Anglo-Hellenic Cultural Relations

Anglo-Hellenic Cultural Relations

By

Panos Karagiorgos

Foreword by David W. Holton,
Emeritus Professor, Cambridge University

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

Anglo-Hellenic Cultural Relations

By Panos Karagiorgos

This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-7819-7
ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-7819-7

We are all Greeks – our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their roots in Greece.
—Shelley

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

FOREWORD

Cultural interactions between Britain and Greece have a long history and assume a great diversity of forms. The historical and literary vignettes that make up this volume offer a refreshing reminder of some of the key moments in the mutual influences of the two peoples, as well as valuable insights into some lesser known contacts and connections.

Panos Karagiorgos studied for his doctorate at the University of Birmingham, where he had the great good fortune to be supervised by the distinguished literary scholar Professor Terence Spencer, author of *Fair Greece, Sad Relic: Literary Philhellenism from Shakespeare to Byron.* From early on in his career Panos had developed a particular fascination for British Philhellenism in all its forms, but also for the manifold ways in which Modern Greek culture had come under the spell of English literature, and more broadly British education and intellectual and cultural production. Birmingham, and Terence Spencer in particular, reinforced these interests and inspired intensive research into various aspects of the relationship, which became for Panos Karagiorgos a lifelong engagement. Some of the fruits of that engagement are displayed in this book.

Given that the subject of his PhD was "Greek Translations of Shakespeare: a Comparative Study", it is not surprising that Shakespeare features in more than one of the essays in this collection. The issue of how extensive was Shakespeare's classical knowledge is the subject of one. It is complemented by an extensive survey of the Bard's reception by Greek writers, in translations, adaptations and critical writings over the last two centuries. This impressive compilation testifies to the esteem in which Shakespeare has been held by Greek poets and prose-writers, from the first national poet Solomos to Nikos Kazantzakis and beyond, but also to the great variety of creative interpretations of his work. A separate chapter focuses on the first extant appearance of Shakespeare in Greek, in a translation of *Macbeth* submitted for a competition by the young Corfiot Andreas Theotokis in 1818-19. Significantly, this event occurred just a few years after Corfu and the rest of the Ionian Islands came under British Protection; ironically, as Professor Karagiorgos has irrefutably shown, the translation was made from French, not from the original English text.

Corfu, that favourite resort of the British (as the cricket and ginger-beer still testify), makes an appearance in several other studies in this

volume. Nicander (or, to give him his baptismal name, Andronikos) Nucius of Corfu was an early modern traveller to the British Isles, who wrote down his experiences in the archaizing Greek of Renaissance scholars. Three centuries later an Englishman, Lord Guilford, founded the first Greek university of modern times in Corfu. His Ionian Academy was relatively short-lived but fortunately much of his important collection of books and manuscripts, discussed in the relevant chapter, has survived. Fittingly, the modern Ionian University, where Panos Karagiorgos taught for many years, is also based in Corfu. But we are not finished with Corfu yet. There is a fascinating and ultimately tragic connection between the English composer Clement Harris and the Corfiot poet Lorentzos Mavilis. Harris was a highly talented young musician with a promising career ahead of him: he studied the piano with Clara Schumann in Frankfurt and became a close friend of Siegfried Wagner, son of Richard. In the course of his travels he met Mavilis and the pair struck up a firm friendship during Harris's stay in Corfu. After the young Englishman's tragic death in 1897, on a battlefield in Epirus where he had fought as a volunteer for the Greek cause, Mavilis dedicated a sonnet to his friend's memory.

More familiar is the long-standing connection of Lawrence Durrell with Corfu, further fleshed out in the last chapter of the book, on the basis of unpublished letters discovered by the author. Durrell of course knew Greece – and Cyprus – very well and spent a significant part of his life there. For other authors discussed in this volume, Greece was a country of the mind, an ancient locus of culture rather than a contemporary reality. Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote a Greek ode in Sapphic style for a prize at the University of Cambridge. Despite the archaic language of his effort, the subject was a very topical one: the slave trade. Milton combined his admiration for ancient Greek culture with a genuine interest in the contemporary fortunes of the Greeks. In the letters published here he shows his sympathy for the Greek people and support for their liberation from Turkish rule. Philhellenic sentiments are also evident in the early work of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who was writing around the time of the Greek war of independence. Her elegy for Rhigas Velestinlis (1757-98), often referred to as the first martyr of the Greek struggle for independence, is here fully annotated and provided with appropriate contextual information.

No book on Anglo-Hellenic cultural relations would be complete without reference to the two great Romantic poets who, in their different ways, shaped the image of Greece for their contemporaries: Shelley and Byron. As is well known, Shelley was inspired particularly by Ancient Greek mythology and philosophy, but in his lyrical drama *Hellas* he

responds warmly to the Greek revolution of 1821. In the case of Byron, his views on the "Elgin" marbles are amply discussed, while in a separate chapter we also learn about the reaction to his death in contemporary documents, his recognition by the Greek state, and his reception in Modern Greek literature.

