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Modern Greek Studies since 1975: a personal retrospect

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In 1975 interest in contemporary Greece in the UK was at its height. The launch of *Byzantine and Modern Studies* coincided almost exactly with the 'Greek Month in London', when venues all over the city simultaneously hosted a series of cultural and academic events that brought together artists, writers, historians, diplomats, Greeks and philhellenes from many walks of life in a month-long celebration. It was advertised on buses and in the Underground. You couldn't miss it. It was so successful that the organizers followed it up a year later with an 'Islamic Month in London'. That's how big the contemporary Greek world and its culture were, back then.

It's not hard to understand why. During the preceding seven years, between 1967 and 1974, Greece had been headline news in the world's media. For seven years, power had been usurped in a 'western', NATO country by the military junta of the 'Colonels'. Democracy had only recently been restored. The euphoria was not confined to Greece, it spread all over Europe. The junta years had also seen a peak in the number and quality of literary translations from Modern Greek published in the UK and the USA. It was an exciting time to study Modern Greek.

Although academic positions in the subject had existed at UK universities since the second decade of the century, 'Modern Greek Studies' as an academic subject-area was then in its infancy. It grew very largely out of the prominence achieved by Greece during the dictatorship.

Three universities in the UK (Birmingham, Cambridge and Oxford) had for some time been offering undergraduate degrees in which Modern Greek could be combined with the study of another modern language or with Ancient Greek. Then in 1974 the University of London introduced a single-subject BA degree in Modern Greek Language and Literature, at the time the only one of its kind, taught in the recently established Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies at King's College (now King's College London). Despite its title, the degree included a one-year course in modern Greek history, also a first at this time. Alumnae (male students were a rarity) include the Reviews Editor of *BMGS* and *The Guardian*'s long-serving, much acclaimed correspondent in Athens.

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By the late 1970s, with Greece on course to join the European Economic Community (EEC, forerunner of today's European Union), and four UK universities offering degrees in the subject, it seemed plausible that future demand for skilled translators and 'Eurocrats' would provide employment for graduates of these programmes. Modern Greek had come of age, proving its credentials as a 'language of culture' alongside French, German, Italian, Spanish and (then in vogue) Russian. Opportunities in literary translation and publishing beckoned. A critical mass seemed to have been reached that in turn would lay the basis for expansion, as the need became established for further generations of specialists equipped to teach these students.

It didn't turn out quite like that. As Greece emerged from the shadow of dictatorship, prospered, and became less exotic and more European, public attention in the rest of Europe and the English-speaking world drifted away. The world became 'global'. Greece, and even a worldwide Greek diaspora, no longer punched above their weight. Globalization, that in theory ought to have room for everybody and everything on the planet, in practice has meant the dominance of certain 'brands'. Greece and Greek culture, other than Classical (and even that has struggled at times in the global marketplace) ceased to become a compelling subject for study for all but those who were part of that culture already.

That this might be a problem for modern Greek studies did not become apparent all at once. In the four UK universities, student numbers increased until, during the 1990s, there were around 100 undergraduates studying Modern Greek as part of their degree programme at any one time; for over a decade Queen's University Belfast added a fifth. What expansion masked was the fact that almost the entire population of graduate programmes in modern Greek studies, and a high proportion of undergraduates too, either came from Greece or Cyprus or belonged to the Greek diaspora in the UK.

At doctoral level, these programmes fulfilled a real need. Universities in Greece (and later the University of Cyprus) were rapidly expanding, but opportunities for postgraduate study there were still relatively limited. Demand for PhD-holders in modern Greek literature, linguistics and history could not be fully met at home. An unquestionable success of the UK departments of Modern Greek is the number of professors and lecturers now in post throughout the sector in both Greece and Cyprus, who took their PhD at one of these British universities. During the boom decade of the 1990s, something like ninety per cent of postgraduate students on Modern Greek programmes in the UK were Greeks who had completed a first degree at a Greek university; after 2004, when Cyprus joined the EU and Cypriots became eligible to pay reduced fees at British institutions, the majority soon came from that country – which was just as well, since by that time graduate programmes at Greek universities were up and running, and the fees they charged were a fraction of even the EU rate in the UK.

