

Dialogues

Volume IV

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Four essays delivered to:

THE SOCIETY FOR THE PRESERVATION
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Cover Photo:

Logic and Dialectic Personified by Plato and Aristotle, Marble bas-relief by Lucca della Robbia from the Florence campanile, c. 1437-9. Museo Opera del Duomo, Florence, Italy

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Preface

Dialogues

...is meant to foster discussion between individuals and groups on the myriad ways the ancients continue to shape and affect modern life. The papers included here cover many disparate topics, but they all reflect the central question we pose to each of our speakers: how does the particular topic illuminate the continuing relevance of the classical heritage to society in the twenty first century? Our lives in the modern world are increasingly hectic, fragmented, and driven by impersonal technology, we believe that it is ever more important—and comforting—to remember and reflect upon the common foundation that the classics provide.

Thus, the following essays are designed to demonstrate the ways in which the thoughts, myths and achievements of thousands of years ago can help us understand how we live today. It is our belief that communication about these topics can help to create something whole with which to stabilize our often-overwhelming world.

It is our sincere hope that these papers will encourage further discussion on the important historical and contemporary issues they raise, foster a sense of connection among long-time classicists (both amateur and professional), and inspire new ones to carry on their work.

Contributors

Carl J. Richard received his Ph.D. in American history from Vanderbilt University in 1988. His books include *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment* (Harvard University Press, 1994); *Twelve Greeks and Romans Who Changed the World* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2003); *The Battle for the American Mind: A Brief History of a Nation's Thought* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2004); *Greeks and Romans Bearing Gifts: How the Ancients Inspired the Founding Fathers* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2008)); and *The Golden Age of the Classics in America: Greece, Rome, and the Antebellum United States* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

Daniel N. Robinson has been a member of the Faculty of Philosophy, Oxford University since 1991, after teaching at Georgetown for 30 years. Author of a score of books and editor of more than thirty published volumes, his scholarship covers a wide range of disciplines, including the brain sciences, philosophy and history of science, moral philosophy, philosophy of law, philosophy of mind & intellectual history. His most recent book is *Consciousness and Mental Life* (Columbia University Press, 2007). He has been a consultant to the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and the Department of Health and Human Services. He was principal consultant to PBS for the award-winning series, *The Brain*, and its sequel, *The Mind*. In 2001, Professor Robinson received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Division of the History of Psychology of the American Psychological Association.

Ambassador Alexandros P. Mallias presented his credentials in October 2005. Joining the Foreign Service in 1976, Ambassador Mallias has been at the forefront of Greece's stabilizing role in the Balkans, serving as Director of the Southeastern Europe Department, and as Ambassador to Albania, Head of the first Mission in FYROM, and Head of the European Community Monitor Mission Regional Office in Sofia. He also served in Libya and at the Greek Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York and Geneva. In 1990, he served as Deputy Head of the Greek Delegation to the Charter of Paris for a New Europe.

Ambassador Mallias has made people-to-people diplomacy an integral part of his mission in the United States, reaching beyond the bounds of Washington. He travels throughout the U.S., speaking on issues relating to Greece and the broader Southeast European region. He continues to devote much effort to the promotion of human rights and to combating human trafficking.

A recipient of many awards, including the Order of the Phoenix (Greece), the National Order for Merit (Romania), the Order of Madara Knight (Bulgaria), and the ECMM Medal for Service in the former Yugoslavia, Ambassador was particularly humbled by the "Martin Luther King Legacy Award for International Service," bestowed upon him in January 2007. On 13 April 2007, Ambassador Mallias received a distinction from B'nai B'rith International for his commitment to advancing Greece's relations with American Jewish organizations.

Athanasios Moulakis is currently Professor of Government at the American University of Afghanistan. He studied classics, philosophy, history and political science at the Universities of Munich, Paris, Heidelberg and Bochum, and received his Ph.D., specializing in classical political thought, in 1978 from the University of Bochum. He has held professorships at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy; the University of California—San Diego; Harvard University; Saint John's College in Annapolis, Maryland; the University of Jena, Germany; and the University of Colorado. He most recently served as a scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. He is the author of five books in English and German, and editor of numerous others. His book *Beyond Utility: Liberal Education for the Technological Age* was the winner of the Frederick Ness Award for Best Book on Liberal Education in 1994.

Ancient Greece and the American Founding Fathers

By Carl Richard

September 18, 2008

Note: The material below is adapted from the author's book *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment* (Harvard University Press, 1994).

The Greek classics exerted a profound influence on the Founding Fathers of the United States. Fundamentally, they provided the theory of mixed government, which came to be the principal basis for the U.S. Constitution, and the theory of natural law, which undergirds the U.S. Bill of Rights. The works of classical Greece contributed a great deal to the founders' conception of human nature, their understanding of the nature and purpose of virtue, and their appreciation of society's essential role in its production. The classics offered the founders companionship, solace, and the emotional resources necessary for coping with the deaths and disasters so common in their era. Finally, these works fostered in our Founding Fathers a sense of identity and purpose, assuring them that their exertions were part of a grand universal scheme. In short, the Greek classics supplied a large portion of the founders' intellectual tools.

The principal means by which the Greek heritage was transmitted from one generation to the next was the educational system. The founders' classical training generally began around age eight, either under the

direction of public grammar school masters or private tutors. Their curricula emphasized Greek and Latin. In fact, the term “grammar school” referred to Greek and Latin grammar; English was not taught in the schools until after the American Revolution, and even then some educators considered English grammar a mere matter for the home, unworthy of formal academic attention. School was for serious business, which meant Greek and Latin. The founders read the New Testament in the original Greek, as well as the works of Homer, Xenophon, Aristotle, and Euclid.

The college curricula were as standardized and classically-based as the grammar school curricula, requiring three or four years of further training in the classical languages. Students kept large commonplace books in which they copied passages from their favorite classical authors. They even belonged to societies that assigned them classical pseudonyms. One student might be called “Themistocles” and another “Aristides.”

One of the primary ways the founders exhibited their passion for the classics was in their determination to immerse their sons and grandsons in them. John Adams endlessly heckled his son, John Quincy, not to fall behind in his classical studies. John Quincy’s training was so rigorous that he held the chair of rhetoric at Harvard while serving as a U.S. senator. Patrick Henry’s grandson claimed that he dreaded his grandfather’s detailed quizzes on the Greek and Latin classics far more than any recitation before a professor.

Some of the founders who had no sons, like Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr, saw to it that their daughters became familiar with the classics, the knowledge of which was an uncommon acquisition for women of that day.

And, through his proposals for public education, Jefferson also tried to disseminate classical knowledge among the people in general. In 1816, when fixing requirements for his beloved University of Virginia, Jefferson wrote that the classical languages were the “foundation preparatory for all the sciences” and “the portico of entry to the university.” Similarly, John Adams spent his final years trying to secure the construction of a Greek and Latin academy in his hometown of Quincy, Massachusetts.

When Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, and Thomas Paine sought to eliminate the requirement of Greek and Latin for some students, they drew upon themselves passionate attacks of a nature generally reserved for murderers and Tories. The founders associated the works of certain ancient republicans so closely with personal and societal virtue that they were unable to imagine the teaching of virtue apart from the teaching of the classics. As a result, the transmission of the classical heritage became one of their most urgent concerns.

The founders maintained a lifelong relationship with the classical heroes of their childhood, considering them wise old friends. In this age before radio, television, and film, reading was the founders’ favorite pastime, and they considered the classics a form of entertainment as well as a means of enlightenment. The classics filled their days and nights, providing comfort for the distressed, adventure for the bored, and lessons, both moral and political, for the student of life. Alexander Hamilton adored John Dryden’s translation of Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*. His chief political rival, Thomas Jefferson, bought thousands of classical books, and when he sold his library to Congress – it became the basis for the Library of Congress – he begged leave to keep a few books “to amuse the time I have left to pass,” these books “being chiefly classical and

mathematical.” His granddaughter testified, “I saw him more frequently with a volume of the classics in hand than with any other book.” He was so fond of quoting Greek passages in his letters that John Adams finally protested, “Lord! Lord! What can I do with so much Greek?” In 1810, Jefferson wrote: “I read one or two newspapers a week, but with reluctance give even that time from Tacitus and Homer and so much agreeable reading.” He added, in 1819: “I feel a much greater interest in knowing what has happened two or three thousand years ago than in what is now passing.” Jefferson also wrote: “When the decays of old age have enfeebled the useful energies of the mind, the classic pages fill up the vacuum of ennui, and become sweet composers to the rest of the grave into which we are all sooner or later to descend.”