This volume brings together a host of familiar names and many more minor figures, who in some way mediated between the British Isles and Greece, over a period spanning more than two millennia. Thanks to his respect for the original sources, his knowledge of both English and Greek culture, and his relentless search for the detail as well as the big picture, Professor Karagiorgos's volume sheds ample light on the fertile interactions of two major European cultures.

David Holton
Selwyn College, Cambridge

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the ages the influence of Greece has had a strong effect on Britain's cultural heritage and vice versa. This book encompasses fifteen topics relating to the more significant cultural contacts between the two countries, which I trust the reader will find edifying and of interest.

The first chapter deals with the earliest known contacts between the two countries, namely the adventurous figure of Pytheas of Marseille, who was the first to circumnavigate Britain in ancient times. The second relates the story of the Greek Archbishop of Canterbury, Theodore of Tarsus, who served and organized the English Church.

The third and fourth chapters deal with William Shakespeare, his knowledge of Greek and the classical writers, the first Greek translation of a Shakespeare play, and his presence and influence in Modern Greek literature.

Documents relating the story of the Greek monk Christophoros Angelou, who lived in England in the early 17th century, are examined in chapter six. Next come John Milton's two letters to the Greek scholar and diplomat Leonardos Philaras. Of equal interest is Samuel Taylor Coleridge's ode, which the young poet composed in archaic Greek language while he was still a student at Cambridge University in 1798, taking part in a competition and winning the prize.

There is a short essay on the Greek world in Shelley's poetry and an essay on Lord Byron and the "Elgin" Marbles, and the impact of the poet's death in Greece. An article on a not so well-known juvenile poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning on Rhigas' death follows.

The final three chapters of the book deal with Lord Guilford's collection of manuscripts and rare books, the tragic death of the British composer Clement Harris, and the last one with two letters by Lawrence Durrell sent to his Greek friend Marie Aspioti in Corfu, the former dating from the turbulent year of the Cyprus crisis (1955), the latter from 1964.

All these fifteen chapters are the result of research done in various archives both in Britain and in Greece and demonstrate some sporadic periods of the didymous cultural, not political, relations of the two countries. It is believed that the reading of these studies will contribute to a further and better understanding between the people of the two countries.

P. K.

CHAPTER ONE

CULTURAL CONTACTS BETWEEN GREECE AND BRITAIN

The earliest ever recorded contact between Greece and Britain was established by the ancient Greek sea captain, Pytheas of Marseille, who is believed to have circumnavigated Britain. According to recent research carried out by the Polish scholar Knapowiski, Pytheas must have made two trips: the first started from Marseille on 5 March 324 B.C. After passing through the Straits of Gibraltar, the Greek navigator sailed along the Iberian and Celtic coasts and reached Britain. Continuing to the north, Pytheas reached the Shetland Islands situated NE of the northernmost part of Scotland. Then he returned home and wintered at Gadeira, near Gibraltar. The following year –323– Pytheas attempted a second trip. This time he reached Britain, entered the North Sea and sailed along the southern coasts of Sweden, returning home on 10 November of the same year. Another version of the hypothesis is the theory of the Greek researcher Evangelos Stamatis, who claims that Pytheas undertook his explorations under the aegis of Alexander the Great.

Pytheas recorded his observations in a work entitled "On the Ocean" (Τα περί του Ωκεανού), which has been lost, but from which some extracts were preserved by various writers. This treatise examined the coasts of the Atlantic Ocean from their natural, geographical and astronomical points of view. Another piece of work by Pytheas entitled "Round Trip of the Earth" (Περίοδος Γης) is mentioned by Apollonius of Rhodes in his *Argonautica,* LV, 761-765. Pytheas' observations are reported by no fewer than eighteen ancient writers.[1]

According to Strabo the Geographer, Pytheas wrote that he had circumnavigated Britain and that he had calculated the circumference of the island as more than four myriads (40,000) of stadia (each equal to 606.95 English feet).

From surviving extracts we learn that on the island of Thule (Iceland), during the summer, night lasted only one or two hours and day about twenty hours; and that the converse figures were true in winter. According

to Strabo, Pytheas had placed Thule where the summer tropic cycle is the same as that of the Arctic. Extracts from his diary, which survived as quotations from contemporary or later writers, enable us to guess what an astute man Pytheas was. He was consumed by the same passion to see foreign lands as Ulysses. According to surviving passages, Pytheas described Britain thus:

> Britain is triangular in shape like Sicily with three unequal sides. It extends obliquely across Europe. The promontory nearest the mainland called Kantion is said to be about eleven miles long, at which point the sea forms a current. The other cape, Balerion, is four days sail from the continent; the third promontory is known to jut out into the open sea and is named Ocra.[2]

The place name *Kantion* is obviously identified with Kent. The width of the channel has been miscalculated by a half, and the current formed by the sea flows as today, with the difference that modern man, of whom Sophocles two and a half millennia ago said: Wonders are many on earth, and the greatest of them is man, has built a tunnel beneath it. *Belerion* has been identified as the modern Lizard; the name *Ocra* refers to the Orkney Islands.