But what was missing, while student numbers were increasing in the late 1980s and the 1990s, was a corresponding increase in the number of those who came to Modern Greek, as I and many others writing in this special issue had done, as a *foreign* language,

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or motivated by intellectual curiosity about a culture that was interesting precisely because it was not our own.

This was a structural problem, that already set Modern Greek departments apart from most other 'modern language' departments. Departments of French do not recruit largely from France or from among Francophone expatriates in the UK. The anomaly was the more noticeable, because in every other respect the curriculum and institutional arrangements for the teaching of Modern Greek in the four universities conformed to the prevailing structures for modern languages. This, in turn, meant that undergraduate programmes of study were, inevitably, built closely on the traditional 'lang-and-lit' model that had become standard for the major European languages some decades before.

This model came under serious challenge during the 1980s. Departments of modern languages began to find their traditional role of providing language instruction threatened by the rise of Language Centres and by teaching methods in which it quickly became self-evident that the teacher must be a native-speaker. In many universities, degree programmes in 'modern languages' were rechristened as 'studies', and came to include increased amounts of history, film and media studies, sociology or politics. In my own institution, we followed precisely this trend. The BA degree was renamed 'Modern Greek Studies' at the end of the 1980s, an MA with the same title was introduced in 1991, new courses were introduced to extend the number and range of options in history and linguistics.

In almost all institutions, and going far beyond the bounds of modern Greek studies, these developments threatened and finally toppled the traditional dominance of literature in the curriculum. At the same time, the last decade has seen a shocking decline in demand for language courses in British schools. The introduction of a new funding model, whereby all university teaching in the Humanities is resourced from the fees paid by students, has brought the distortions of a market-economy into Higher Education for the first time. The provision of undergraduate education is now wholly demand-led; students are encouraged to see their studies as a form of financial 'investment', and the pressure of repaying large loans later in life ensures that most will do so. As if that were not enough, the widespread perception, ever since the Greek financial crisis began in 2010, that Greece is a 'basket-case' acts as a further deterrent for intellectually enquiring would-be students who would literally be investing all their eggs in the Greek 'basket'. Meanwhile, students from Greece and (since 2013) from Cyprus can no longer afford the fees, capital controls make payment difficult if not impossible, and the job opportunities are no longer there to go back to.

It is a perfect storm, and it is not surprising that departments and programmes have closed or been drastically reconfigured during the last few years. The only remaining undergraduate degrees, at the time of writing, are offered by Oxford, where Medieval and Modern Greek can be combined with another modern European language on the traditional model (or with Latin, Ancient Greek, Linguistics, Philosophy, English,

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Modern History or a Middle Eastern language), and the Classics Department of my own institution, which offers a BA in Classical and Modern Greek Studies.

PhD programmes continue at Birmingham (which also offers the degrees of MRes and MA by research), King's College London, and Oxford. Although numbers have fallen in recent years, it is heartening to see that, despite the financial constraints, talented students from Greece and Cyprus still wish to come to the UK to study modern Greek history, literature or linguistics. But what do these programmes offer either to 'home' students or to the ever-increasing numbers from outside the European Union who in recent years have become the lifeblood of British postgraduate programmes? Career opportunities in modern Greek studies in the English-speaking world were always limited. Today they barely exist.

If we look only at institutions (departments and degree programmes), it's a sorry story – or perhaps even a rather traditional one, of 'rise and fall'. The research record of modern Greek studies in the English-speaking world over the past forty years, however, reveals a rather different pattern.