Even though Jefferson knew at least six different languages, he called Greek “the finest of human languages,” and his favorite poet was Homer, who was universally acclaimed as “the Father of Western Literature” and as the ideal according to which all writers were measured. He called Homer “the first of poets, as he must ever remain, until a language equally ductile and copious shall again be spoken,” and he often lectured Adams on the finer points of Greek pronunciation and grammar as epitomized by Homer.

Jefferson’s deep immersion in the classics helped to produce in his own writing the clarity and concision that stand as his trademark. He argued regarding Greek and Latin: “To these we are certainly indebted for the rational and chaste style of modern composition which so distinguishes the nations to whom these languages are familiar.” And as the historian Gilbert Chinard wrote of Jefferson: “His speech, in which metaphors and similes are rarely found, has the trim, stripped beauty of a Greek athlete.”

The founders used classical symbols and allusions to communicate, to impress, and to persuade. With a single classical pseudonym, statue, or allusion, a gentleman could be certain of generating a chain of associations in the mind of his audience, since his audience consisted of gentlemen equally well-educated in the classics. To appropriate such emblems was to claim social status for oneself and the support of venerable authorities for one's cause. Classical symbols provided badges of class, taste, wisdom, and virtue. To use them aptly was to claim the endorsement of ancient sages, the very longevity of whose reputations attested to their greatness. The founders frequently enveloped themselves and their causes in classical symbols, much as modern politicians wrap themselves and their policies in the flag.

The most common classical symbol was the pseudonym, and Alexander Hamilton was one of its most adept users. For instance, Hamilton used "Phocion" as his pseudonym for an open letter to the citizens of New York opposing a state law which would confiscate more Tory property. Phocion was a fourth-century B.C. Athenian who had befriended his own personal enemies, even to the extent of telling his son not to resent the Athenian people for sentencing Phocion to death. Hamilton was suggesting that his fellow New Yorkers emulate the Athenian general's wise magnanimity toward his opponents. More important, Phocion had always sought decent treatment for prisoners of war. The story of Phocion, like that of many of the pseudonyms Hamilton used, is found in Plutarch's *Lives*.

Another important example of the use of classical symbolism was the neoclassical movement in American architecture, of which Thomas Jefferson was the leader. Jefferson helped to design the Virginia State Capitol, the U.S. Capitol, the University of Virginia campus, and his

own home at Monticello. His designs always combined the Greek column with the Roman arch. When the U.S. Capitol was completed in 1812, Jefferson praised it as “the first temple dedicated to the sovereignty of the people, embellishing with Athenian taste the course of a nation looking far beyond the range of Athenian destinies.”

Jefferson endorsed neoclassical architecture not only because its simplicity and symmetry paralleled that of nature, but also because, having received the approval of more than two millennia, it would confer legitimacy on the United States within the western world. Like most of the other founders, Jefferson was the first in his family to attend college. Having employed classical knowledge to rise in American society, Jefferson and the other founders hoped to use classical symbols to secure European respect for their nation. Living on the frontiers of western civilization, American aristocrats were anxious to prove to haughty Europeans that theirs was a cultured nation. Jefferson feared that republicanism itself might be stigmatized, and the prospects for world happiness thus destroyed, if Europeans considered the United States a society of ignorant barbarians. Europeans must not be allowed to view republicanism as a system of government suited only to a primitive society. Yet republican art and architecture must also represent republican simplicity, not monarchical opulence.

The founders also filled their homes with paintings and statues that featured classical themes. James Madison placed busts of Homer and Socrates beside those of Jefferson, himself, and his wife Dolly. John Adams’s favorite engraving was Simon Gribelin’s *Judgment of Hercules*, which depicted a fable related by Socrates in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*. In the tale, Hercules chooses the rugged path

of Virtue over the easy path of Vice. Adams was so smitten with this engraving that he proposed it as the great seal for the United States in 1776. The founders also gave classical names to their horses and homes.

Ancient history provided the founders with important models of personal behavior, social practice, and government form. For instance, they admired the sixth-century B.C. Athenian leader Solon for his wisdom and moderation. Themistocles and Demosthenes also served as models. Thomas Jefferson likened John Adams, a staunch supporter of a strong American navy, to Themistocles, whose success in building an Athenian fleet had led the Greeks to an astonishing victory over the Persians in the fifth century B.C. When Adams, one of the greatest orators of his day, rose before the Continental Congress on July 1, 1776, to speak in favor of American independence, the New Englander could not help but think of Demosthenes and Cicero. He recorded in his diary: "I began by saying that this was the first time of my Life that I had ever wished for the Talents and Eloquence of the ancient Orators of Greece and Rome, for I was very sure that none of them ever had before him a question of more importance to his Country and to the World." Patrick Henry was dubbed "the Demosthenes of the American Revolution." The Founding Fathers admired both Demosthenes and Socrates as lone-wolf heroes who sacrificed short-term popularity, which could be purchased only by vice, for long-term fame, which could be purchased only by virtue – noble aristocrats who sought, at the cost of their own lives, to save the people from themselves.

The founders also sought societal models among the Greeks. They admired the Spartans for their frugality, self-discipline, patriotism, and courage, and they admired

the Athenians for their freedom of speech and openness to foreigners. Samuel Adams, who is rightly called the “Father of the American Revolution” for his leadership of the Boston Sons of Liberty, prayed that Boston would become a “Christian Sparta,” a society known for its patriotism as well as its piety. Thomas Jefferson celebrated the courage and patriotism of the Spartans under King Leonidas, who had volunteered to give their lives at Thermopylae, defending Greek liberty against the Persians in 480 B.C. James Wilson applauded the openness of Athens and praised the Athenians of Solon’s day for their “generous” and uncommon policy of recruiting skilled foreigners and granting them citizenship.

The founders also turned to the ancients for models of government. They appreciated the Greek love of liberty and, in the Revolutionary period, applauded the independence the Greeks had given their colonies. John Adams responded to British encroachment on the rights of the colonists by writing: “The Greeks planted colonies, and neither demanded nor pretended any authority over them, but they became distinct, independent commonwealths.” The precedent of the Greek republics gave the founders the courage to face the great challenges of their time. In 1775, John Adams had been able to write regarding the theory of popular sovereignty that underlay American resistance to British measures: “These are what are called revolution-principles. They are the principles of Aristotle and Plato, of Livy and Cicero, of Sidney, Harrington, and Lock – the principles of nature and eternal reason.” In an age in which rebellion was considered an act of the darkest villainy and rebels were summarily hanged, ancient Greece enabled the conservative American revolutionaries to argue that they were preserving past liberties rather than presumptuously tinkering with the natural order. Because of the ancient republics, they were able to portray the king

as the real rebel, the violator of that natural law that lawful patriots would die to defend. Without the Greek precedent, it is unlikely that the founders could have persuaded themselves and many other Americans to rebel against the mother country. The American Revolution was a paradox: a revolution fueled by tradition.

The Greek precedent not only reassured the founders that they were right to rebel, but also assured them that their rebellion had a chance to succeed. After all, no one had given the tiny Greek republics much chance of success, either, when they had dared to stand up against the greatest power of their own day, the seemingly invincible Persian Empire. Yet the Greeks had shocked the world by defeating the Persians decisively. And the founders agreed with the Greek historian Herodotus as to the cause of Greek success: “Free men fight better than slaves.”