Of the character of the Britons and their methods of mining and transporting tin, Pytheas gives us the following account:

> The natives of Britain by the headland of Belerion are unusually hospitable and, thanks to their intercourse with foreign traders, have grown gentle in their manner. They extract the tin from its bed by a cunning process. The bed is of rock, but contains earthy veins, along which they cut a gallery. Having smelted the tin, they refine it and hammer it into the shape of knuckle-bones, and, then convey it to an adjacent island called Ictis. They wait until the ebb-tide has drained the intervening firth, and then transport whole loads of tin on wagons.[3]

The place named *Ictis* must be St. Michael's Mount in Cornwall.

Another extract from Pytheas' work enables us to form an idea of the people of Britain with whom he came into contact, or of whom he had heard:

> The inhabitants of Britain are said to be sprung from the soil, aboriginals, and to preserve a primitive mode of life. They make use of chariots of war such as ancient heroes are reputed to have employed in the Trojan War. Their houses are rough and ready being for the most part made of lathes or logs. They harvest grain by cutting off the ears, and leaving the stalks, and then storing them in covered granges… They are simple in their habits and far removed from the cunning and knavery of modern man. Their diet is

> inexpensive and quite different from the luxury that is born of wealth. The island is thickly populated and has an extremely chilly climate, as one would expect from a sub-Arctic region. It has many kings and potentates who live for the most part in a state of mutual peace.[4]

Pytheas, of course, was not the first Greek whose eyes beheld old Albion. As Stanley Casson writes, trade intercourse, exiguous but definite, existed between Minoan Crete and the British Isles. Driven by desire and curiosity to see what was beyond the Pillars of Hercules, the ancient Greek seamen of the 6th century B.C. sailed northwards along the Iberian and Celtic coasts and reached the coast of Cornwall from which they brought back tin. It is most probable that the *Cassiterides* Islands applied to the Isles of Scilly, that is, the "Tin Islands" (*cassiteros* meaning *tin*). There the tin miners of Cornwall used to take their tin ingots for sale. Tin in those days was a much-needed commodity; it is a semi-precious element for making bronze, which requires a small but indispensable percentage of tin. This metal, excavated on the Cornish shores, was taken to the Scillies depot and from there by boat to Marseille; the cargo was transferred to Pireus and Militus, where it was sold. The tin market was apparently dominated by the skilful Ionian seamen of Marseille, an Ionian colony.

The historian Hecataeus, writing during the 4th century B. C. and referring to information acquired from seamen who had travelled to Britannia, gives us the following account:

> Opposite the land of the Celts there exists in the Ocean an island, not smaller than Sicily, inhabited by Hyperboreans. They honor Apollo more than any other deity. A sacred enclosure is dedicated to him on the island, as well as a magnificent circular temple adorned with many rich offerings.

There is no doubt that Hecataeus refers to the prehistoric monument of Stonehenge situated on the Salisbury Plain and dating from 1800-1400 B.C. By the word "Hyperboreans" the Greeks of that time meant the people who lived "beyond the North Wind".

Another Greek from Marseille who came into contact with Britain and her people was the tradesman Midacritos. As Pliny (A. D. 23-79) tells us, Midacritos was the first to import "white lead," that is, tin, from the Cassiterides.

Excavations by British archaeologists have revealed that during the Roman occupation of England (43 B. C. - 410 A. D.) there lived Greek military men, doctors, craftsmen and servants. Plutarch, writing in 83 or 84 A. D., tells us:

> By chance there came to us two educated and pious men from different points of the earth, and we met at Delphi: Demetrius, the scribe, who had returned from Britain to his home, Tarsus, and Cleombrotus, the Spartan. Demetrius said that many of the islands around Britain were uninhabited and scattered at a great distance, and some of them had names of heroes and demons. He himself had sailed at the emperor's orders on a journey of exploration and observation.

Christianity in Britain brought the apostle and martyr Aristoboulos, who was one of the Seventy Apostles, a brother of Barnabas, the founder of the Church of Cyprus and a disciple of St. Paul, who ordained him Bishop of Britain and sent him to spread the new religion to the pagan Britons who martyred him.

During the Byzantine period Constantine the Great was acclaimed Emperor by the Roman army in 306 in the city of York. His father Constantios Chloros, an official of the Roman Empire, died in that year in the same city.

