

GREEK LANDSCAPE AND THE FORMATION OF MODERN WESTERN CIVILIZATION

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Abstract

The intention of the following dissertation is to explain that concepts and design principles concerning landscape, from Renaissance till the first part of 19th century, are developed in reference to landscape of classical Hellenic antiquity.

Despite the deficiency of corresponding evidences, this reference contributed normative models for landscape architecture of 18th and the first part of 19th century; models that in addition disposed political character, issued by the emblematic relation of neoclassicism to the development of modern Western bourgeois regimes.

Moreover the following dissertation emphasizes the importance which Hellenic landscape still retains for Western and universal civilization, and the actual possibilities concerning the promotion of this relation; possibilities having to do with the "physiognomy" reinforcement of regions of Greece or Hellenic cities, for cultural, political and economic reasons as well.

Concluding, the landscape of Arcadia will be proposed as an exemplar case of the above mentioned possibilities, describing in general the richness of opportunities, presented by contemporary Hellenic land and landscape in urban or non-urban areas.

Key words: *Hellenic landscape, Enlightenment, Neoclassicism, Arcadia.*

Preface

Introductory protest and dissertation hypothesis

The following dissertation is centered to its author's scientific assumption that modern history of concepts as well as of design mode concerning landscape, from Renaissance till 19th century, is at great extent related to the re-inscription of references concerning Hellenic antiquity, in modern societies. The above as sertation seems to stand in immediate contradiction to reduced recognition, offered by Greek intellectuals of my generation in general or by Greek architects of my generation in particular, to the specific cultural and political significance, let us repeat this second designation, to the "political" significance, which neoclassism disposes.

The explanation of the above contradiction that sometimes attains the state of aversion, has only recently reached my understanding. In the course of a scientific meeting, dedicated to the relation between urban design and suburban landscape, as well as to the possibility of landscape intervention in the interior of urban areas, I came to the conclusion that all suggestions, presented by the participants in the meeting, concerned environmental issues or directions of expression, which design approach of contemporary landscape architecture follows in general; surprisingly enough without bring in gunder consideration the subject of the historical background of landscape. Yet, the above meeting was organized by the Italian University "La Sapienza-Roma 1",³⁶ in Rome; namely in a city where natural landscape quality could under no circumstances be

separated from its historical background. However the participants in the meeting were Italians, all of them, the author of the present dissertation excluded.

In any case, what is the reason that my Italian colleagues referred to Italian landscape and to the landscape of Rome, without mentioning their great importance for modern Europe and Western world, for their civilization and for modern political structures as well? What is the reason that my Greek colleagues usually refer to Greek landscape and to the landscape of Athens, as if those landscapes were similar to any other in Europe? What is the reason that they constantly ignore their determinant importance for the constitution of modern European and Western civilization, for modern European and Western political self-consciousness; degrading at the same time the equal importance that neoclassicism holds?

A first explanation for the above condition may refer to modernist architectural education, which still qualifies the majority of contemporary Greek architects and their Italian colleagues as well. Though postmodernism or, even closer to the present moment, contemporary avant-garde architectural tendencies have been introduced into their way of thinking, the impact of modernism seems still to be responsible for the devaluation of neoclassicism, of classicist references in general; for the underestimation of their international value and their cultural and political contribution to the formation of modern Europe and modern Western world.

A second explanation has to do with the rather limited historical knowledge of the particular group of scientists and professionals originated from the domain of natural sciences and occupied with landscape. Agronomists, foresters, environmental are usually dispose limited education in the sectors of history or art history. Those sectors of knowledge are for sure closer to architect's education, though sometimes faced by them, as we already commented, in a historically biased way.

A third explanation also appears highly interesting not only because it indicates political motifs for the general historical underestimate on we have stated above, but because it refers to additional large population groups, larger than groups of specialized scientists or professionals.

This last explanation refers to the political exploitation of classicism by auto critic regimes, for Italy and Greece equally, in a way that connected historical memory to traumatic political experiences, in particular in those two countries that have been thoroughly identified with the classical past. However Italian fascism, as well as the two periods of dictatorship in Greece, before and after Second World War, is by no means, possible to monopolize the expressive examples of historical periods that principally represent the exact opposite of political suppression – namely ancient democracy.

In any way, whatever may have occurred in the meantime, between 19th century and our contemporary era, it is in conceivable not to understand the tremendous impact of ancient references, of ancient Greek landscape in particular, on European and Western history and, what is even more crucial, not to claim the active reminding of this ideological origin to the contemporary international community.

³⁶ A meeting under the subject "*Margini Urbani - In and Out*" ("*Urban Margins - In and Out*") organized in relation to the tutorials concerning PhD candidates of the School of Architecture of Sapienza University of Rome, having as object of their doctoral research the "*Progettazione e Gestione dell' Ambiente e del Paesaggio - Design and management of Environment and Landscape*" (Rome, February 25th2013). During the meeting the author presented a lecture under the title "*Urban Margins In and Out. An Epistemic Reversal*". In addition he participated in a round table discussion having as discourse subject that of the meeting, «*Margini Urbani - In and Out*».

Pict.1: Thomas Eakins - Arcadia (circa 1883).



Objective of the dissertation

Cultural and political reference of modern Western societies to ancient Greek landscape

Let us proceed to the presentation of our views, in a more conventional way... Our dissertation insists on describing, as already noted, that reference to the landscape of Greek antiquity offers exemplar or motive forms for landscape conceptualization and design; from Renaissance time and here after, till 19th century, a period important for the constitution of modern Hellenic state. Moreover, those normative forms possess an “emblematic”³⁷ political character.