The struggles of the Revolutionary period increased the founders' sense of kinship with the ancients. Proud of America's firm resistance to the Intolerable Acts, Samuel Adams declared in 1774: “I think our Countrymen discover the Spirit of Rome or Sparta.” In a 1776 letter to George Wythe, John Adams exulted: “You and I, my dear Friend, have been sent into life at a time when the greatest lawgivers of antiquity would have wished to have lived.” Imagine the founders' excitement at the opportunity to match their ancient heroes' struggles against tyranny and their sage construction of durable republics—to rival the noble deeds which had inspired them in their youth. The founders were thrilled by the belief that they were beginning anew the work of the ancient republicans, only this time with an unprecedented chance of success.

Demosthenes had lost the first round of combat against the tyranny of Philip, but the founders, starting afresh in a virgin country with limitless resources, could pack the punch that would win the second and decisive round.

The Greeks also introduced the theory of mixed government on which the founders based the U.S. Constitution. Plato was the first to suggest that the best system of government balanced the power of the one, the few, and the many. Aristotle made the theory the centerpiece of his *Politics*, citing numerous examples of mixed government in the ancient world. In the sixth book of his *Histories*, the Greek historian Polybius enshrined the Roman republic at its height as the prime example of mixed government, with its balance between the consuls, the Senate, and the Tribal Assembly. Such was the beguiling clarity and simplicity of Polybius' analysis he even convinced the Romans themselves that their complex system of balances was the chief cause of their success. In the late republican era, Cicero seized upon Polybius' theory to thwart the increasing efforts of ambitious Romans to consolidate their own power at the republic's expense. Modern republicans then added Great Britain, with its balance between the king, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons, to the pantheon of mixed government systems.

Influenced by this long tradition, the American revolutionaries blamed Parliament's unconstitutional taxes during the 1760s on a degeneration of the mixture of the English constitution, noting that the king had used his patronage powers to buy the House of Commons and to pack the House of Lords. The framers of the state constitutions drafted during the Revolution adopted mixed governments, though substituting an elected governor for the king and an assembly of wealth for the House of Lords.

The founders then established a mixed government at the federal level in the U.S. Constitution of 1787. Power was balanced between the president, the Senate, and the House of Representatives—a fairly powerful monarch selected by the Electoral College, an assembly of wealth selected by the state legislatures for long terms, and a democratic body elected by the people every two years.

Although the Democratic-Republican Party of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison eventually abandoned mixed government theory in support of simple majority rule, they immediately turned to another Greek theory to justify the transition from mixed government to representative democracy. They turned to the pastoral tradition, a heritage as ancient and revered as mixed government theory. Pastoralism was the belief that the rural, agricultural lifestyle was morally superior to urban life. It was begun by the Greek poet Hesiod, and continued by the Alexandrian poets of the Hellenistic period, before being adopted by the Augustan poets of Rome, including Virgil. The ancient historians attributed the triumph of Sparta and Rome over their vice-ridden, commercial adversaries, Athens and Carthage, as much to their pastoral virtues as to their government forms. Both produced virtue, the agricultural life by fostering frugality, temperance, and independence; the balanced constitution by encouraging moderation, cooperation, and compromise.

Democratic-Republicans like Jefferson and Madison comforted themselves with the notion that the United States could safely adopt a democracy, however vilified by classical political theorists, because the abundance of land in the United States would allow a citizenry of virtuous farmers. Jefferson's pastoralism made him so determined

to perpetuate the agricultural character of the United States that he was willing to violate strict interpretation of the Constitution, one of his core principles, in order to purchase Louisiana. When the absence of a constitutional provision allowing Jefferson to buy foreign territory threatened the future of the republics' agricultural base, and, thus, its virtue and longevity, Jefferson reluctantly sacrificed his constitutional scruples in order to extend the life of the republic.

The theory of natural law also played a crucial role in the formation of the U.S. Constitution. The Pythagoreans were the first to declare that there were universal moral laws that did not vary with time or place and that humans could deduce these laws from nature. Plato adopted this theory, and the Stoics emphasized it. It was from the theory of natural law that modern republicans like John Locke developed the doctrine of natural rights, which held that all individuals were born with unalienable rights, such as the right to life, liberty, and property. The theory of natural rights, in turn, became the basis for the United States' federal and state bills of rights.

The Stoics influenced the founders in other ways as well. Their optimistic conception of human nature contributed to the founders' belief in the possibility of social progress. The Stoics argued that humans were born with an inclination to good, though this inclination had to be nurtured through moral training to produce full-blown virtue. The founders read the Stoics and referred to this inclination to goodness as the "moral sense." To the Stoic, virtue was rewarded in this life, through self-respect and the respect of others. Though the founders believed in heaven (even the deists among them), they were also quick to emphasize the earthly rewards of virtue. They believed

that virtue's greatest reward was fame, defined as the praise of virtuous contemporaries and of posterity – not as the immediate applause of the masses. Much like the ancient Greeks, the founders felt that they were always on stage and that their actions would one day be judged by History. Stoicism also proved an important source of solace for the founders, giving them the courage to face old age, death, and other hardships. The Stoics helped Jefferson endure the passing of his father, his favorite sister, and his wife. Young Jefferson's literary commonplace book overflows with Stoic quotations regarding the certainty of sorrow in this world and the need to endure it patiently. John Adams turned to the Stoics in the wake of his wife Abigail's death, and Stoicism was a source of solace to young George Washington in his dealings with Sally Fairfax, the wife of his best friend, a woman he loved but could not have. Washington's Stoicism enabled him to exercise restraint and to adopt the practical solution of marriage to Martha Custis.

The Greek classics furnished the founders with a common set of symbols, knowledge, and ideas, a literature select enough to provide common ground, yet rich enough to address a wide range of human problems from a variety of perspectives. The Greek classics taught a love of liberty, an understanding of human motivation, an appreciation for the written and spoken word, a respect for order, symmetry, and harmony, and a sense of belonging to an ancient and noble tradition. The latter feeling brought purpose to the founders' lives and gave them a sense of kinship with the world. Patrick Henry expressed a common view when he stated: "I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of history. I know of no way of judging the future but by the past." At the Constitutional Convention, John Dickinson reiterated this point:

“Experience must be our only guide. Reason may mislead us.” In *The Federalist*, Alexander Hamilton called history “the least fallible guide of human opinions,” and Madison termed it “the oracle of truth,” adding that “where its responses are unequivocal they ought to be considered conclusive and sacred.” Immersion in the best works of ancient history made the founders shrewd judges of political and social affairs, contributing to success against tremendous odds in their quest for independence and a durable constitution. As Colyer Meriwether puts it: “They knew how to build an argument, to construct a logical fortress; that had been their pastime since youth. They could marshal words, they could explore the past... They had been doing that for years.” The perceptive ancients who founded Western civilization can still teach us a great deal. One can do worse than to learn poetry from Homer; drama from Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides; philosophy from Plato; politics from Aristotle; rhetoric from Demosthenes; and history from Herodotus and Thucydides.

“Aristotle and the ‘Perfect’ Life”

Portions from a lecture by Daniel N. Robinson
January 7, 2009

Solon’s “Most Fortunate People”

The Greek word made famous to posterity by Aristotle is *eudaimonia*. Often rendered as “happiness” – a rendering that would be less confusing had modernity not restricted happiness to a set of sensations and moods (closer to the Greek *edoni*) – it is sounder to translate it as “flourishing”. One of the eminent Greeks treated in Plutarch’s *Lives* is the poet and wise law-giver, Solon (c. 640-561 B.C.), who was called upon to judge the sort of life rightly regarded as flourishing. In Plutarch’s interesting, if doubtful, account, Solon is invited to Sardis by the incomparably wealthy Croesus, the last king of Lydia. Eager to astonish and impress Solon, Croesus displays his treasures, “...curious and valuable either in beauty of colors, elegance of golden ornaments, or splendor of jewels” as we learn from our translators.