According to legend, a Greek monk named Regulus or "Rule" had a vision around the year 345 that the Emperor Constantine was planning to remove the relics of the apostle St. Andrew from their resting place in Patras to his new capital Constantinople. The monk therefore went to the apostle's shrine and took an arm-bone, three fingers of the right hand, a tooth, and a knee-cap and, setting out by ship for western parts, arrived on the Scottish coast with the relics. There he established a religious house, and the town, which grew up around it, was named St Andrews.[5]

The pagan Anglo-Saxons, who started invading England early in the 5th century, came into contact with Byzantine art during the years 600-630. In 1939 an astonishing archaeological discovery in Suffolk, the ship-burial at Sutton Hoo, brought to light a small treasure: a complete set of nine silver bowls, the interior of each decorated in the Byzantine style. There were also two typical Byzantine spoons, most probably used for the Holy Communion, inscribed with the words ΣΑVΛΟC (Saul) and ΠΑVΛΟC (Paul).[6]

In 668 the Greek monk Theodore of Tarsus (see next Chapter) was ordained Archbishop of England by Pope Vitalianus and sent to England. During the twenty years of his service, despite the difficulty of his task, Theodore managed successfully to unite the various ecclesiastical dioceses and organize the Church in England.

Another contact between the two countries occurred during the year 1400 when the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Palaeologus travelled to Paris and London seeking support for defense of Byzantium against Ottoman threat. The chroniclers of that time have described his reception

by Henry IV at Blackheath. Later, Manuel celebrated Christmas as Henry's guest at Eltham.

After the fall of Constantinople to the Turks, a considerable number of scholars and educated Greeks fled to take refuge in Western Europe, mainly in Italy. Curious and interesting is the case of a member of the last Byzantine Emperor's family, Andreas Palaeologus, nephew of Emperor Constantine Palaeologus, who immigrated to Pesaro, Italy. One of his descendants, Theodore Paleaologus, settled in the south west of England, where he married an English noblewoman. His grave is in the parish church of Llandulph, near Plymouth. His epitaph gives us his history:

> Here lyeth the body of Theodoro Paleologus
> Of Pesaro in Italye descended from ye Imperyall
> Lyne of ye last Christian Emperors of Greece
> Being the sonne of Camilio ye sonne of Prosper
> the son of Theodoro the sonne of John ye sonne
> of Thomas second brother to Constantine
> Paleologus the 8th of that name and last of
> yt lyne yt raygned in Constantinople until sub-
> dewed by the Turkes who married with Mary
> Ye daughter of William Balls of Hadlye in
> Suffolke Gent & had issue 5 children… and de-
> parted this life at Clyfton ye 21th of January 1636.[7]

In 1546 Nicander Nucius from Corfu, belonging to the men of Gerard Weltwick, who was an Ambassador of Charles V, King of Spain, visited England and in his diary, which he wrote under the title *Αποδημίαι* (Travels), described in detailed, archaic Greek his travels and meeting with Henry VIII. Here is a short passage, in translation, about the English:

> The race of men is fair, inclining to a light colour; in their persons they are tall and erect; the hair of their heads and beards is of golden hue; their eyes blue, for the most part, and their cheeks ruddy. They are martial and valorous and generally tall; fish-eaters and insatiable of animal food; sottish and unrestrained in their appetites; full of suspicion.

Of the English language Nucius, who appears not to have spoken it, had this to say:

> They possess a peculiar language, differing in some measures from all others, having received contributions from almost all the rest both in words and in syllables, as I conjecture. For although they speak somewhat barbarously, yet their language has a certain charm and allurement, being sweeter indeed than that of the Germans and Flemish.

And here is what the observant Corfiot traveller has to say about the position of women in English society:

> One may see in the markets and streets of the city married women and maidens employed in trades and bartering quite undisguisedly… They display great simplicity and absence of jealousy in their usages towards females: for not only do those who are of the same family and household kiss them on the mouth with salutations and embraces, but even those too who have never seen them before. And to themselves this appears by no means indecent.[8]

During the 17th century various Greek clergymen arrived sporadically in England to study at the famous universities of Oxford and Cambridge. The most notable of them were:

The monk **Christophoros Angelou** (see Chapter 5) from the Peloponnese who, after having suffered at the hands of the Turks in Athens, took refuge first at Cambridge University and later at Oxford, where he taught Greek; he published certain treatises relating to the Orthodox Church.

Kyrillos Lucaris travelled in various European countries and in 1621 became Patriarch of Constantinople. He sent young Greek theologians to study in England, Holland and Switzerland. He liked Protestantism more than Catholicism and maintained contacts with Archbishop of Canterbury George Abbot and his successor William Laud. In his work, *Confession* (1629), he included articles of Calvinistic inclinations. He was a friend of British Ambassador to Constantinople Sir Thomas Roe, and of his successor Sir Peter Wynch, for whose son – named after him – the Patriarch acted as godfather.

