's 'state', which he saw as a modern version of Plato's *Republic*, and he emphasised his impact on poets, scholars, artists, and musicians – also reminding his readers that Arnold Schönberg's compositions were very much influenced by George's poetry. Kanellopoulos went on to argue that George had portrayed the young Maximin as the incarnation of the new man, comparing him to Alexander the Great and the young Jesus. He also seemed to agree with George that Maximin had to die young, for perfection must not surrender to the ravage of time.⁴⁵

The enquires on antiquities and the classical world of those intellectuals who had been Georgeans, took the character of a political and nationalist project for modern Hellenism. Their philosophical view in the approach and meaning of Greekness was founded on neo-Kantianism and idealism. They proclaimed the coming of a new humanism, one based on the ideals of antiquity. Their aim was to save Hellenism from the destruction caused by modernity. One of the most important and characteristic symptoms of the interwar crisis for these intellectuals were the attacks of historical materialism, which destroyed the organic unity of the subject and the nation-community as well as the connection of Hellenism with its archetypical and mythic past, leading to the vulgarization of the interpretation of its history and culture.

Many Greek intellectuals were also attracted to George's model of the poet-educator-leader. And this clearly emerges from their writings. Theodorakopoulos, in his celebratory lecture delivered at the University of Thessaloniki on 30 January 1935 in memory of the Three Holy Hierarchs and under the title 'The Spiritual Man', described the spirituality of the intellectual-educator-poet-martyr as the most emblematic figure in Greek history. By drawing his standards for the

⁴⁴ Kanellopoulos, *Ιστορία του Ευρωπαϊκού Πνεύματος*, 418.

⁴⁵ Kanellopoulos, *Ιστορία του Ευρωπαϊκού Πνεύματος*, 414-431. He dedicates the fifty-three chapters in the second volume almost exclusively to George and Rilke.

intellectual as interpreter of nation's meanings, romantic and idealistic from Antiquity and the Christian tradition he conveyed the aristocratic influence of George's circle and the leitmotiv of Secret Germany pervasive in his poetic oeuvre.⁴⁶ In this context, Kanellopoulos and Tsatsos championed the intellectual's political involvement in society, pleading for Plato's philosopher-king ('φιλόσοφος-βασιλιάς') as well as the Weberian charismatic ruler.⁴⁷ The philosopher-king was the model of leadership. His heroic will and his mystic qualities embodied 'Reason' itself and rendered him the sole suitable guide-educator-ruler of the masses. He was to govern without restrictions, even against all laws, for he understood the highest ends of the state better than anyone else.⁴⁸ The charismatic ruler, according to Tsatsos, was driven by the awareness of his higher mission, so during his rule, described in apocalyptic terms, there was no need for written laws.⁴⁹

In their perception of the philosopher-king Greek intellectuals reproduced George's notion of Secret Germany, presented as a selected group of intellectuals, 'imbued with a higher calling and touched by a divine entity'.⁵⁰ Both the Greeks and the Georgians contrasted this model of leader with the masses, depicted as obsessed with material possessions, deprived of reason and therefore obliged to conform to the philosopher-king's will in order to change their fate. Those selected few, circulating between the masses, were the only hope for modern civilization; the only who could ensure redemption and the coming of a new humanism and a new world.

Close to these intellectuals were also Ioannis Sykoutris and the poet Dimitrios Kapetanakis. Ioannis Sykoutris (1901-1937) was a philologist, part of the same academic and intellectual milieu of Kanellopoulos

⁴⁶ Papari, *Ελληνικότητα και αστική διανόηση στον Μεσοπόλεμο*, 232.

⁴⁷ Papari, *Ελληνικότητα και αστική διανόηση στον Μεσοπόλεμο*, 237. See also, Villa, Dana. "The Legacy of Max Weber in Weimar Political and Social Theory", in Gordon and McCormick (eds.). *Weimar Thought: A contested legacy*, 2013, 77.

⁴⁸ Papari, *Ελληνικότητα και αστική διανόηση στον Μεσοπόλεμο*, 238-241. See also, Tsatsos, Konstantinos. "Η πρωταρχική πηγή του δικαίου", *Αρχαίον Φιλοσοφίας και Θεωρίας της Επιστήμης*, 8 (1938), 3. See also, Tsatsos, Konstantinos. *Η Κοινωνική Φιλοσοφία των Αρχαίων Ελλήνων*. Athens: Estia, 1938, 136.

⁴⁹ Tsatsos, *Η Κοινωνική Φιλοσοφία των Αρχαίων Ελλήνων*, 137.