However, Solon is conspicuously unimpressed, even revolted by the ostentation. He is then drawn into conversation by Croesus, who asks if Solon has ever known of a man more fortunate than Croesus himself. Solon says he has known such a person: Tellus, a plain but upright Athenian who sired good children and who died in battle in defense of his country. Croesus presses on: who, after Tellus, would Solon rank as the most fortunate? To this, Solon offers two names, neither known to Croesus: Cleobis and Biton. These were the sons of a temple priestess, living in Argos. Their mother had duties in the temple of Hera one day, but was facing lateness owing to the fact that the oxen had not been yoked to her carriage for the journey.

The boys yoked themselves and carried their mother over miles of rocky soil, arriving exhausted but on time. Falling asleep in the temple, they did not hear their mother supplicating Hera to grant these fine young men the greatest blessings possible for mortals. Hera granted the wish, for Cleobis and Biton never awakened. By this account, they had already attained the greatest flourishing possible for mortal life, and thus died in a state as close to *eudaimonia* as our natures permit.

In this case, it would be entirely beside the point to ask just what “feelings” the two had as they drifted into sleep. One might guess that the dominant one was exhaustion. Their status in the judgment of Solon was established by the essential characters that had formed within them and, thus, by the manner in which their lives proceeded, with no guarantee that every hour or day would be “happy.”

Aristotle on “To ti ein einai”

To speak of something having an *essential* nature, at least as Aristotle would intend this to be understood, is to speak of what it is to be a certain kind of thing. As Aristotle used it, the term “essence” is explicated by the phrase *to ti ein einai* – the “what it is to be” something. The “something” falls under a universal category. Thus, a cat is an animal, but were there no such *taxa* as plants and animals, there could be no cats. Aristotle here notes degrees of kinship as expressed in the form of similar appearance, similar modes of behavior, similar responses to the environment. Thus, the sense in which “Coriscus is a man” is different from the sense in which “Coriscus is musical.” Coriscus is *essentially* an instance of “what it is to be” a human being, but merely *accidentally* musical, as an added benefit.

Aristotle took the *to ti ein einai* of human beings finally to include centrally a rational animal, disposed naturally to social and political modes of life and able to base actions and choices on rational deliberation. Additionally, “what it is to be human” includes at its core a *fitness for the rule of law*. A human being must be an *active* creature whose identity cannot be reduced to a name or title. Think only of Aristotle’s reference to the statue of a physician with a hand that is a physician’s in name only. The physician expresses his “physician-ness” only in the act of *doctoring*; only when the rational deployment of hard-won skills, combined with temperamental factors and the framing of worthy goals, leads to an activity that might last for moments or be seamlessly woven into a whole lifetime.

Aristotle on the “Flourishing” Life

There is no flourishing life, properly so called, unless what flourishes is something to be proud of in the first instance, and where the pride is of that proper form Aristotle discovers in persons of virtue; a pride that is proportionate, internal, rightly earned.

Aristotle contended, through systematic argument and analysis, that actions have as their ultimate end just this flourishing. The actor aims to achieve some good, but the aim may be directed at what is finally an illusion. It is, to use Aristotle’s terms, through a corruption or perversion of one’s nature that one might act in behalf of what is merely an apparent good. The actual goods of life for Aristotle are not, as he called them, the “idle abstractions” featured in Plato’s philosophy but the actual, practicable goods achieved within the domains Aristotle called *politiki kai oikonomiki kai fronisis*².

It is customary to translate these respectively as “politics,” “economics” and “practical wisdom,” but again, these are words now so freighted with modern and technical connotations as to be misleading. What Aristotle is identifying as the basic goods – those goods from which the lesser ones are derived – are the gift of a special form of civic and domestic life, and that developed *excellence of character* by which one has a lordly command over the appetites and passions.

All this was well understood by Aristotle and readily translated by him into that ethical school we’ve dubbed “perfectionism.” Aristotle himself was at sixes and sevens as he contemplated the best form of life, the form most closely approximating *eudaimonia*. In Cleobis and Biton, he would have found fine examples of the right life as the active life. What was missing, we have reason to believe, was the *contemplative* life; a life devoted to the study and comprehension of all that is really worth knowing. Here, the activity is for its own sake and not designed to achieve something else. As such, he says, it is a god-like life, one lived “on the Isle of the Blest.”

But contemplation in this sense is not at the expense of activity; it is its forerunner, its preparation, its constant critic and judge. The doctor’s aim is to relieve suffering and secure good health. The thinker’s aim, too, is to secure a form of mental health and civic health; to refine law and order the *polis* in a manner that allows it to teach and guide.

¹ Plutarch’s *Lives*. J. Langhorne and W. Langhorne, trans. Cincinnati: Applegate Publishers, 1855; p. 82

² *Eudemian Ethics*, 1218b 14

Wisdom from the Past: The Relevance of the Greek Classics

By Alexandros Mallias

February 12, 2009

Introduction by Senator Paul S. Sarbanes:

I have the distinct honor of introducing the Ambassador and I certainly welcome this opportunity... One of the reasons I welcome this opportunity is that the Ambassador will be ending his tour later this year – from our point of view, the later the better! Ambassador Mallias has done an absolutely splendid job. He is a skilled and experienced diplomat who has been in the Greek Foreign Service since 1976, joining not long after he completed his education at the University of Athens and then in Geneva. Ambassador Mallias has done a number of very important jobs in the Greek Foreign Service, and he's really been – in addition to his very significant role here – probably the leading diplomat with respect to Southeastern Europe and the Balkans, in what is a very complex and sensitive area. Alex Mallias has been ambassador to Albania and to the mission in the former-Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and he headed the directorship within the Foreign Office for Southeastern Europe. He's also served the United Nations in New York, and in October of 2005, he presented his credentials to Bush, so he's now been here going on three-and-a-half years.

I think it's fair to say that any Greek ambassador in Washington faces a very challenging assignment. The nature of the relationship is complex and there are many issues on the agenda, a number of them of significant historical precedence. The Ambassador started moving

from Day One. I think the activity of the Embassy has taken a marked jump across the country. The Ambassador has gotten out to meet not only Greek-Americans but much more broadly than that. He's a real proponent of public diplomacy as you know, and he has really promoted human rights. He's been very strong on the issue of human trafficking – an issue that's not always in focus but is an important issue.

The Ambassador also has this very interesting dimension that has followed the U.S. Civil Rights movement and the legacy of Martin Luther King and he's been recognized for that. The Embassy has adopted an elementary school in Birmingham, Alabama and they've also been very active here in Washington regarding the SEED School.

I have seen a person of skill and effectiveness in the way the Ambassador has carried out his responsibilities here in Washington, and I've seen him deal with some very difficult issues with great success. It's always important to us that a Greek ambassador be able and effective, and we're been very grateful to Ambassador Mallias for his wonderful service over the past three-and-a-half years. It's my honor and privilege to introduce him.

Wisdom from the Past: The Relevance of the Greek Classics (Alexandros Mallias)

Let me make it clear from the start: I am not an expert on the Greek classics. I am simply a person who, over the years, has recognized the value of the lessons provided by the Greek classics. My first exposure to the classics wasn't even voluntary; I am Greek, after all, and the ancient Greeks were part and parcel of my basic education.

It wasn't until my adult life that I recognized the value of this gift.

I'll even confess that it wasn't until my arrival in Washington as Greece's Ambassador almost four years ago – in September of 2005 – that I was inspired return to this part of my education. I noticed that an increasing number of books dealing with the classics continued to pop up in bookstores and that more and more universities were implementing and expanding classics programs. It seems to me that the Greek Classics are enjoying a “Golden Age” in the United States, having clearly now entered the realm of the average or “civilian” reader.

Over the past four years, I have traveled extensively throughout this country, visiting more than 30 states. I have spoken at many universities – from Stanford in California, to Harvard and MIT in Massachusetts, to Rice in Texas – connecting with people beyond the Washington Beltway. I have discovered that the United States is a beautiful and diverse country. I have also witnessed a love on the part of Americans for the history and culture of Greece, and an appreciation of the writings of the ancient Greeks. Impressed by this evident thirst for discussion about and contemplation of these writings, I went back to the staples of my education with a new-found appreciation.