Mitrophanis Critopoulos from Veria was sent to England by the Patriarch Kyrillos Lucaris and studied at Oxford for seven years (1617-24) on a scholarship from King James. He made known to various Anglican officials aspects of Orthodox Theology and became Patriarch of Alexandria in 1636.

Nicodemos Metaxas, a monk from Cephalonia, went to London in 1620 to visit his brother and was impressed by the educational institutions and universities in England. His brother, an eminent merchant, helped him to buy a printing press, which he shipped to Constantinople to print Greek books for the education of his countrymen. One of the books printed was the translation of the *New Testament* into Modern Greek by Maximos Kallipolitis in 1638; but the same year the Patriarch Kyrillos Lucaris was strangled by the Turks, the printing press was destroyed. What remained of it was transported to Cephalonia, where Metaxas continued printing books. He became Archbishop of Corfu, Zante and Ithaca.[9]

About the year 1670 more than 150 Greek refugees from the Peloponnese, having wandered through Italy, settled in England, probably following the mediation of Constantine Rodokanakis, a private physician to King Charles II. Some years later, in 1677, on the initiative of Joseph Georgirinis, Metropolitan of Samos, a Greek Orthodox Church dedicated to Virgin Mary (St. Martin's-in-the-Fields) was built on a plot of land, where there is still a "Greek Street" in the vicinity. Later they moved to the City.

In 1712 Metropolitan Arsenius of Thebais, who was sent to England by Patriarch of Alexandria Samuel Kapatsoulis, wrote: "During the three years I lived in England both myself and my people dressed as clergymen were shown much respect by the officials and the clergy as well."[9]

The inhabitants of the Ionian Islands came into contact with the British during the 50 years they were under British rule (1815-64), when a garrison of some 4,000 sailors and soldiers made up of naval and army officers and administrators governed the Islands. Public education, which had been forbidden during more than 400 years of Venetian occupation of the Islands (1386-1797), was re-established by the British. In 1824 the philhellene Lord Guilford founded the Ionian Academy, an institution of higher education that gave great impetus to study of the Greek language and the sciences. This period coincides with the flourishing of the Ionian School in Modern Greek literature led by Count Dionysios Solomos (1798-1857). During the British occupation (or "protectorate," as the British preferred to call it) of the Ionian Islands, ten High Commissioners ruled the Islands in succession, some of them more liberally, like Adam and Nugent, some more severely, like the autocratic Maitland and the strict Seaton. However, relations between the Ionians and the British were on the whole friendly. The British established contact with the Ionian aristocracy, and some mixed marriages took place. The British introduced cricket matches and ginger beer drinking, two social features that still exist.

Another wave of Greek refugees settled in London after the devastation of the island of Chios (1821) and during the Greek Struggle for Independence (1821-27). Many of them were from Chios, Constantinople, Smyrna and the coast of Asia Minor. Later some of these refugees distinguished themselves in shipping. Greek ship owners converted their sailing ships to steamers, thanks to the liberal attitude of Britain in shipping and commerce. They established their shipping companies in the City of London and made astonishing progress.[10]

The presence of eminent Greeks in England was apparent and marked by the poets Ugo Foscolo, whose mother was Greek, and Andreas Calvos,

whose wife was English. Stephanos Xenos, ship-owner and man of letters who published the *Britannic Star* (1860-62), a Greek newspaper in London, contributed significantly to the economy.[11] Among the other outstanding Greek writers who lived in England during the 19th and 20th centuries were Spiridon Trikoupis, politician and historian; Demetrios Vikelas, who, among his other works, translated five Shakespeare plays; Alexandros Pallis, a champion of demotic Greek; the poets Andreas Lascaratos and Georgios Vizyinos; the well-known poet C. P. Cavafy; and the Nobelist poet George Seferis, who served as Ambassador.[12]