The very considerable achievements of modern Greek literary studies carried out at UK and US universities have been fully and fairly documented by Dimitris Tziovas elsewhere in this special issue. Probably the most significant achievement of this work in aggregate is the revision of the Greek literary 'canon' into broad phases of Romanticism, Modernism and Postmodernism. This in turn has allowed the recognition that the creativity of Greek writers since national independence has always been carried on in active dialogue with the major currents of European writing of their time. This dialogue was never a one-way process, of passive absorption of a dominant culture by a 'marginal' or 'peripheral' culture. Instead, *Greek* Romanticism, *Greek* Modernism, and *Greek* Postmodernism are distinct phenomena within these large movements. This paradigm is now well accepted in Greek academia, as it wasn't twenty years ago. It only remains to convince comparatists and those who study European literary movements in a broader spectrum that you can't fully understand Romanticism, Modernism, or Postmodernism *anywhere* without also taking into account their manifestations in Greek and the forms of response, extension or resistance generated by original minds writing in Greek and addressing a Greek readership.

Work devoted to modern Greek literature and published in English has been recognized for its rigour and originality by many forms of peer review in the UK and US. Most, if not all, of those scholars who were in post twenty years ago have since become full professors (including emeriti) – a record surely not matched across the Humanities. Modern Greek studies are, for the first time, represented among the Fellowship of the British Academy, in the section devoted to 'Languages, Literatures and Other Media since 1830' – surely an important mark of recognition for the subject.

In other respects, literary scholarship has been less successful. The 'theory wars' of the 1980s were nowhere more tenaciously fought than in the Greek-coffee-cup-sized world of modern Greek studies. But if teaching and research in the field are now everywhere informed by a theoretical sophistication that was lacking forty years ago, there

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has been no corresponding contribution from modern Greek studies to the development of literary theory itself.

An aim shared by many of us, perhaps by all, whether we were wedded to particular theoretical approaches or not, was always to bring the work of modern Greek writers into the 'western canon'– to win for the novels, poems and plays that we studied and admired a place in the discourse of those who cared about literature, talked about it, and studied it. For all our efforts, and despite many excellent initiatives, such as the University of Birmingham series of translations, no new literary figure writing in Greek has come to prominence since 1975 and established a regular place in the literary canon in Britain or the USA, with more than one book published and regularly kept in print over a period of years. In 1975 this could have been said with confidence of Cavafy, Kazantzakis, Seferis, Elytis and Ritsos. Today only the first two can still claim any degree of 'name recognition' – and in the case of Cavafy, the reasons for this global reach have less and less to do with the language or the cultural context in which the poet wrote. Universally recognized 'brands' such as Penguin Classics or the Oxford World's Classics series still include no modern Greek authors – except, of course, Cavafy. There must be many reasons for this failure to break through, many of them nothing to do with the academy. But for those of us who have tried, it remains a disappointment.

I turn now to other disciplines, not all of them represented in departments of Modern Greek, where academics working on Greece and with Greek data have made more conspicuous contributions to their discipline: in anthropology, in linguistics and (perhaps) in history.

Of these, anthropology stands out, because the case has been made explicitly and the evidence clearly set out. In an article that is less easy to track down than it deserves to be, Roger Just demonstrates that not just one, but a whole series of paradigm shifts in anthropological discourse since the 1960s have hinged on case studies based upon Greece.[1] First, J. G. Peristiany and John Campbell established a new category for anthropological research, based on ideas of 'honour and shame' in a Mediterranean context. The very idea that anthropological methodology could be applied to Europe's own backyard was new in the 1950s and 1960s, and was forged largely in Greece. Then at the end of the 1980s, a new 'self-reflexive' turn in anthropology is associated with the work of Michael Herzfeld, who drew on his own experiences as a fieldworker in Crete and the Aegean to rebuild the whole edifice of anthropological discourse, going back to its founders Vico and Herder.[2] The following decade saw yet another new paradigm, when for the first time anthropologists who were themselves Greek went back to their own familiar, and now usually urban, milieus to conduct a new kind of fieldwork in

1 R. Just, 'The archaeology of Greek ethnography', in M. Llewellyn Smith, P. M. Kitromilides and E. Calligas (eds), *Scholars, Travels, Archives: Greek History and Culture through the British School at Athens* (Athens 2009) 179–88.