⁵⁰ Ruehl, "Aesthetic Fundamentalism in Weimar Poetry", 250.

and Theodorakopoulos. Nevertheless, he stresses a different aspect of George's influence by emphasizing a moral and heroic attitude to life than a political program of Greekness. After having studied philology in the University of Athens, Sykoutris was granted a fellowship in Germany. From 1925 to 1926 he attended, at the University of Leipzig, courses by Bente, Körte, and Heinze and from 1926-1929 he attended courses in the University of Berlin by Ulrich von Wilamowitz, Werner Jaeger, Mass, Norden and Deubner. He became enamored with Georg and frequented his circle.⁵¹

The importance that Sykoutris attributed to classical antiquity also emerged in his everyday life. One of the elements he saw as key to virtuous existence, one that the intelligentsia at that time lacked, was heroism. He connected the study of antiquity to an ideal image of life inspired by Nietzschean philosophies. As he wrote in a letter to one of his students, Marika Strombouli-Apostolopoulou, 'the command that Nietzsche gives, by translating one of Pindar's verses, *werde der du bist (become who you are)*, is the greatest wisdom of life'.⁵² For Sykoutris, this heroism consisted not only in knowledge but also in courage, bravery, and freedom, all qualities that were necessary for a person or a nation to know itself, to realise itself, and to remain faithful towards its identity. In his lectures in the Free School of Social Welfare (Ελευθέραν Σχολήν Κοινωνικής Πρόνοιας) entitled 'Philosophy of Life', classified in six ideal types his personal approach-beliefs for life and happiness, emphasizing what he perceived as a heroic attitude towards life.⁵³ Consequently,

⁵¹ Sykoutris, Ioannis. *Μελέται και άρθρα*. Athens: Ekdoseis tou Aigaiou, 1956, 72-83.

⁵² Detzortzis, Nasos. "Ιωάννου Συκουτρή, η ηρωϊκή αντίληψις της ζωής", in *Ioannis Sykoutris. Fifty Years from his death*, Studies Association of Modern Greek Culture, Moraitis School, Athens 1988, 49. See also Ramfou, Eleni (ed.). *Ιωάννης Συκουτρής. "Με φιλίαν παντοτινή και άδολην". Γράμματα του Ιωάννη Συκουτρή στις μαθητριάς του (1933-1937)*, Athens: National Bank of Greece Cultural Foundation, 2014.

⁵³ Sykoutris, Ioannis. *Φιλοσοφία της ζωής. Τρία μαθήματα εις την Ελευθέραν Σχολήν Κοινωνικής Πρόνοιας*. Athens: Eleftheri Skepsis, 1980, 53. The lectures were delivered in 1937. See also Sykoutris, *Μελέται και άρθρα*, 2001. Sykoutris also gave two lectures in Parnassos entitled "'Ο δωδεκάλογος του Γύφτου' του Κωστή Παλαμά", *Νέα Γράμματα*, June 1936. See also Cyprou, Chrysanthi. *Ο Ιωάννης*

the heroic man was regarded as a strong personality, lonely, hermit, one who oversees the present time, channels his own robustness, his psychic and spiritual forces, to the common good selflessly and for this reason he burns out fast and his life is extremely short.⁵⁴ The same argument was to be found in his lectures on *The Twelve Lays of the Gypsy*, offered at the Literate Association Parnassos, in which he invested the intellectual's attitude in his era with particular ethics. In this approach, the heroic/epic and the romantic elements were highlighted, along with the faith in the intellectual and the awareness of his great mission.⁵⁵ As Ludwig Klages wrote in the journal *Blätter für die Kunst*, published by George, 'someone had to be identified with Antiquity not only to appropriate, but to familiarize with it'. However, the antiquity with which someone was identifying oneself had to be chosen very carefully: it was not the one of the classic with the old meaning, but on the contrary, it was about the integral, the whole beauty of the archaic world that stemmed from the land, that yearned for centuries the gaze that would recognize it. This was the new and archetypical Greekness that would feed the culture and life of the present world. It would shape the *Cultura* (education) of the time and, by such a token, the present and the next generation. As Sykoutris claimed, it could incite revolutions against the academic idea of the 'classic' and fortify the cultivation of original ideas for the present and the future.⁵⁶

Therefore, in Sykoutris' view, in contrast to the conservative intellectuals above, antiquity was rediscovered to draw the values and the ethics that should embrace intellectuals and the youth. In this way, they could learn the proper art of living. To this perception of the heroic attitude toward life, Sykoutris remained faithful throughout his short

Συκουτρίης και η Νεοελληνική Λογοτεχνία και Πνευματική Ζωή, Ammochostos 1973, 115. See also Sykoutris, Ioannis, *Μελέται και άρθρα*, 436-515.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵⁵ Sykoutris, Ioannis. "Ο δωδεκάλογος του Γύφτου' του Κωστή Παλαμά", 510. See also Sykoutris, Ioannis. "Η Ελληνική Αρχαιότης και η μεταπολεμική πνευματική ζωή", *Νέα Εστία*, 20 (July-December 1936), 984-993; Zielinski, Thaddeus. *Ημεείς και οι Αρχαίοι*. Athens: Dimitrakos publishing, 1928.