Notes

[1] Barry Cunliffe, *Facing the Ocean: The Atlantic and Its People,* Oxford, 2001, pp. 91-93, 306-8.
[2] Stanley Casson, *Greece and Britain,* Collins, London [1943] p. 31.
[3] *Ibid*., p. 30.
[4] *Ibid.,* p. 32. See also: H. J. Mette, *Pytheas von Massilia,* Berlin, 1952.
[5] Lionel Butler & Chris Given - Wilson, *Medieval Monasteries of Great Britain,* Michael Joseph, London, 1983, p. 333.
[6] M. Alexander*, Old English Literature,* Macmillan, London, 1983, pp. 22-25, 240-241. See also: *Μπέογουλφ, αγγλοσαξονικό επικό ποίημα*. Εισαγωγή - Μετάφραση - Σημειώσεις: Πάνος Καραγιώργος, Αφοί Κυριακίδη, Θεσσαλονίκη 1996.
[7] The second part of Nucius's work referring to England was published by J. A. Cramer: *The Second Book of the Travels of Nicander Nucius of Corcyra,* Oxford, 1841. The second part of the manuscript is in the Ambrosiana Library, Milan, and the third is in the Escorial Library, Spain.
[8] Terence Spencer, *Fair Greece Sad Relic. Literary Philhellenism from Shakespeare to Byron.* London, 1954, p. 5.
[9] Β. Τσιμπιδάρος, *Οι Έλληνες στην Αγγλία*, Αθήνα 1974, pp. 21-22.
[10] Χ. Μετής, "Ιστορία των Ελλήνων στη Μεγάλη Βρετανία" *Η Καθημερινή* "Επτά Ημέρες", 9 Φεβρ. 1997, p. 4.
[11] Ζ. Καυκαλίδης, *Στέφανος Ξένος,* Εκδόσεις Καστανιώτη, Αθήνα 1998.
[12] Πάνος Καραγιώργος, *Πολιτισμικές Σχέσεις Ελλάδας – Βρετανίας. Έρευνες και Μελέτες.* Σύλλογος προς Διάσοσιν Ωφελίμων Βιβλίων, Αθήναι, 2002, pp. 9-23.

CHAPTER TWO

THEODORE OF TARSUS, THE GREEK ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

The earliest information we have about Theodore of Tarsus (602-690), the seventh Archbishop of Canterbury, derives from the Venerable Bede (673-735) who has been described as "the father of English history." Bede, a contemporary of Theodore, learned Greek from Theodore's pupil Aldhelm, and it is possible that the young historian met Theodore in person. In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*,[1] which he completed in Latin in 731, four years before his death, Bede gives us the following account of Theodore:

> At this time there was in Rome a monk named Theodore, a native of Tarsus in Cilicia, who was well known to Hadrian. He was learned both in sacred and in secular literature, in Greek and in Latin, of proved integrity, and of the venerable age of sixty-six. Hadrian, therefore, suggested the name of Theodore to the Pope, who agreed to consecrate him, but made it a condition that Hadrian himself should accompany him to Britain, since he had already travelled through Gaul twice on various missions and had both a better knowledge of the road and sufficient men of his own available. The Pope also ordered Hadrian to give full support to Theodore in his teaching, and to ensure that he did not introduce into the Church which he was to rule any Greek customs which conflicted with the teachings of the true Faith.[2] On receiving the subdiaconate, Theodore waited four months for his hair to grow so that he could receive the circular tonsure; for hitherto he had worn the tonsure of the holy Apostolic Paul in conformity with eastern custom. He was then consecrated bishop by Pope Vitalian on Sunday 26 March 668 and on 27 May he set out for Britain, accompanied by Hadrian.

Theodore was born in Tarsus, Cilicia, the native city of St. Paul, in about 602, and he was 35 when Jerusalem fell into the hands of the Mohammedans. It is most likely that Theodore attended some school in his native city. Later he completed his education in Constantinople and Athens, both famous centres of learning, where, in spite of the expulsion

of the philosophers by Justinian from Athens in 529, some learning and culture survived.

A second early piece of information about Theodore is derived from a letter addressed a generation later by Pope Zacharias to Boniface which refers to Theodore as "Graeco-latinus ante philosophus et Athenis eruditus,"[3] which implies that he studied philosophy in Athens, a fact that earned him the reputation of a philosopher.

When Theodore set out for England from Rome at the end of May 668, he was accompanied not only by Hadrian but also by Benedictus Biscop, who was on his second pilgrimage to Rome and agreed to return to England as companion, interpreter, and instructor in the English tongue to the new Archbishop. They sailed to Marseille and from there proceeded to Arles, where they handed the Pope's commendatory letter to John, Archbishop of Arles. John asked permission from the Mayor Ebroin for his guests to pass on their way, but Ebroin suspected that Hadrian, while bound for England, was acting in the interests of the Byzantine emperor Constans II with offers of an alliance against Gaul, and so detained him for some time.

Theodore proceeded to Paris, where he was received and given hospitality by Bishop Agilbert, who had previously been Bishop of Wessex in England for 14 years. Agilbert had consecrated Wilfred as Bishop of the Northumbrian Church in 664. Theodore spent the winter with Agilbert, who informed him about the difficulties with West Saxon politics that had forced him to leave England.