2 M. Herzfeld, *Anthropology through the Looking-Glass: Critical Ethnography on the Margins of Europe* (Cambridge 1989).

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which the categories of participant observer and anthropological subject became consciously blurred.[3] As a consequence, Greece and Greek case-studies have far higher visibility in the worldwide anthropological literature than might have been expected, or than the relative size of the Greek population would warrant.

In linguistics, standard grammars of the modern language have been produced in English by scholars based at UK universities.[4] A project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board from 2004 to 2009 at Cambridge will result in the first-ever full descriptive grammar of 'Medieval Greek', using an innovative methodology and for the first time based on non-literary as well as literary sources. These are landmark studies – useful and appreciated in Greece (both the Routledge grammars referred to in note 4 have been translated), but primarily directed towards users who come to the subject through the medium of English. In other areas of linguistics, specialists trained in Greece and working with Greek along with other data are making theoretical contributions to their discipline. To take just one example, of which I happen to have knowledge, an internet search for 'small stories research' will reveal that one of the pioneers of this new methodology in Sociolinguistics is Alexandra Georgakopoulou. The theory of 'small stories' has global reach and is applied across languages.[5] But much of the underlying research derives from Georgakopoulou's fieldwork with Greek material, as well as her intellectual training in Linguistics at Athens University.

The case of history is more problematic, but also perhaps offers the greatest potential today. Readable and authoritative one-volume histories of Greece and Greeks in modern times by Woodhouse, Clogg and Gallant have remained in print since they were first published, and are available in inexpensive paperback editions.[6] Clogg's book has been published in a dozen languages, and its sales in English alone are reported to have exceeded 40,000. English-language historiography of modern Greece has a long tradition, going all the way back to Thomas Gordon in the 1830s and George Finlay in the 1860s. Once again, all of these books have been translated and valued in Greece itself, but their reach has been far wider.

Going beyond disseminating the specifics of modern Greek history, in the mid-twentieth century Arnold Toynbee built an entire theoretical edifice of world history, that at the time was considered authoritative, on his formative experiences of the

3 N. Panourgia, *Fragments of Death, Fables of Identity: An Athenian Anthropology* (Madison 1995).

4 D. Holton, P. Mackridge and I. Philippaki-Warburton, *Greek: A Comprehensive Grammar*, 2nd edn revised by V. Spyropoulos (London 2012 [1997]); D. Holton, P. Mackridge and I. Philippaki-Warburton, *Greek: An Essential Grammar*, 2nd edn (London 2016 [2004]).

5 A. Georgakopoulou, *Small Stories, Interaction and Identities* (Amsterdam 2007); M. Bamberg and V. Marchman, 'Small stories as a new perspective in narrative and identity analysis', *Text & Talk* 28.3 (2009) 377–96; M. Hamilton, 'Moving voices: literacy narratives in a testimonial culture', in J. Rowsell and K. Pahl (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Literacy Studies* (London 2015) 504–19 (see 508–9).

6 C. M. Woodhouse, *Modern Greece: A Short History* (London 1968); R. Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece*, 3rd edn (Cambridge 2013 [1992]); T. W. Gallant, *Modern Greece* (London 2001; 2nd edn due 2016).