Our dissertation insists on denoting in addition, the position already presented through our introductory protest. We already emphasized that the impact of the above exemplar forms is crucial for the constitution of modern European and Western civilization; thus we may accept as a paradox that this impact is not strongly promoted, as an attempt to invigorate the contemporary profile of territories and cities of the Hellenic country, in reference to Greek civilization and culture, and to political and economic reasons as well.

Methodological commentary

We have just presented the three fundamental aspects under laying our dissertation. According to the first aspect, concepts and formations concerning landscape possess crucial importance for our civilization and culture, over the entire range of modern European and Western history, already beginning from Renaissance Quattrocento. According to the second aspect, in a more particular way, they also possess a crucial political importance; a political importance that did

³⁷ Quotation made to the title of the Swiss scholar J. Starobinski’s book, *Les emblèmes de la raison – 1789*. In this study neoclassical art is presented as an emblematic expression of modern bourgeois political sovereignty. The term “emblem” is used instead of the term “symbol” in order to point out an immediate and apparent state of reference (Starobinski, 1979).

not need contemporary “green” sensitivity in order to emerge. Finally, according to the third aspect, the effort for promotion of our country, the effort for invigoration of the character of its territories and cities, has every reason, political, cultural or economic reason, to point out the original relation already cited, the relation between modern Western societies and Greek antiquity, ancient Greek landscape in particular.

If landscape perception may be described as the vision closest to cosmic wholeness, because of its extension and perplexity of its elements, then it is rather easy to explain societies’ tendency to use landscape as a field where their relation to nature could be presented. In the majority of modern cases the relation to nature used to be that of power projected on the natural substrate, treating it as field of control. It is only during the period of romantic objection or under the impact of contemporary environmental sensitivity, that landscape is treated finally, as a field of environmental and cultural discourse.

However this power exerted on surrounding world, on society as well as on its space-substrate equally, on its habitable landscape, this power that has to do with scientific and managerial knowledge, with economic possibilities, with possibilities of construction, consists at the same time an expression of a more generalized political power, which landscape formations are committed to display.

“Teatrum politicum”, political theatre for the presentation of ethical norms, landscape formations indicate differences or resemblances of modern Western thought to prior historic periods, while in addition they accept the responsibility to present in an emblematic way, as we have already stated, the special political character of modern European societies.³⁸

The dissertation that follows, is thus committed to deal with modern concepts and formations of landscape from Renaissance time and afterwards, proving that their political significance, during 18th century and the beginning of 19th century more precisely, has to do with references to landscape of classical Greek antiquity. In order to prove this political significance, we shall briefly comment this historical background, using as conclusion a specific example, that of the reference to ancient Arcadia and of the importance that this reference may have today for the promotion of the real Hellenic landscape of Arcadia and for the invigoration of the character of this concrete region of Hellenic Republic.

First Part of the Dissertation

Cultural assimilation of classical references by modern landscape art

It was because of the cultural and political rhetoric, requested by glamorous modern Western societies, that modern landscape art had to assimilate in its course, constantly, every interesting external discourse. Some of those external influences nevertheless, as the influence of the Arabic garden art or the controversial for its impact influence of Chinese art of landscape,³⁹ seem still to retain a comparatively limited recognition; while some others obtained the biggest possible recognized symbolic force, although through hypothetical approaches mainly.

This last case concerns, principally, landscape references related to classical antiquity, which despite the lack of evidences, insisted on defining not only the principles of modern landscape art but also the space vision of modern ideal society. Commenting architecture or

³⁸ As we have repeated lyre marked, they thus describe their difference to medieval ethics, or their resemblance to the landscape hypothesis of classical antiquity, as it happens for example in the case of the hypothetical landscape of ancient Arcadia, to which we shall especially refer afterwards. Lastly, they express the difference between politics of bourgeois class, being under development by that time in protestant countries, versus politics of catholic European monarchies of 17th century (Moraitis, 2012, especially chapters 5th and 6th).

³⁹ See William Chambers’ significant book, *A dissertation on oriental gardening* (Chambers, 1774), concerning Chinese gardening and its influence on 18th century English landscape architecture.

sculpture, modern classicism had the possibility to refer to concrete, still existing material examples, to remnants of temples or other building structures; it had the possibility to discover statuary in full sculpted or relief form. However in the case of classical landscape formations natural materiality of the examples had long ago been perished or radically altered. Thus modern Western disciples of Roman or Greek antiquity were forced to lean on hypothetical approaches principally, on pictorial landscape conjectures sometimes,⁴⁰ however without their force of interest being decreased.

Nevertheless, why all this cultural and political labor had to be accomplished?

The development of classicism proves in a dramatic way that an esthetics and ethics constitute interchangeable versions of similar social and political suggestions. Under the impact of this similarity, modern classicist art resumes to support the development of social and political Reason, which would offer, in accordance to the promises of rising bourgeois class, guarantees of social prosperity. Thus we turn to our central ascertainment, according to which, modern classicism, after Renaissance, is developed in accordance to cultural movements related to the development of bourgeois class and, finally, in relation to the development of bourgeois democratic regimes. In this way pictorial representation of classical landscape or reference of landscape formations to classical indications, during 18th century as well as during the beginning of 19th century in particular, ultimately implies that this new landscape constitutes the receptor of the novice Western bourgeois democracy.