In the meantime, King Egbert of Kent sent his high reeve or prefect to France to meet the Archbishop and accompany him back to England. In Etaples Theodore was delayed by sickness and fatigue. Later he crossed the Channel and was received at Canterbury on 27 May 669, exactly one year after he had set out from Rome.[4]

At the time of Theodore's arrival the church in England lacked administrative organization, discipline, and order. The Celtic missionaries had carried on their work in an individual manner rather than through an ecclesiastical system. The controversy of the Paschal question, which divided the energies of the clergy, had caused great disturbance and personal jealousies. The English kingdoms were too large to be dioceses, and the sees of Rochester and East Anglia were vacant. Theodore, with Wilfrid, Chad, and Wina, formed the entire episcopate of the English Church. Theodore had to organize the Church, not an easy task for a man of 77 who was not used to the cold climate, who was a scholar and an ascetic, with none of the attributes of an administrator.

In spite of all this, Theodore showed remarkable dynamism, perseverance, and courage. He was a man of strong will and untiring energy who set before himself two major tasks: to establish the authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury over all the bishops of England and to organize a legislative structure for the English Church. The church in England was to be an organized body with a definite voice and a definite government.

Soon after his arrival Theodore began to visit the different bishoprics and to set things in order. Beginning at Rochester, he consecrated Putta, a well-known Church musician, to the vacant see. Proceeding to East Anglia, he consecrated Bisi. In the autumn of 669 he reached York, where the pious Chad ruled his vast diocese with love and great zeal. Although the pure character and the gentle humility of Chad attracted Theodore, he remained true to his Roman principles and told Chad that consecration to the see already filled by Wilfrid was unlawful. Chad at once accepted the Archbishop's ruling and insisted on retiring to his old monastery Lastingham, while Wilfrid, emerging from his retreat at Ripon, placed his energies at the service of his diocese. Of the other bishops, Wina continued to hold London, while Leutherius was consecrated Bishop for the whole kingdom of Wessex. The following year, Theodore consecrated Lothere as Bishop of the West Saxons, with his seat at Winchester.

Returning to Canterbury, the Archbishop had the satisfaction of knowing that all the bishops of England had acknowledged his authority as primate, agreed to follow the Roman Easter, and owed orders to Roman practices. In the meantime King Ethelred of Mercia, who had newly succeeded to the throne, declared himself a devoted follower of the Archbishop.

The Synod of Hertford, 673

Some years later, in 673, Theodore summoned a council of English bishops of his province to meet in synod at Hertford on 24 September. Fortunately, the Venerable Bede has preserved the text of the decisions of the Council, which were in the following form:

> In the name of Lord God and our saviour Jesus Christ, and under the everlasting governance and guidance of His Church, it was thought right that we should assemble in accordance with the custom of venerable canons to deliberate concerning the necessary affairs of the Church. We therefore assembled on the 24th day of September, the first indiction, at the place called Hertford; that is, myself, Theodore, though unworthy, Bishop of the See of Canterbury by the authority of the apostolic see; our fellow-bishop and brother the most reverend Bisi, Bishop of the East

Angles; also our brother the Bishop Wilfrid, Bishop of the Northumbrian people, who is represented by his own proxies. Also present were our brothers and fellow-bishops Putta, Bishop of the Kentish fortress of Rochester; Leutherius, Bishop of the West Saxons; and Wynfrid, Bishop of the province of the Mercians. When all the above had assembled and taken their places in due order, I said: "My dearest brothers, for the love and reverence you bear our Redeemer, I beg that we may all deliberate in harmony for our Faith, preserving inviolate the decrees and definitions of our holy and respected Fathers. I dealt with these and many other matters relating to charity and the preservation of the Church's unity and, having concluded this introductory address, I asked each in turn whether they agreed to observe all the canonical decrees of the ancient Fathers. To which all our fellow-priests replied: "We are all resolved that we will cheerfully and willingly obey whatever is laid down in the canons of the holy Fathers." I then produced the said book of canons, and publicly showed them ten chapters that I had marked in certain places, because I knew them to be of the greatest importance to us, and asked that all should devote special attention to them.

Chapter 1. That we all unite in observing the holy day of Easter on the Sunday after the fourteenth day of the moon of the first month.

Chapter 2. That no bishop intrude into the diocese of another, but confine himself to the guidance of the people committed to his charge.

Chapter 3. That no bishop shall interfere in any way with monasteries dedicated to God, nor take anything from them forcibly.

Chapter 4. That monks shall not wander from place to place, that is, from monastery to monastery, except with letters dimissory from their own abbot; and that they keep the promise of obedience which they made at the time of their profession.

Chapter 5. That no clergy shall leave their own bishop and wander about at will, nor be received anywhere without letters of commendation from their own bishop. And should such a person, once received, refuse to return when so directed, both receiver and received shall incur excommunication.

Chapter 6. That bishops and clergy when travelling shall be content with whatever hospitality is offered them; and that it shall be unlawful for any of them to exercise any priestly function without permission from the bishop in whose diocese they are known to be.

Chapter 7. That a synod be held twice a year. In view of various obstacles, however, it was unanimously agreed that we should meet once a year on the first of August at the place called Clofeshoch.