In carrying out my duties as ambassador, mediator and negotiator, I have drawn guidance and inspiration from my ancestors. Some of the best advice – a recipe, if you will – comes from *The Phoenician Women (Foinissai)*, a tragedy by Euripides based on the same story as Aeschylus' play *Seven Against Thebes*. The tale concerns the two sons of Oedipus and Jocasta, who fight each other for power over Thebes.

Jocasta advises her son to think before he acts: "Stay a moment" she says, "haste never carries justice with it; *but slow deliberation oft attains a wise result.*" At another point in the play, her son Polynices says to her: "The words of truth are simple, and justice needs no subtle interpretations, for it hath a fitness in itself; but the words of injustice, being rotten in themselves, require clever treatment." When talking about his brother, Eteocles, Polynices says to his mother: "He ought not to have attempted reconciliation by armed force, for words compass everything that even the sword of an enemy might effect."

These few lines may be the best recipe for any person charged with a diplomatic peace-making mission.

A year or two ago, the Shakespeare Theatre in Washington, D.C., presented *The Persians* by Aeschylus. The oldest surviving play in the history of theater, *The Persians* dramatizes the Persian response to news of their defeat at the Battle of Salamis in 480 B.C. As I watched the play and listened to the words of the messenger giving Queen Atossa, the mother of Xerxes, a graphic description of the battle, I found it impossible not to relate his bloody tale to current events and contemporary miscalculations. The timelessness of this play and its relevance to today's global developments was striking.

Aeschylus himself was not a pacifist. He was an Athenian soldier, an "hoplite". Even so, *The Persians* remains a masterpiece of compassion for the defeated; it is an elegy to moderation and to the importance of thoughtful and deliberate action when contemplating war. It is also a blunt condemnation of arrogance – the kind of arrogance that led Xerxes to a great blunder and to his defeat. I drew the following lessons from *The Persians*:

- a. One should not underestimate the motivation of the other side.
- b. Numeric superiority of forces cannot make up for a lack of knowledge of the enemy's battle tactics and positions. The Persians overestimated the importance of their army's size, which in this case proved to be disadvantage given the smallness of the harbor.

Most significantly, however, the Persians underestimated the motivation of the Athenians at Salamis, whose very survival depended on this battle. The Greek battle cry, as Aeschylus writes it, makes that abundantly clear:

On, sons of Greece!
Set free your fatherland, your children, wives,
Homes of your ancestors and temples of your gods!
Save all, or all is lost!

The Athenians had better battle plans and they had a deep awareness of the pitfalls of fighting at sea, especially at the particular location. In his book *The Battle of Salamis*, Barry Strauss, author and professor of history and classics at Cornell University, writes:

The Great King had hoped to win the war in central Greece. His army and navy would overwhelm the Greeks through Persian numbers and Greek defections. But the navy was defeated by a combination of Greek boldness, Persian strategic errors, and the very size of the fleet, which rendered it too big to find a harbor in a storm. The Persian army fared better, but only at a steep cost. Xerxes' war was not going according to plan.

It has been 2,488 years since the Battle of Salamis. The victory of the Greeks under Themistocles caused Xerxes to retreat to Persia, which allowed for the foundation of an Athenian Empire – which, in turn, changed the course of western history. The Battle of Salamis remains one of the most brilliant battles ever fought, and as such, it behooves every political and military leader to absorb the lessons of this conflict, particularly as they are expressed in Aeschylus' play.

In confronting the challenges of the 21st century, I consider the Greek classics to be the best resource for determining what criteria should form the basis of good political, diplomatic and geostrategic decisions. These texts are a source not only of wisdom, but also of applicable practical advice, since they wrestle with fundamental questions and universal issues. They entreat us to seek answers first by figuring out the right questions to ask. Socrates, in particular, dedicated his entire life to teaching others just how to do this. Whether one studies ancient Greek drama; the historical writings of Thucydides, Herodotus, and Xenophon; the philosophical writings of Plato and Aristotle; or the wisdom of men like Solon, Lycourgos and other lawmakers, the Greek classics shed light on all things of concern to man, urging us to examine ourselves, our lives, and our values.

The classics also struggle with the fundamentals of government: of organizing a state and facing the basic political issues that decide the fate of a nation. By studying them, we can learn to avoid the pitfalls the Greeks themselves often fell into. This is precisely what the Founding Fathers of the United States took from their study of the classics. Avid readers of Plato, Aristotle, Thucydides, Plutarch, Xenophon, and others, the Founding

Fathers looked to history for lessons for the future. These wise and exceedingly well educated men were steeped in the writings of the ancient Greeks and learned to respect the lessons of history.

These men drew more than inspiration from the classics: they found the key to protecting America against the pitfalls that weakened Greek city-states and rendered them vulnerable. In the 85 essays comprising the *Federalist Papers*, three of the most eminent of the Founding Fathers – Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay, the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court – outline the philosophy and the motivation of the drafters of the Constitution. Testament to the lessons derived from the classics, the *Federalist Papers* warn against tyrants who undo the liberties of republics, and seek ways to inoculate the United States from conspiracies, thus giving rise to the checks and balances of government.

In understanding the miscalculations, over-extensions and blunders in political decision-making in the 21st century, and in making sense of some of the conflicts of the 20th century, there is no better handbook than Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian Wars*. There, one reads about the political mistakes made by Athens and cannot help but notice the relevance to current events. It is no coincidence that in her book *Memo to the President Elect*, Madeleine Albright draws parallels between the Athenian decision to attack Sicily and the decision of the previous presidential administration to launch a war against Iraq. She writes:

I have emphasized the importance of critical thinking because its absence can lead even well-intentioned people into disaster. Consider the story of the superpower that decided to launch a preemptive strike.

The time was 2,400 years ago; the superpower was Athens; the intended target, Sicily; the alleged danger, that the people of Sicily might one day unite and take up arms.

Athenian leaders were so certain their invasion would succeed that they disregarded the warnings of their military, who said the planned strike force was too small. "What if the Sicilians in terror combine against us and we make no friends?" asked one general. Besides, he continued, "Even if we conquer them, they are so distant and numerous that we could hardly rule them.

. . . . In trying to conquer Sicily, the Athenians overreached; in the process, they transformed a containable risk into a major self-inflicted wound.

Thucydides also records a speech by Archidamus, King of Sparta, who tried to convince the Spartan assembly not to go to war against Athens, even though the decision had already been made. I consider Archidamus' advice, as recorded by Thucydides, invaluable. He says:

When many lives and much wealth, many cities and a great name are at stake, we must not be hasty, or make up our minds in a few short hours; we must take time. We can afford to wait, when others cannot, because we are strong... In the meantime, prepare for war. This decision will be the best for yourselves and the most formidable to your enemies.

... I would far rather go to war than with multitudes of soldiers, for I know that those of our people who first came to this country did not

prevail over their adversaries through numbers, but through the virtues...

... Let us assume that they (our enemies) have common prudence, and let our preparations be not words, but deeds. Our hopes ought not to rest on the probability of their making mistakes, but on our own caution and foresight. We should remember that one man is much the same as another, and that he is best who is trained...

In his acceptance speech, given in Chicago on November 4, 2008, then-President-elect Obama stated that he wanted America to be a country whose “true strength . . . comes not from the might of our arms or the scale of our wealth, but from the enduring power of our ideals.” These words brought to my mind a speech entitled “On Peace,” by Isocrates, one of Greece’s greatest orators, in which he proposes to the Athenians ways to achieve lasting peace with their neighbors, providing advice on how to treat allies, how to prepare for war, the value of good advisors, the dangers of arrogance, and the limits of power. Isocrates tells the Athenians:

We must be willing to treat our allies as we would our friends...and not exercise our leadership as masters but as helpers, since we have learned the lesson that while we are stronger than any single state, we are weaker than...all states put together... So we shall not lack allies...and shall find many ready and willing to join their forces with our own. For what city or what men will not be eager to share our friendship and our alliance when they see that we are at once the most just and the most powerful of peoples?