We have to signalize here that previous remarks have not to be accepted as important for understanding modern history of concepts and formations concerning landscape only. They seem to be equally important for understanding the way modern perception of "Hellenic" identity is constructed, by Greek citizens and Westerners as well. Pushing this remark to its limits we may agree that the very presence of an independent Hellenic state has to do with their connaissance of the ancient Greek cultural and finally political exemplars, as decisive for the constitution of the modern European or even more generally, of the modern Western bourgeois states. Moreover it has to do in particular, with the reconnaissance of Greek landscape as a generator of political references that seem important for Western world.

Political and cultural significance of classical landscape. Classical landscape as an emblem of Reason⁴¹

The term "classical" is often used to describe the total time range of 17th and 18th century, and the way cultural classical background of those centuries influenced 19th century.⁴² However it would be wise to limit the use of the term, to the development of bourgeois morals during 17th century in the territory of Holland in particular; or principally to use it, with the addition of the prefix "neo" - neoclassicism, for the description of the period corresponding to the decline of French monarchy and to the ascent of Enlightenment that reach its summit point during French

⁴⁰ By the end of last century some novel theoretical suppositions appear; they try to explain the landscape aspect of ancient Greek constructions, abutting on more explicit proofs. Such a novel theoretical supposition is the one proposed by Konstantinos Doxiadis, about the way sacred places in ancient Greece were organized, based on the use of polar coordinates – this hypothesis explicitly indicates terms of landscape composition, concerning both the terrain where temple clusters were built, and their relation to the wider landscape environment (Doxiadis, 1972). Certainly, this supposition may use as proof the preserved architectural traces as well as the existing surrounding ground relief. It has to be compared with suppositions proposed by Vincent Scully, concerning ancient Greek temples and their relation to landscape (Scully, 1979, as well as Scully, 1994).

⁴¹ To be compared with the title of the book previously quoted, *Les emblèmes de la raison– 1789*, by Swiss author J. Starobinski.

⁴² For example as used by Michel Foucault, in his book *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (French: *Les Mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines*) (Foucault, 1966).

Revolution.⁴³ Neoclassicism is thus related to processes developed in geopolitical differentiation to monarchic glamour, or to processes that followed the period of Baroque development. Those processes appear to be crucial for the entire Western world, and they immediately affected the concepts and formation of landscape, promoting a geometrical austerity at the beginning, being followed by a natural-like design tendency.

In examining the period of 18th century in particular, we have to signalize that Roman and Greek ancient democracy are equally proposed as examples of social and political structure, in relation to the critic are used by the political thought of Enlightenment. A similar phenomenon may be noted if we examine the creation of the general ideological support developed three centuries before, during the period of Italian Quattrocento, when Florence bourgeoisie's radical political thought seeks, in a similar way, political analogies to Roman and Greek antiquity. In the example of Renaissance, as in the example of 18th century, retrospective references are related to the totality of cultural life. They concern theory, as well as natural sciences⁴⁴, state institutions, arts as well as everyday ethics. Moreover they are emphatically related to concepts and design of landscape, as landscape appears to offer the perceptible space area, where ancient references may be reinstated and spatially reinstalled.

Many of the precedent comments are probably already known. However its worthy to recur to them, not only because their total synopsis allows a better theoretical control of our subject, but also in order to stress in addition that Western political thought and its sculptural claims are emphatically turned for specific reasons, after a certain period, towards the Greek example, accepting it as more important than the Roman one. In this case we don't have an evaluation of the fictitious reference to Greek landscape only. There a geographic space itself corresponding to Greek antiquity, though being under extensive occupation by a non-European, Muslim force, acquires a special significance. Thus a landscape oriented ideology concerning Greece is favoured, still retaining its power today.

The development of omnipotent European monarchies of 17th century was certainly founded on the rational way of thinking, which seems to entirely conquer the totality of the developed countries of this age. However this despotic, concentrating way of government could not but create a counteraction, especially in relation to the development of bourgeois class, persistently claiming the control of political and economic structures. In the domain of speculative thinking, the major factor that has to carry out the propulsion of those changes is Reason again, while the founding historical example continues to be that of antiquity. What is more, the impact of the ancient paradigm seems to be amplified in a specific way. During the period of royal absolutism, mythical and historical references to ancient times express generally the civilized and sophisticated manners of the royal Court; however upraise of Enlightenment identifies the recall of antiquity, of democratic antiquity especially, with the demand of purification and improvement of social ethics.

Thus, it is not a paradox that neoclassicism results to be the principal system of expression, representing at the same time the spirit of the British reformist bourgeoisie, that of the Whigs' party, as well as that of Jacobins' party, namely of the militant bourgeois party of the French Revolution. At the end of 18th century, classicism into art turns out to be the emblem of social reform, in a

⁴³ Using this historically "versatile" attitude, we may discern, in the context of 17th century, cultural tendencies that present stricter classical qualities. Thus we may identify Holland landscape norms as classically stricter and more austere, in contradiction to French Baroque examples.