Chapter 8. That no bishop claim precedence over another out of ambition: seniority of consecration shall alone determine precedence.

Chapter 9. It was generally discussed that more bishops shall be consecrated as the number of the faithful increases. But we have announced no decision in the matter for the present.

> Chapter 10. On marriages: That lawful wedlock alone is permissible; incest is forbidden; and no man may leave his lawful wife except, as the gospel provides, for fornication. And if a man puts away his own wife, who is joined to him in lawful marriage, he may not take another if he wishes to be a good Christian. He must either remain as he is or else be reconciled to his wife.
>
> After discussing these chapters and reaching decisions by our common consent, in order that no occasion for unedifying controversy or differences between ourselves may arise, it has been thought right that each of us should ratify our decisions by his own signature. I have dictated this expression of our decisions to Titillus, our secretary to be written down, and this has been done in the month and indiction mentioned above. Therefore, if anyone shall presume in any way to contravene or disobey these decisions confirmed by our agreement and ratified by our signatures, according to canonical decrees, let him take notice that he incurs suspension from every priestly function and exclusion from our fellowship. May divine grace preserve us all in safety, who live in the unity of His Holy Church.[5]

It is clear that the object of the Archbishop's intention was mainly to increase the authority of the bishops over their clergy and to correct the laxity that had prevailed until then by giving the bishops a definite law to enforce and a definite area of authority.

Theodore was successful in establishing his authority and had taken the first great step towards the organization of the English Church. So far he had met with little or no opposition, but the history of his next effort was far different and gave rise to a controversy that caused the vessel of the church to be tossed by the waves.

Theodore was convinced, and rightly so, that the English bishoprics were far too large, and at the synod of Hertford he raised the question of their division without, however, obtaining any definite decision from the council. In the same year he had succeeded in dividing the bishopric of East Anglia without difficulty. The chief offender in this matter was Wilfrid of Northumbria who, with his seat at York, ruled over a vast district. Wilfrid did not attend the synod, but sent proctors instead.

Wilfrid ruled the whole Northumbrian church from 669 to 677, during which time he became an outstanding figure both in the ecclesiastical and secular life of the North. Many abbots placed themselves under his protection. He acquired many great estates, and his household became a school where young nobles received their military education. He was the spiritual guide of Queen Aethelthryth, who presented him with a piece of land at Hexham on which he built a monastery. Wilfrid exercised such a religious influence on the queen that she left the court and entered the

monastery of Coldingham. In this way Wilfrid earned the wrath of King Egfrid. The king became the bishop's bitter enemy, and his new wife fed her husband's jealousy by reminding him of Wilfrid's wealth and many prosperous monasteries. At that time Theodore was invited by the king to visit Northumbria and, encouraged by him, proceeded to divide Wilfrid's diocese.

Some commentators accuse Theodore of being an opportunist, but what actually happened is unclear. Without Wilfrid's consent the Archbishop consecrated three bishops to new dioceses of Bernicia, Lindisfarne, and Lindsey, leaving Wilfrid only the largest part of Deira.[6]

Wilfrid, furious with indignation, ignored both the Archbishop and the King and left for Rome to appeal personally to the Pope. By doing so he began a long, tangled, and highly controversial history; one may speculate that this was the seed that finally germinated, many centuries later, into the Reformation of 1534.

Wilfrid did not realize the far-reaching implications of his actions. He considered himself grievously wronged by a vindictive king and an arbitrary archbishop. He could not hope for justice from his fellow bishops, who were all the nominees of Theodore, and the church owed her existence to the great see of Rome. Furthermore, Wilfrid believed that the Archbishop himself had been appointed to his office only some years earlier and was entrusted with authority that he had abused. Wilfrid had sought refuge in the Pope, who could be the only possible judge.

Theodore and the King of Northumbria, however, viewed the problem differently. Theodore sent a statement of his view of the case to Rome and, after establishing the new bishops, returned to Canterbury. The following year, 680, he carried out a division of the Mercian see by establishing the bishoprics of Worcester and Leicester.

On reaching Rome, Wilfrid found Pope Agatho acquainted with the matter in dispute through letters from Theodore and, in October 679, a council of 53 bishops heard Wilfrid's case and ruled in his favour. Soon afterwards, having in his possession a papal bull drawn up in due legal form, directing Wilfrid's restoration to his old diocese, Wilfrid returned to England and presented himself before King Egfrid and his privy council (*Witan*), confident of being easily restored to his diocese. He was, however, rudely dismissed. Neither the king nor his council would submit to a foreign power. They refused to recognize the papal bull, accused Wilfrid of bribing the Roman court and, after imprisoning him for some time, banished him from the country. Wilfrid took refuge in Mercia and then in Wessex. Finally, persecuted by his enemies, he ended up in the