On the use of persuasion rather than force, Isocrates says:

What is most important of all is that we shall have all mankind as our allies—not because they have been forced, but rather persuaded, to join with us; who will not welcome our friendship because of our power, but who will be disposed towards us as in very truth allies and friends.

On preparing for war, he states:

We ought not to rest our hopes of safety upon the blunders of our enemies but upon our own management of affairs and upon our own judgment.

...The first way improve the condition of our state is to select as our advisers on affairs of state the kind of men whose advice we should desire on our private affairs.

One of the most important lessons we can draw from this speech is that justice and interest, two seemingly irreconcilable concepts, are not mutually exclusive. Isocrates argues that the virtue of justice, while making us better individuals and better nations, is also a means of protecting our self interest. Power without justice leads to ill repute; power without justice will not win allies. Isocrates asserts that maintenance of power presupposes the existence of justice.

In his inaugural speech, President Obama spoke about self-interest and proclaimed it not mutually exclusive with the notion of values. He said:

Our power alone cannot protect us, nor does it entitle us to do as we please... our power grows through its prudent use; our security emanates from

the justness of our cause, the force of our example,
the tempering qualities of humility and restraint.

Today, scholars, citizens, individuals, concern themselves with the sorts of questions first explored by the Greeks, as we all strive to understand, in logical, rational terms, both the world around us and our position within it. Today, when our world has become a global village, or an “ecumenical polis,” we see the interconnection more clearly. When conflict in one corner of the earth spawns terrorist acts in another, when abuse of the environment in one corner impacts the world over, we must keep reminding ourselves that our fates are intertwined in a relationship that requires balance and equilibrium; it requires a blend of harmony, based on the essence of measure, what the Greeks called *metron*. In ancient Greek drama especially, we see how the actions of one impact the world around him or her. The sins of Oedipus, for example, do not only torment Oedipus himself, but plague his entire city.

We also see the main characters in Greek drama challenging prevailing norms and questioning authority. In Sophocles’ *Antigone*, we find the concept of civil disobedience: the heroine breaks Creon’s law, which she considers unjust. Contrary to his orders, she buries her brother but is willing to suffer the consequences. To me, Sophocles here is telling us that being noble presupposes the courage to challenge the societies in which we live, provided we are willing to pay the price. There is almost an explicit admiration of the one who breaks man’s law when it is an unjust law. In the case of Creon, however, who breaks divine law, Sophocles shows us that there is a very thin line between nobility and hubris.

Many historical figures since then have taken up this concept. More recently, we find it in Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," written on April 16, 1963. In this letter, Dr. King expounds upon his own theory of civil disobedience to his fellow clergymen:

I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment... is in reality expressing the highest respect for law.

It is impossible not to think of Antigone, the reluctant but inevitably brave heroine, who says: "I will not obey an unjust law, and if something happens because of it – so be it."

Another famous proponent of civil disobedience is Henry David Thoreau, a man well-versed in the Greek classics and author of "Civil Disobedience," which he wrote because of his disapproval of slavery and the Mexican-American War. In this essay, Thoreau argues that citizens should not allow governments to rule their consciences, that they have a duty to disobey laws that would make them agents of injustice. And perhaps the most famous proponent of civil disobedience is Thoreau's admirer, Mahatma (Mohandas) Gandhi, the ultimate philosopher, spiritual leader and practitioner of this ideology.

Because Greeks realized that the *polis* – "country or community" – is the ultimate outcome of individual actions, social responsibility and the concept of public service, so highly regarded in the United States, can be said to have its beginnings in ancient Athens. In his famous funeral oration, Pericles expounds on the opportunity and prestige of serving one's country, one's society, presenting it as reward rather than an obligation:

We are called a democracy, for the administration is in the hands of the many and not of the few... When a citizen is in any way distinguished, he is preferred to the public service, not as a matter of privilege, but as the reward of merit. Neither is poverty an obstacle, but a man may benefit his country whatever the obscurity of his condition. There is no exclusiveness in our public life...

Man – *anthropos* – is at the center of Greek thought and Greek politics. We see an “anthropocentric” view of the world in the Greek classics, but not the one under which we have been living, in which the ultimate goal is short-term satisfaction, to the detriment of the environment and the earth. This is a misunderstanding of “anthropocentrism.” Ancient Greek writing focuses on man, but in an effort to negotiate how man can best co-exist with his environment and his fellow humans, and how he can provide his services for the realization of the common good. The goal was to be the best that a person can be: to strive for excellence, to fulfill certain ideals, to achieve what Aristotle calls a “happy life,” which is a life based on the pursuit of virtue, excellence and, ultimately, the common good. Public service is one avenue towards this goal. In my estimation, this is the kind of world we should be aiming for today.

President Obama is one man who has a profound understanding of the need for greater public service. His inaugural speech was an ode to public service, and public service was one of the basic tenets of his entire campaign. The day before his inauguration, which happened to be Martin Luther King Day, he called upon everyone to serve the country, and I believe that he will bring out the best in everyone, as there has been an overwhelming response to him around the country – I might even say around the world.

The value of the Greek classics was not lost on Martin Luther King Jr. On the issue of public service, he put it simply:

Everybody can be great. Because anybody can serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve.

Proof of the inspiration that Dr. King took from the classics can be found in the last speech of his life, which resounded around the world only the day before his assassination in Memphis on April 3, 1968. Entitled "I've Been to the Mountaintop," it reads:

I would take my mental flight by Egypt through, or rather across the Red Sea, through the wilderness on toward the Promised Land. And in spite of its magnificence, I wouldn't stop there. I would move on by Greece, and take my mind to Mount Olympus. And I would see Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Euripides and Aristophanes assembled around the Parthenon as they discussed the great and eternal issues of reality.

Martin Luther King also had a profound respect for the Greek language. In his sermon "Loving Your Enemies," delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama on November 17, 1957, Reverend King expounded on the power and comprehensiveness of the Greek language, explaining how it

comes to our aid beautifully in giving us the real meaning and depth of the whole philosophy of love....for you see the Greek language has three words for love... *eros*... a sort of aesthetic love. Plato talks about it a great deal in his dialogues, a

sort of yearning of the soul for the realm of the gods. Then the Greek language talks about *philia*... the intimate affection between personal friends. The Greek language comes out with another word for love. It is the word *agape*... the understanding, creative, redemptive goodwill for all men. It is a love that seeks nothing in return.

In essence, it seems to me that in searching how to live our lives, how to co-exist with our fellow humans – not only as individuals, but as nations, ethnic, cultural and religious groups – we can find guidance in the classics. Know thyself, know your place and your role in the web of human and national interaction, and know that everything we do will have repercussions on all of humanity. Always keep in mind that relationship of harmony and balance, of the *metron*.

In Greece, our Foreign Minister, Dora Bakoyannis, recently took over the Chairmanship of the OSCE (the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), which is the world's largest security-oriented intergovernmental organization. Its mandate includes issues such as arms control, human rights, freedom of the press, and fair elections. In recognition of the interconnection of all people and nations, the three ideas that will guide the Greek Chairmanship are synergy, strategy and symmetry:

The search for synergy between all participating States for promoting our co-operative, indivisible and cross-dimensional security.

The pursuit of strategy to design more effective ways of achieving our common goals: the guaranteeing of stability, security and cooperation in the OSCE area.

The concern for symmetry of efforts in dealing with new “asymmetric threats” and old challenges.

Foreign Minister Bakoyannis, recognizing this delicate and intricate relationship, has called upon all members of the OSCE to work towards ensuring “security based upon shared values, agreed commitments and the fundamental dignity of the individual.”

The ancient Greeks would have been proud.

In Alexander's Wake: Greek Culture in Central Asia

Athanasios Moulakis

Transcription of an informal lecture given June 20, 2009.

Let me first say something about the Greek heritage, which I think affects all modern Greeks. As George Seferis said, it's as if we woke up one day and found a marble head in our lap. The Greek heritage is a magnificent one, but it's also a very difficult one to bear. It's a heavy load to carry. If we shed it, we are nobody; if we shoulder it, we risk breaking under it. It is not an easy heritage, but it is, I think, something that we as modern Greeks must carry as worthwhile for all mankind.