⁴⁴ The assertion that classicist intention influenced natural sciences seems rather paradoxical, especially when related to the development of Empiricism. However though empiricist scientific approach enough to detect their elements by investigating external reality itself, they evolved inside the general atmosphere of classicist culture, to which natural scientists participated too. It is thus a veiling fact that botanist Joseph Banks had also been member of the Society of Dilettanti as well as an amateur archeologist. At the same time another botanist, Johannes Sibthorp, investigated the botanic species of Greece, defining for his research the geographical territory corresponding to the range of ancient Greek civilization, to which in many ways Sibthorp felt obliged to refer.

similar way to what it has previously happened in Florence during Quattrocento; however it iconizes in this second case, revolutionary Reason itself. The causes of that emblematic choice were more than one.

Firstly, classicist art ascribes the “face” of democratic antiquity. Moreover “eumetria” and regularity that may be accepted as concepts constitutive of ancient classicist expression were directly attributed to the proposals of Reason. In the context of this cultural shift, the simplification of Baroque extravagant forms may be indicated as typical, in pair with a gentler and much more descent geometrical regularity,⁴⁵ related to the demands of practically oriented, bourgeois defined rationalism.

As far as landscape architecture is concerned, the above mentioned change of classicist expression acquires in addition some specific cultural qualities. The domain where that changes of expression had to be applied, namely landscape, not only indicates topics concerning political promotion or rationality of forms, but in addition it refers to the relation of civilization with concepts and formations concerning nature. Landscape architecture, as developed in British Isles during 18th century, corresponds for sure to the effort of approaching natural qualities of place, in accordance to theory and scientific approaches of Empiricism. However the realized results of landscape architecture would be rather wiser to be described as “nature-like” than as “natural”. They correspond to a cultural idealization of nature, largely imitating pictorial representations created by European societies of that period in order to describe ancient classical landscape; what is more, realized landscape architecture formations were supplemented by neoclassical building constructions.

An extremely interesting result of the above political and cultural tendency is related, as we have already mentioned, with the fact that this effort for idealization had not only to do with landscape formations constructed according to the historic classical model. In addition, it committed itself to idealize the real, the initial landscape paradigm of this approach, which corresponds to the real geographic cradle of democratic regime, that is to say which primarily corresponds to the real Hellenic landscape.

The landscape of bourgeois regime. Coming back to the Hellenic cradle of European democracy

Having to examine Greek landscape, as an idealized model for landscape formations produced in the European bourgeois democratic states of 18th century, we understand that this approach corresponds to an ideological construction. If Johann Joachim Winckelmann presented ancient Greeks through an incomparable physical description,⁴⁶ neoclassicism similarly judged Greek landscape as being beyond any controversy.

⁴⁵ Probably being similar to the one revealed in the garden art of Holland, which had already been a bourgeois country in 17th century.

⁴⁶ «*The physical beauty of the inhabitants in the majority of Greek islands, despite the miscegenation with so many different races, and the exquisite charms of the female sex there... permits us to form, at the same time, a general view concerning the beauty of both sexes during the time of their ancestors*». Quote from the book *Thoughts about the Mimesis of the Greek works of art in Painting and Sculpture* (Winckelmann, 2001, p. 14). It concerns a short dissertation, published in 1755. It is important to note the relation, described by Winckelmann, between natural qualities and the elaboration exerted on them by civilization and art. By acknowledging natural qualities and interposing acts of constant amelioration, ancient Greek civilization, promoted by the German thinker as a model of modern Western society, successfully arrived to an ideal result. That is to say it conquered “*a high era esthetic aspiration, whose general feature was ‘nobles implicit and serene grandiosity’ – this phrase was to become emblematic for the classicist theory of art while, simultaneously, it presented a polemic position against Baroque, which by that time prevailed in Winckelmann’s Saxon entourage*”. Op. cit., concluding epilogue by N.M. Skouteropoulos, p. 71. However this “*serene grandiosity*” is also presented by its advocates, as fundamental characteristic of the Greek landscape.

Thus perception of “Greek” or “Hellenic landscape” by modern Western man constitutes a cultural construction caused by a political causal agent. What corresponds to the real geographic dominion recognized as territory of the development of ancient Greek civilization or as modern Hellenic country, offers in both cases landscape features. However those features, in contradiction to what is usually propounded by landscape directed nationalistic ideology, do not constitute a “single” place physiognomy only; it corresponds too many different landscape profiles instead. An even more important remark has to note that every one of these different landscape profiles may possess similarities to landscapes of other countries. Finally, it looks extremely probable that landscapes of similar climatic zones in different countries, appear to have many more common features among them, despite the difference of geopolitical sovereignty; many more common features than those existing for example between the landscape of northern Creek mountain zone and the islanding landscape of Aegean sea.

Nevertheless, what is the reason that modern Western bourgeois societies produce and support this ideological, cultural and political construction of a uniform, typical country landscape identity?

The development of national identity is related, as the analysts of this phenomenon remark, to the persistent reference to a geographic domain, which corresponds to the region of the territorial sovereignty as claimed by the nationalistic intentions; as well as to the fatherland, to the fathers’ country. This geographic domain of reference constitutes therefore a landscape, defined by cultural and political symbolism. Moreover, specific and even more unique qualities have to be attributed to this landscape, in relation to the demand for national distinctive character.

This effort for national designation of a concrete, specific landscape identity has to do with every national state in particular, in the frame of the construction and strengthen in its national identity. Yet the common political profile of Western bourgeois states had to invent a generalized landscape reference, which could visualize, which could offer a perceptive form for the internationalist bourgeois quality. This specific symbolic function was assigned, as we have already consistently remarked, to Italian and Greek landscape, as space references of the ancient Roman and Greek democracies respectively. Furthermore, the promotion of Greek landscape seems to obtain, for particular reasons an increasing importance, in comparison to Italian alternative, from 18th century onwards.