⁵⁶ Settis, Salvatore, *Futuro del 'classico'*. Torino: Einaudi, 2004.

life; he committed suicide in 1937, at the age of 36. Petros Chartocollis, in his *Ideal Suicides*, has investigated Sykoutris's 'the study of death'. As he argues, Sykoutris' 'faced death as the vindication of a heroic life. [...] Sykoutris defends death as the choice of the tragic man. [...] Death is projected as an ideal that fills the soul and the thought of a philosophic man, who knows that truth lies beyond compromise, delusion and the absurdity of daily life, the pain and the humble problems of earthly beings, such as Socrates describes them in his *Apology* and Shakespeare in *Hamlet's* monologue'.⁵⁷

Demetrios Capetanakis (1912-1944), the youngest of all the above intellectuals, a poet himself, in his short life left a small oeuvre. This is a truly cosmopolitan set of essays on Rimbaud, Dostoevsky, Proust, Charlotte Brontë, George and so on.⁵⁸ He studied at the Law School at the University of Athens, and he was a student of Kanellopoulos and Sykoutris. Between 1934 and 1936, he continued his studies in Heidelberg (where in 1936 he defended his dissertation entitled *Liebe und Zeit* [*Love and time*]). During those years he became enthralled by George's poetry and the works of the members of his circle. In 1936, he returned to Athens and three years later he moved to London, where he continued his studies and dedicated himself to poetry until the end of his life. Capetanakis too died very young, in 1944, at the age of 32 years, from leukaemia.

He was the first and only one of the intellectuals to criticize George's beliefs and poetry by moving closer to the English literary tradition. He had testified in one of his letters to his friend and teacher, Kanellopoulos, that it had taken him a long time and much effort to escape from George's influence.⁵⁹ In his essay on George, 'Stefan George und die

⁵⁷ Chartokollis, Petros. *Ιδανικοί Αυτόχειρες. Έλληνες λογοτέχνες που αυτοκτόνησαν: Κ. Καρνωτάκης, Π. Γιαννόπουλος, Ν. Λαπαθιώτης, Ι. Συκουτρής*. Athens: Estia, 2004, 95, 125, and 182.

⁵⁸ Ricks, David. "Demetrios Capetanakis: A Greek Poet in England", *Journal of Hellenic Diaspora*, 22 (1996), 61-75. See also, Kantzia, Emmanouela. "Dear to the Gods, Yet all too Human: Demetrios Capetanakis and the Mythology of the Hellenic", *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique*, 14 (2017), 187-209.

⁵⁹ "Αφιέρωμα στον Δημήτριο Καπετανάκη", *Νέα Εστία*, Athens, vol. 39, no. 448, 1 March 1946.

Folgen' ('Stefan George and his successors'), Capetanakis laid out his definition of the foundations, and, for him, the attractiveness of English poetry in contrast to that of Germany and George in particular.⁶⁰ While recognizing that George never showed any sympathy for the Nazis and died outside Germany, Capetanakis considered that he was, nonetheless, 'undoubtedly one of Hitler's forerunners'. The reason is that George was, in the Greek poet's view, 'the most typical example of a pure state poet in modern times', something unknown to the English literature tradition.⁶¹

To a great extent, the attempted assassination of Hitler by Claus Stauffenberg in 1944, who was impelled by the Georgians' ideals of a Secret Germany, had served for many years as the main argument for George's political vindication. However, there were and there still are many implacable critics of his ambiguous treatment of Nazism, imputing him to have promoted the cultivation of a hyper-nationalistic imagination and also helped to the forging of the fascist ideals and authoritarian leadership. Raulff has argued that the George Circle used the swastika as one of its symbols. Nonetheless, this symbol had nothing to do with the racist and populist totalitarian regime, as the Circle was by and large crewed by Jews among other nationalities. And the truth is that until now the huge bibliography on Stefan George's case oscillates between exculpation and derision.⁶²

Conclusion: European North and South united in a common kingdom of ends

In the early twentieth century, the monumental and classical ideas and values of the Mediterranean world and culture prevailed in German poetry and philosophy through a cosmopolitan and aristocratic perception of a Greco-Roman Germanness, as the case of poet Stefan George and his Circle demonstrates. However, they were not the only adepts of antiquity's strength at their time. Other scholars, like Werner Jaeger, probably one

⁶⁰ Ibid. See also, Capetanakis, Demetrios. "Stefan George und die Folgen", *Neue Auslese* (from *New Writing and Daylight*), 11 (1946), 84-90.

⁶¹ Ricks, "Demetrios Capetanakis", 62-64.

⁶² Raulff, *Kreis ohne Meister. Stefan Georges Nachleben*, 2009.

of the most influential German classicists of his time, sought to bridge the divide between scholarship and life and rehabilitate antiquity as a meaningful for life, history and culture parameter.

More than any other, nevertheless, the case of George, the George-Kreis, and the Greek intellectuals, philologists, and poets influenced by them demonstrates a unique intersection in their quest for the meaning and the mission of their Germanness and their Greekness respectively; both Germans and Greeks hoped for the regeneration of Europe out of the German (or the Greek) mind; both the Georgian and the Greeks' vision of a European unifying civilization accommodated the notion of German (or Greek) supremacy. The great influence of the Georgians' elaborations on intellectuals and poets from Southern Europe, at that time, and the re-appropriation of antiquity in different ways, such as the welcoming of a *New Reich* or of the *Third Humanism*, manifest an ongoing and dialectical entanglement of cultural narratives in the colonization of the past.

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