One aspect of our heritage that continues to resonate strongly with us is our language. There is a continuity of memory and language in Greek and the language is, as anyone who reads Kavafi knows, an instrument with double strings: you pluck the modern string and the ancient string reverberates along with it. The range of evocation is always particularly rich. As a Greek who finds himself in modern Afghanistan, I have been fascinated by the echoes of the Greek heritage that can still be heard in this part of the world – echoes that I will trace for you in this talk.

Alexander the Great is the most famous instrument by which "Greekness" was transported to central Asia, but as we will see, he was not the first. He is, however, a character we all know, because he has become a mythical figure – of all the ancient figures, he is the only one to exist in the popular memory of the West independently of the literary and the learned tradition.

Alexander lives also in the memory of Central Asia – in the memory of Persia and the memory of Afghanistan. But he does not necessarily exist there in a manner we would want to celebrate. He is the Bogey Man. Children in the Persian civilization are warned by their mothers to behave or else Alexander will come and take them away. To them, Alexander is as Tamburlaine or Genghis Khan is to us.

But this goes to show how deeply his mark has been made, and we have to be aware of this juxtaposition between the different ways he is viewed. Tamburlaine, Genghis Khan and Alexander the Great are all people who have been transformative, who through great energy, great capacity and great ruthlessness have transformed the world.

There is no question that Alexander is a transformative figure, one who changed the ancient world from a place made up of little self-governing city states to vast empires – places ruled by military men, where Hellenism as a mode of language and a way of life become associated no longer with a political culture of a certain sort but with rule from the top. The ancient world expands from “tiny little Greece around the Aegean” to an expansive sphere of influence that reaches the Indus.

This is the great world Alexander created. It's not the same world of which Aristotle taught and in which he believed. It's completely different – but it's a world that was marked by Greek language which we know as the “Greek-speaking half of the Roman empire.” It's what became the Greek-speaking East, as opposed to the Latin-speaking West.

We're very much aware of what Alexander did in the Western part of the empire he conquered. We know about

the library of Alexandria, we know about the gardens of Antioch, we know about Syria, about Egypt, about Asia Minor. We even know about Greek influence in Mesopotamia. But we know very little about what Greekness was transported into the depths of Asia, into Bactria and Sogdiana and India. And yet, you have to consider that it took Alexander less than three years to conquer the Western part of his empire. He spent another three years – as long as it took him to conquer everything else – in Bactria. The area known then as Bactria lies mostly within the borders of modern-day Afghanistan. It's between the Hindu Kush and the Pamir mountains, at the roof of the world. The mountains there are, to put it in perspective, three times as high as Mount Olympus. Why did Alexander bother with this extraordinarily (it would seem) isolated, peripheral and backward place?

The answer is that it was not peripheral and it was not backward. One of the things not generally known – because our sources are concentrated on the Mediterranean and the part of the world that was inherited by Rome, not on the part that was excluded from Rome – is that it was an extraordinarily privileged province. It was never fully incorporated into the Persian Empire, and the local nobility remained quite powerful. The satrap of Bactria was always a member of the Persian Royal family. It was like the Isle de France; it was in a sense the home county of the royal house. They may have ruled out of Persepolis, but Bactria was “the good country” – like the farm back home. When, after the battle of Gaugamela in which he was defeated by Alexander, Darius III – the last king of the Achaemenid Empire of Persia – ran away, he ran away to Bactria, his home ground. It was the closest place where he would expect to find residual loyalty. And what he found instead was Bessus, the local satrap. Bessus saw to it that the fleeing, cowardly last great king of Persia was

assassinated, and he assumed the royal title, calling himself Artaxerxes, the King of Asia. He attempted to organize an uprising against Alexander's forces. Alexander however, having taken the Persian Empire, had himself assumed the role of legitimate King of Asia, and considered Bessus a rebel, not a Persian enemy. It was as a rebel that he hunted Bessus down and executed him.

Alexander made his way back to Babylon through the desolate, waterless Gedrosia desert – where the story goes that a soldier brought him hard-to-find water in a helmet and Alexander poured it out onto the ground, as a visual symbol that he would be treated no better than his men (which is the sort of leadership that made his success possible). But, back in Babylon, he died. He was succeeded by a number of his generals, in the East by Seleucus I Nicator, who became in effect the King of Asia.

Thousands of very high quality gold and silver coins were cast to commemorate Alexander and his heirs, and they are a testament to the degree of sophistication that existed in Bactria. There must have been areas of sufficient wealth and refinement to produce art of this quality. They clearly do not come from a provincial mint. When Alexander and his successors put all this wealth into circulation, it had the same stimulating (and inflationary) effect as that of American silver on the Spanish empire, which virtually launched the commercial wealth of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe.

But unfortunately, we know very little about this because our historical sources are scarce and fragmented. We know from the coins that there were 64 Greek kings in Bactria and India between 330 B.C. and 10 A.D. But for

only three or four of them do little snippets of written information exist (some in Plutarch, some second-hand in Roman texts).

Why was so little written about these kings? Did they not have writing? They did, but lots of people have writing and yet so little survives – it depends on who copies the writing and who cherishes the writing, on where there are fires and where there are continuous traditions. The fact is that the West is interested mostly in the West.

We know, however, that a kingdom was established – a Greco-Bactrian kingdom which was quite considerable. But the Hellenism that occurs there is much more superficial than that which develops in the West. There is nothing like what happens in Asia Minor, which becomes completely Hellenized to the point that Basil the Great considers himself a Greek and St. Paul, naturally, writes in Greek. This does not happen in Bactria. There are several local languages that continue to survive as they did under the Persian Empire. Fundamentally, they speak Persian and to this day the deep culture of that part of the world is Persian. But the language of administration of the Hellenic Empire in Bactria was Aramaic, the same language that was used by Jesus.

Much of Alexander's time in Bactria was spent founding cities. He did this because the Persian Empire he inherited was not an empire of cities; it was an empire of country gentlemen. Persian rule was structured through the gentleman with his lands and his house and his retainers. There were ritual centers where everyone would meet – the occasional castle, the occasional residence of a king – but there were no cities as we would recognize them.

There are only very few exceptions to this – Balkh being one, from which Bactria gets its name. It was here that Alexander made his home during his Central Asian campaigns and it is one of the earliest cities in the world, a continuous establishment to this day. It is a crossroads of trade: part of what we call the Silk Road but also part of the route connecting the great civilizations of India and China. It was along this route that Buddhism spread and the Turkic and Mongolic conquerors made their way west.

But of the cities Alexander founded it's difficult to know much – again because the texts are not sufficient. Unquestionably, they were in part garrison towns where he established soldiers and gave them land. They were also trade centers – but how Greek were they? It's very difficult to know with the few remains that we have.

A few clues are suggested by the ruins of a city known today as Ai-Khanoum (“Lady Moon”). One day in the 1960s, Zahir Shah, the last king of Afghanistan was out hunting near the border of Afghanistan and Soviet Tajikistan and one of his courtiers stumbled onto an unusual stone. The king was a well-enough educated man to know that this was not a typical Afghani stone. So he called his friend, a member of the French archaeological society – the French have done by far the most important archaeological work in Afghanistan – who told him that it was a Corinthian capital. The archaeologist believed there must be remains of an intact Hellenic city on that spot, which lies at the confluence of the Oxus and a smaller river in a naturally fortified site. At length, he obtained permission to dig in the area, and between 1966 and 1975 they unearthed an intact city.

One of the problems with nearly all of the Greek sites in Afghanistan that we know about is that someone built

on top of them. It is true of most historical sites. Thebes is a particularly good example – you can find none of the ancient or medieval world there because modern Thebes is right on top of it. Ai-Khanoum, however, was an ideal site from an archaeologist's point of view, because nothing had been built on it except the occasional hut since it was first abandoned in about 147 B.C.