Greek historicist Nasia Giakovaki, in a revealing research of hers, describes in detail the causes of the above cited preference.

Since 18th century, she explains, the predominance of the Roman paradigm seemed to be more intense, because of the geographic identification to modern Italy, to a country that participated to the political and cultural centre of growing Europe. On the contrary, Ottoman occupation of ancient Greek grounds and the resulting abandonment, the decline or devastation of many previously important inhabited ancient Greek areas, as happened in the case of Athens, may explain the negative approach of many former travellers. This tendency is radically changed as European history moves towards 18th century, for reasons that according to Giakovaki have to do with political causes as well.

Roman antiquity, which had also given birth to a democratic regime, was qualified by a serious disadvantage, according to the viewpoint of the developing bourgeois class, which was principally identified with religious Reform. It was connected to Rome, namely to the centre of the Papal force, from whose influence European bourgeoisie demanded to get rid of ⁴⁷ The shift of the European references of origin towards another older cradle of democracy, towards ancient Greece,

⁴⁷ “Protestant populations... being in conflict with Pope had to take their distances both from Rome and Roman Church” (Giakovaki, 2006, p. 205).

seems thus to be there as on able result of the cultural and political mood of the time, having to do with the European travellers regressive visit to the Greek land, that is to say to the Greek landscape.

Modern terms for the upgrade of Greek landscape in the European perception of 18th century and 19th century that follows, comprise the imaginative approach, for example the fictitious Arcadia to which we shall refer more extensively afterwards, as well as the evaluation of the real Greek region, under Ottoman occupation by that time, which previous Western travellers used to devalue.

In a certain way reference to Greek landscape was committed to introduce to the totality of Europeans and finally to the whole Western world, what the appeal to national landscape of every country separately was trying to succeed in reference to its national identity. Greek landscape had definitely been the landscape – component of European and Western cultural and political identity or, using the terms of an exaggerating metaphor, the landscape - component of a European and Western “nationalism” in a broader sense. It seems to be a landscape promoting European and Western special physiognomy and superiority, in contradistinction to other sculptural and political designations corresponding to other geographical and landscape regions, peripheral in relation to the West.

However the most substantial remark, in relation to landscape ideologies that have previously been described, refers to the fact that this approach to Greek landscape, though fictitious in its substance, disposes during the period of its development the glare of originality.⁴⁸ A glare that still preserves, in spite of the wear exerted by the time in between, in spite of the cultural poverty of our days and the patricidal attitude of modern Greeks, a great part of its impact on contemporary Western culture.

Going back to 18th and 19th century, we shall insist on the fact that the real quality of the “Greek” landscape as well as the ideological burden that this landscape carried attracted a great number of not able visitors. What is even more impressive, it fomented a worship attitude that would push some of those visitors to risk their own life for what they had recognized as a deeper constitutional cultural and political paradigm, important for the formation of their own societies. 19th century may display among many other Philhellenes the English man George Gordon Byron, “our” lord Byron, a prominent literature figure of that period, who decided to put an end to his wanderings in the landscape of a Greek lagoon; however, contemporary 21st age has to present another Philhellene poet in comparison, a poet of German origin.

Recently, during hard times for Greek reality, Günter Grass had the courage to speak out in favour of the proffer of Greece and Greek antiquity, insisting on the bliss of the Greek islands, the bliss of the Greek maritime landscape, relating it to the previous romantic German veneration. “Contemned to poverty, this very Land, whose wealth adorns museums: a loot this weal this, by you hoarded” protests the poet in a thunder-like verse, in order to conclude that even “those who

⁴⁸ G. Veltsos remarks, commenting the “*Semiotics of the Hellenic identity*” (in the frame of the public discourse organized by the 2nd Chair of Sociology of Pantios University of Political Sciences, under the subject *Hellenism and Hellenic identity – Principal axis for the explanation of Modern Greek society’s Ideology and Experience*, from 11th-15th May 1981): “*Finally, semiotics and in my case the semiotics of Hellenic identity – in every phase of its formation, answer to the following critical question: in which way, plausible proposals... (even the one) immediately instigated by ideology, has no need to be true in order to be authentic*”. See D. G. Tsaousis (επιμ.): *Hellenism and Hellenic identity – Principal axis for the explanation of Modern Greek society’s Ideology and Experience*. Athens: 1983, p. 232. Veltsos insists on the authentic correlation between social addressee and ideology, which nevertheless qualified the impact of ideology in general. However this remark of his, concerning the non-identification between truth and authentic relation, indicates that similar approaches have been inevitable for many important cultural formations, upon which political or social groups built their claim for independence or even for their survival. A similar significance is ascribed to the perception of Greek landscape, in the frame of Modern Greek state formation, as well as of modern Western civilization formation.

attacked this blessed Land of islands, by force of their arms, even those, in their military sacs Hölderlin's books were carrying".⁴⁹

The persisting reference of 18th century classicism to Hellenic landscape

Reorientation of Western thought towards Hellenic or Greek landscape principally, and rise of its historic significance in comparison to the Italian one had to do, as already signalized, with its religious neutrality. As Roman historic paradigm and ancient Roman landscape were related to ancient Rome, and thus to Holy See, they consisted a rather problematic domain for Western protestants to refer to.

Thus gradually and without completely abandoning their interest for ancient Rome, the orists and visitors from developing West, are directed in an accelerated fervorto territories of the ancient Greek world, to southern Italy, to Greek peninsula and to the coast of Minor Asia. They gradually accepted that nationalities existing in those territories possessed, though occupied, cultural ethics of much higher quality than that justified by their political condition; at the same time they attributed to the native places of those nationalities high landscape qualities, neglected by previous visitors.

We could insist on the fact that this latter evaluation, regarding social and political ethos of the occupied population, consisted an ideological construction. Obviously, every perception of reality is accepted under ideological terms. However it would be much more useful to signalize that by that time, regardless of our contemporary critical negation, Western intelligentsia and Philhellenes accepted such an ideological condition as authentic.

An even more important remark, immediately concerning landscape studies, has to do with the feeling that previous political ideology emerged out of a landscape receptor, whose perception was organized, was culturally "constructed", in order to make tangible the significance of the ancient Greek political model.

Commenting the example of the design of the Athenian National Garden, created by the first Greek Queen Amalia, we introduced the provocative assertion according to which this Garden corresponds to a political statement rather, than to a material space structure. According to this assertion, which must not be accepted as arhetoric exaggeration only, after the construction of the Garden, "we", Greeks, "belong to the West".⁵⁰ As we have in many occasions pointed out, gardens similar to the National Garden of Athens constitute can integral part of royal building complexes and manors, in all over civilized Western world.

Thus it is completely justifiable that Ludwig of Bavaria, crown groom's father, offered to his young daughter in law, as wedding gift among other presents, a specialized gardener, so that the cultural landscape quality and the West European physiognomy of the Greek capital, would be assured. However, in there verse way, this new landscape formation as soon as it began getting organized, immediately understood that its essential character belonged "here", in Greece, even if it had been expressively formulated previously, in Western and Northern places. Here the sites of the ancient monuments existed, them also possessing the immediate intimacy of tangible. The geographic transcendency of the idealized Western landscape had finally returned to reality, had

⁴⁹ Extract from the poem "*The shame of Europe*", published on May 26th, 2012 in the newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. The reference to the German romantic 18th century poet Johann Christian Friedrich Hölderlin explicitly indicates his work *Hyperion or the Hermit in Greece*, where besides an imaginary early description of Greek revolution against Turkish occupation, many fictitious versions of Hellenic landscape were presented.

⁵⁰ In reference to a rather recent political statement made by Prime Minister and President of Hellenic Republic K. Karamanlis. See also Research Program, *Upgrade of National Garden*, Prefecture of Athens– National Technical University of Athens, Athens 2009-2010 (scientific responsible of the program Prof. K. Moutzouris, Rector of NTUA, head responsible of the research K. Moraitis).

been re-introduced herein. The political landscape of modern Western history, demands to reinstall itself to the place accepted as its primal cradle. Neoclassical Athens constitutes, as a total scheme, the final realization of this holistic landscape projection. A latter cultural construction, organized on the substrate of a place accepted as one of the oldest cultural landscapes in universal history or, at least, as one of the two most important political and cultural landscapes of Western civilization.

On behalf of classical landscape:

The cultural, scientific and landscape adventure of *Flora Graeca*

At this point of our dissertation the reason for insisting on term “civilization” instead of term “culture”, becomes apparent.

Nowadays, we are probably gifted with ecological sensibility, thus obliged to extend our interest to the totality of social practices affecting our cultural landscape. However we have to signalize too that our view of landscape has been determined in the past by concentered ominent schemes of civilization, dictating our landscape perception in a social width and in a depth of concepts, which still seem to be extremely important. Commenting the width of those precepts and the depth of the concepts, we have to signalize in addition the leading impact that they exerted on thinkers, scientists and travellers, impelling them to sincerely participate to what is nowadays perceived as fictional ideological pretence.

The concepts of Enlightenment and of the political declarations proclaimed by Western bourgeois republics are extensively criticized and thus partly deprived, for sure, of their previous glamour. In a similar manner political and cultural centrality of the Greek paradigm for Western world, seems less obvious for a Greek addressee, because of the ambivalent contemporary Greek’s attitude, already analysed in the introductory part of this dissertation.

Thus it seems in explicable, nowadays, the fact that Philhellenes, some of them prominent personalities in their own countries, engaged in the effort for the liberation of Greece, though having no clear utilitarian profit. We dare not convert this discourse to a political treatise. We shall simply comment that the condition of this philhellenic engagement usually soared in the atmosphere of landscape respect.

Landscaping approaches in Hölderlin’s *Hyperion* or Byron’s narrative poem *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* are famous because of the literary publicity ascribed to them and to their authors equally. However a third, less known attempt seems to get involved to landscape and its natural features in a more directly way. This third attempt concerns the effort of Johannes Sibthorp, an eminent European botanist of the 18th century, for the edition of a general Greek plants catalogue, also known as *Flora Graeca*.⁵¹ It is important to remark that Sibthorp was not a current scientist. On the contrary he happened to be an important scientific personality of his time, so important that the seat held by him in Oxford University was honourably named, after his loss, *Sibthorpianna*.