The ruins found were of a fully-fledged Greek city dating to the third century B.C. It was probably not a city founded by Alexander but by one of the local kings. It had a theater – the largest Greek theater east of Babylon – a gymnasium, an Acropolis, a main avenue over a mile long, and an absolutely enormous palatial construction. Whether by coincidence or not, the mosaic decoration of the main courtyard of the city is exactly the same Macedonian sun that was found in the grave of Philip II. It's an extraordinary site where you can truly see Hellenism encrusted on top of a different civilization. For example, the enormous palace has Greek details but Persian proportions. A statue of the gymnasiarch, whose name was Strato, was also found – it's not a particularly good statue, but considering where it was found, it's not bad!

Among the artifacts found were a water spout and several finials, which look as though a child, who didn't quite understand, had seen a Greek finial and re-done it – there is just something that's a bit off. On the other hand, there are numerous remains of absolutely perfect Corinthian columns and a sundial that could be in Athens. A gold and silver plaque, now part of the travelling "Hidden Treasures of Afghanistan" exhibit, shows an extraordinary melding of influences from different civilizations: Cybele, a divinity from the coast of Asia Minor that was absorbed into the Greek pantheon in a chariot that appears Egyptian or Mesopotamian, pulled by

lions that are very Persian-looking, with Apollo up above. So you have a mixture of cultures that makes us wonder what kind of society this was.

Archaeologists would almost certainly have found a great deal more at Ai-Khanoum, but the Soviet-Afghan war came. The Russians bombed the site to pieces and after it was bombed, the Afghans looted it. There is an awful lot from this site that is now on the world market.

We would very much like to know how many of the inscriptions were in Greek. We know from some of the ones that have been published that they bore real Hellenic names. And then there are Bactrian names that had taken on Hellenic aspects, so it is clear that the elites began at some point to consider Greekness “chic.” How deep did it go? What were the proportions? We simply don’t know.

Alexander was not the first Greek to come to that part of the world. The Persians had transferred Greek populations from the coast of Asia Minor into Bactria and they had lived there for several generations and fought on the Persian side against Alexander – incidentally, in the great battle of Issus there were probably more Greeks on the Persian side than there were on the Greek side. The Persian king had resettled mercenaries and others who were likely to get into trouble with their neighbors to Bactria. These people still remembered that they were Greek and were proud of being Greek when Alexander found them, but Alexander’s soldiers found them disgusting, because they were Greek but they were *not Greek enough*. They were Greeks who had gone native. And Alexander’s soldiers slaughtered them, because they had supposedly been traitors to the national cause 300 years earlier.

The great English historian W.W. Tarn wrote a book about the Greco-Bactrian Empire entirely inspired by the idea of the “White Man’s Burden.” Alexander comes and finds a society of barbarians who don’t know what to do with themselves and he teaches them how to read and write and develop and so on. Then we have the opposite sort of bias: Greek influence was a form of “imperialist oppression.” Clearly, it was a very complicated society and it probably wasn’t a very fair society. On the other hand, Alexander and the Greeks did bring with them some useful ideas, such as that showing your ankle wasn’t awful! So in the absence of documents, it’s very difficult to do this sort of colonial or anti-colonial interpretation. What we have is what we have.

Towards the end of the Greco-Bactrian Empire, we find the largest gold coin ever coined in antiquity. It is almost 6 cm across. It is typical of one of the upstart Indo-Greek rulers, who was very successful in turning back invaders and is bragging. The quality is already not as good as that of the coins produced during and just after Alexander’s time. What is interesting about these later coins is that there were two types: coins that are round and follow the Attic measurements – drachmas, tetra drachms etc. - and those that follow Indian weights and are square-shaped. Those that follow Indian weights are often bilingual in Greek and Indian script. The two currencies circulated at the same time, which suggests that there was trade between culturally differently-sourced people. This practice has not changed – if you go shopping in Kabul today for soap or perfumes, you need Persian currency, but if you need car parts, you use Pakistani currency. For everything else, you use American dollars despite the law, which requires everyone is to use Afghan currency for all transactions.

Inscriptions from the time of Ashoka the Great of India (third century B.C.) are examples of the multi-lingual culture of this area. Ashoka was the ruler who, after he ruthlessly created the largest empire in India, decided that violence was not a nice idea, since he was on the receiving end of peace at that point. He decides to proclaim Buddhist peace forever, which he does through inscriptions written in three languages. Examples found in Kandahar, in the heart of Afghanistan, are in Aramaic, Greek, and an Indian script. The fascinating thing is that by the late third century B.C., it is clearly worth Ashoka's while to write an inscription in Greek, which suggests that there were still some leaders who could be persuaded by reading in Greek.

Later on, in the second century B.C., the Bactrian king Demetrius I conquered India – or what was called India then (now mostly Pakistan). He wears the scalp of an elephant as a helmet, and it is through people like him who crossed the Hindu Kush that the Greek influence spread to what is now northern Pakistan. This marriage of Indian traditions and Greek traditions results in statues with great classical evocation, such as a Corinthian column with a Buddha sitting on top.

The Greek influence, symbolized at first by Alexander, now stretches from the Mediterranean all the way through India. In Central Asia, the tradition leaves very deep marks that survive the collapse of the last Greek king, who dies in the year 10 A.D. – meaning there was a Greek king in India 40 years after the death of Cleopatra, the traditional point at which we cut off the Hellenistic period.

About SPGH

The Society for the Preservation of the Greek Heritage (SPGH) is a non-profit organization founded in 1974. Our original goal was to assist in the restoration of Byzantine monasteries and churches in Greece and of the historic Plaka House in Athens, which now serves as the headquarters for our Greek affiliate, Elliniki Etairia.

*Our present programs are dedicated to increasing awareness of and appreciation for ancient and modern Greek culture and philosophy, and to the exploration of the interrelationship between classical Greek heritage and contemporary society worldwide. Our activities in the U.S. are generously supported by donations from our members and friends. For more information about SPGH, contact us at:
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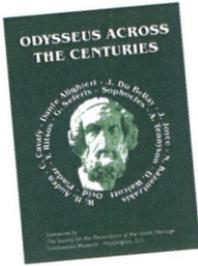
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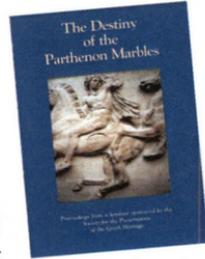
2002, 28pp. A lecture sponsored by The Society of the Preservation of the Greek Heritage. Held at the Cosmos Club, Washington, D.C., September 18, 2000.

Lecture by: **Peter Bien**, Professor Emeritus of English and Comparative Literature at Dartmouth College and President of the Modern Greek Studies Association.

The Destiny of the Parthenon Marbles

1999, 114pp. Proceedings from a Seminar sponsored by The Society for the Preservation of the Greek Heritage. Held at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., February 13, 1999.

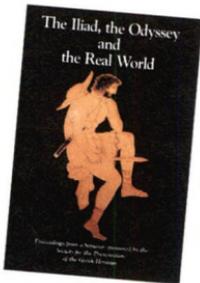
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The Iliad, the Odyssey and the Real World

1998, 120pp. Proceedings from a seminar sponsored by The Society for the Preservation of the Greek Heritage and held on March 6-7, 1998.

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Where the Achievements of Ancient Greece Borrowed from Africa?

1997, 80pp. Proceedings from a Seminar sponsored by The Society for the Preservation of the Greek Heritage and held on November 16, 1996.

Presentations by: **Erich Martel**, Teacher of Advanced Placement U.S. and Modern World History, Wilson High School, Washington, D.C.; **Stanley Burstein**, Chair, Department of History, California State University, Los Angeles; **Dr. S.O.Y. Keita**, Biological Anthropologist, Research Associate, The Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Illinois; **James D. Muhly**, Professor of Asian and Middle Eastern History, University of Pennsylvania; **Jay Jasonoff**, Professor of Linguistics, Cornell University; **Dr. Frank Yurko**, Egyptologist, Research Associate, The Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Illinois.