A second remark concerns Sibthorp’s death. Thee minent scientist dies during thee laboration of his *Flora Graeca* project, largely due to the excessive physical hardship that had to suffer, during his travels in the Eastern Mediterranean area, while gathering scientific material for his research. Thus he may be presented as one of the "martyrs" of science, being at the same time, without exaggeration, a devotee of the western Greek vision of modern Europe; a botanist whose philhellenic dedication may be compared to that of Byron. His decision to complete the recording of

⁵¹See A. Rizou’s and S. Rizopoulou’s book, *Symbolic plants of Olympic Games* (Rizou – Rizopoulou, 2004). It is because of the author’s personal contact with Mrs. Rizopoulou that a first knowledge of historic data concerning *Flora Graeca* and Sibthorp’s and Bauer’s travels in Eastern Mediterranean was attained.

Greek fauna seems to overpass the scope of the botanical diversity, having also to do with the historical significance of the place.

It is also characteristic that the term "Graeca" geographically describes, according to Sibthorp, the territory historically related to the development of the ancient Greek civilization, that is to say to what geographically refers, as we have quoted previously, to Magna Graecia of the lower part of Italy, to Greek peninsula, and to ancient region of Ionia as well. Thus the scientific width of Sibthorp's investigation was prescribed by civilization references – moreover it possessed a landscape identity. If flora species related to Greek civilization and Greek culture may describe the subtle natural qualities of the chosen Greek land, according to his botanical vision, then landscape seems to be even more characteristic for the description of the overall Hellenic identity.

For the needs of his project, Sibthorp will hire Ferdinand Lucas Bauer; an Austrian painter specialized in pictorial description of flora species, who accompanies the English botanist during his scientific expeditions in Greece, in order to paint from life, species selected for the research. It is not strange that Bauer uses, as an introduction to every new chapter of *Flora Graeca* book, the image of a typical Greek landscape.

Second Part of the Dissertation Commenting its motive and purpose

Having nearly finished with the theoretical support of this dissertation, I feel compelled to mention the motive of its formation as well as its final practical purpose, apart from its theoretical interest.

For those involved in history and theory of landscape, the importance of ancient Greek land scenery for modern Western landscape art, consists for sure a continuous stimulus; a stimulus constantly strengthen in its influence upon me, as I try to describe it in my own writings, for fifteen years already. Thus, over the years, the certainty of a historically evolving paradigm has been added to the early teaching suggestions of my professors, of Olivier Revault d'Allones in Paris and George Vlahos in Athens; a certainty concerning the development of landscape concepts and design in modern times.

The first of my professors previously mentioned, insisted on the political determination of artistic expression, or on the politically subversive artistic creation.⁵² The second one had pointed out to me, early enough, that Florentine Medici's turn over toward Greek antiquity, and the formation by them of Neo-Platonic Academy, the very use of term "Renaissance", ultimately the guise of the re-emergence of classical antiquity in order to characterize a social condition completely innovative otherwise, all these phenomena are not politically unintended.⁵³ Adding my current experience of landscape history, I may insist that the colonization of Renaissance gardens by pagan deities or Polyfilo's *Fight for Love in a Dream*, better known as *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*,⁵⁴ describes a society for which antiquity presented a considerable political interest, largely emerging from its cultural expression, including landscape approach.

Yet my intense interest in the modern European and Western reference to ancient Greek landscape may also have other, more practical reasons. On the level of immediate practical response, the effort to identify conditions for invigoration of cities or regions physiognomy for utilitarian reasons, boosting tourism for example, makes it clear that this intention can be directly

⁵²By juxtaposing critical creative attitude to the intentional centralized political control, exerted over artistic expression.

⁵³ See his book concerning the *Introduction to Political Theories of Modern Times*. Tome I. (Vlachos, 1979).

⁵⁴Written by Renaissance author Francesco Colonna (Engl. transl.: Godwin, 1999). Also attributed to Leone Battista Alberti.

associated to landscape and environment quality, as well as to features related to civilization or culture and thus often related to the total range of Greek history.

However in Greece in particular, this is a second conclusive remark, landscape and culture do not consist conditions of parallel tourist or educational interest. They are closely involved, yielding in an explicit way the complex characterization of "cultural landscape." Finally, let us arrive to a third even more crucial conclusive remark, international public's touristic or pedagogical interest for Greek landscape, continues to be significantly defined by classical references, for reasons extensively explained previously. Thus it would be pedagogically and practically unwise to neglect the promotion of these references, instead of using them as central component bringing together other important parts of Hellenic cultural structure; Byzantine references, contributions of older tradition, modern folk culture. In the manner of Odysseas Elytis' cumulative presentation, ancient kouros is still staring at the succession of historic periods, their traces laid out on the common substrate of Greek landscape.⁵⁵

Thus we arrive in explaining the purpose of this dissertation in an immediate way, insisting on its relation of the quality of our habitat places to what economic management describes, using the terms "city" and "territory" or "region branding".

However if previous terms persist in forming the physiognomy of cities or regions for reasons of economic development, tending to attract visitors, investors or causing operational upgrade of population, the invigoration of important space features seem to offer an even stronger political opportunity. They improve the indigenous population's self-esteem concerning their place of dwelling, strengthening what we may call "citizens' dignity".

Concluding landscape visions on Arcadia

The example of Arcadia seems to be one of the most commendable, in regard of the distant ancient references of modern societies. Starting at the early period of Roman literature that rewrote its qualities, Arcadia gradually transformed into a fictional place of idealized reference, into an "imaginative realm of absolute bliss".⁵⁶

Thus Arcadia acquired plasmatic lures which could not really possess. Besides luxuriant vegetation, literary desire enriched it with "eternal spring and endless appetite for love".⁵⁷ Drafting this virtual place whose apprehension is as old as Latin poet Virgil, Western thought was forced to combine the best qualities of other ancient places. "Wild pines of Arcadia" were put "together with groves and meadows of Sicily", where Theocritus placed, in those last especially, his Idylls. This very desire of idealized nature, capable to iconize ultimate human happiness, will feature by reference to ancient Greek Arcadia the modern Western civilization, identifying Arcadic vision to a landscape where inhabitants would live "in perfect harmonious relation to nature and to their neighbours, being in absolute freedom". "Our bliss Arcadian will be and free", Faust is promising to Helen, in Goethe's well-known poetic masterpiece. One thus and eight hundred and fifty years after Virgil's utopian invention, Western thought confirmed through Faust's dictum its relation to Arcadia, which by that time; the German thinker knew it, was already free from its previous bondages.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ A well-known collage by famous Greek poet Elytis, already quoted in previous articles of the author.

⁵⁶ One of the most informative presentations of the importance of Arcadia in modern Western art and civilization is included in Erwin Panofsky's, *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, in the chapter entitled "*Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition*", where present quote is taken from (Panofsky, 1982, p. 300).

⁵⁷Op. cit. p. 299.

⁵⁸*Faust*, Goethe's masterpiece, was completed in 1832, a year before his death, when Greek Revolution was already crowned with success.

Two thousand years after Virgil, two hundred years after Goethe, happy I felt but at the same time disappointed when informed about festivities organized by Arcadians every year, in honour of Nikos Gatsos, a great Modern Greek libretti stand poet.

Happy I felt, because the public, as well as many famous contemporary Greek music performers participated in the festivities, having not forgotten his offer and strengthening at the same time the cultural physiognomy of his birthplace.

Disappointed I felt, because the effort of attributing cultural qualities to a region, has promoted a secondary feature of place as principal. Important as he may be Nikos Gatsos for Greek intellectual life, recent as may be the traces of his physical and mental presence, we cannot but accept the use of his name, in the case of Arcadia, as a first, easily promoted chance only, in order to attract public interest to other references much more important, internationally non-comparable.

Our last observation neither tends to diminish Arcadian poet's importance nor ignores the significance of the presence in his homeland, once per year, of famous representatives of the Greek music scene. However this last remark insists that reference to name "Arcadia, its significance in the frame of modern European and Western civilization, its position in the imaginary ideological formation of modern European and Western civilization, finally consist non-comparable historical facts.

Let us stop here. This paper ought to emphasize before proposing anything else that only people of reduced historical and political discernment would disregard the importance of reference to Arcadia for the constitution of modern European and Western civilization. Certainly people of such a declined judgment or deficient education could not use Arcadian vision, not even for business promotion.

Unfortunately this lack of discernment and education is also typical of the official Greek state's reactions to problems concerning many other regions of the country. Thus criticizing the mediocrity of the Greek Municipality of Acharnes, we usually forget to mention that Aristophanes wrote his comedy *Acharnis* in reference to this very place, also known to modern Greeks as Menidi; neither for Marseilles nor for Bonn. In a similar way we also insist that Messini in Peloponnese is an insignificant provincial town, underestimating the presence of ancient Messini, in the nearby territory; an archaeological site, which tends to become one of the most important in all over the world.

I have to remind that ancient Messini, as well as ancient Megalopoli, consisted principal urban centers of the ancient Achaian City Federation, comprising ancient Arcadia as well. Thus in our country we not only possess places of spatially limited, though important, historic references but, what is more, we may also refer to extended network soft races corresponding to ancient, byzantine or modern history. Through these networks a final composition of civilization and culture is realized, a political composition of successive historical inscriptions as those emphatically described by Elytis in his collage works. In the meditative great poet's art, the importance of history, the importance of civilization or culture plus the importance of landscape or environment seem to coincide. I have to comment that Municipality of Acharnes disposes, except of the ancient drama reference and the important archaeological finds, the equally important environmental and landscape presence of mount Parnes; while contemporary Messini also disposes the environmentally important zone of the ancient god-river Pamissos, as well as the surrounding agricultural landscape.

In the case of the Arcadian landscape, those relations seem to be even more direct. Ancient Arcadia is intensively promoted, in the frame of European and Western history, from Renaissance period onwards as we have already extensively described, as "an ideal realm of perfect bliss and beauty, a dream incarnate of ineffable happiness"⁵⁹, where ideal conditions of life are identified

⁵⁹A description by Erwin Panofsky (Panofsky, 1988).

with an equally ideal quality of landscape. Thus, mythical and historic references are absolutely identified with their land substrate that has still to wait for its promotion as one of the most important, internationally, landscape and environmental destinations, as a touristic and educational attraction at the same time.

Epilogue

From Arcadia to Syros

Concluding this presentation of concepts, I happily noted that I could also direct my final remarks to Syros, a year after a lecture of a relative subject in the isle...

In Arcadia historic places recent or older, archeological sites, traditional architecture, contemporary festivities in Nikos Gatsos' honor, all those references may be composed on the single substrate of landscape perception. In a similar way, the example of Syros landscape may equally support the presence of the medieval settlement of Ano Syros, the neoclassical city of Ermoupolis, the mature expression of the folk *rempetiko* song, as well as the immediate radiance of the ancient wreath of Cyclades.

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