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Greco-Turkish war of 1919–1922, part of which he had witnessed on the ground in Anatolia.[7] No historian takes Toynbee seriously today. But the twelve volumes of *A Study of History* remain a landmark in the development of 'world history', and could never have been written if their author had not gone moonlighting, writing articles for the *Manchester Guardian* while supposedly holding down the Koraes Chair at King's College London, and then found himself in conflict with the university and the sponsors for the Chair.[8]

More recently, Paschalis Kitromilides has proposed that Greece deserves to be considered as 'the paradigm nation' in the rapidly expanding, and never more topical, study of nations and nationalism.[9] There are good grounds for this, both historical (Greece was the first new nation-state to be recognized in the Old World after the Napoleonic Wars) and methodological, and it is pleasing to see it endorsed in a recent handbook in English, designed to explain modern Greece and the causes of the country's current crisis to the uninitiated.[10] Whether Kitromilides' proposal will continue to gain traction among specialists in nations and nationalism, and/or among historians more generally, remains to be seen. But it is a promising start.

Newer disciplines are also beginning to intersect with modern Greek studies, in ways that have certainly begun to make their mark within the field. It is probably too early to say whether, or to what extent, Greek-based work in film, cultural studies, or queer studies will impact upon the subsequent development of these disciplines. At the time of writing, a new intersection is opening up with musicological study of national art-musics since the nineteenth century, with the potential to impact upon future developments in the insights and methodologies of music history.[11] Finally, Classical Reception, a productive interface between Classics and the modern world during the last thirty years, has until now curiously neglected the reception of Classical civilization in Greece and by Greeks. There must surely be opportunities to make good this omission – not least because the creation of the Greek nation-state in the nineteenth century, and just about every aspect of its culture since, cry out to be recognized as the most spectacular instance of 'classical reception' there has ever been.

In the face of the changes and crises of the last few years, the field has shown an impressive resilience and resourcefulness. While traditional departments and programmes have proved unsustainable, other groupings are either emerging or redefining

7 R. Beaton, 'Koraes, Toynbee and the modern Greek heritage', *BMGS* 15 (1991) 1–18 (also published as originally given as an Inaugural Lecture in the Koraes Chair, King's College London, May 1989).

8 R. Clogg, *Politics and the Academy: Arnold Toynbee and the Koraes Chair* (London 1986).

9 P. M. Kitromilides, 'Paradigm nation: the study of nationalism and the "canonization" of Greece', in R. Beaton and D. Ricks (eds), *The Making of Modern Greece* (Farnham 2009) 21–31, on which see also Dimitris Tziovas in the present issue.

10 S. Kalyvas, *Modern Greece: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford 2015) 34.

11 R. Beaton, K. Levidou, P. Tambakaki and P. Vlagopoulos (eds), *Music, Language and Identity in Modern Greece: Defining a National Art Music in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Ashgate, in preparation), based on an international conference held in Athens in May 2015.

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themselves in a changed environment. Here, I think of the Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies at Birmingham and the Centre for Hellenic Studies which I currently direct at King's, both of which retain their identity as centres for research and public engagement despite kaleidoscopic changes in the institutional structures around them. A comparable cross-departmental initiative at Royal Holloway University of London, the Hellenic Institute, has successfully raised external funding to support the only current post in Modern Greek History in the UK. At the London School of Economics, the Hellenic Observatory sustains an enviable research culture around the Venizelos Chair of Contemporary Greek Studies, and provides a window on the contemporary Greek political scene that must be valued by professional politicians as much as by the general public that attends its events.

Another type of research institute is represented by the British School at Athens, which forms part of the British Academy's network of Sponsored Institutes and Societies (BASIS) overseas. In 2016 the first multi-author volumes in the School's *Modern Greek and Byzantine Studies* series, published by Ashgate, will begin to complement existing series from the same publisher on behalf of the Centres at Birmingham and at King's College London. The School is expected by the British Academy to work ever more closely with the UK Higher Education sector, and already covers a disciplinary breadth, in the Modern Greek field alone, that goes well beyond any one research centre or department in the UK.

At the other end of the spectrum, it appears that modern Greek language is alive and well in Language Centres up and down the country. Teaching and examining for the State Certificate in Greek Language (Κρατικό Πιστοποιητικό Ελληνομάθειας) is available in several of these. The days when somebody like my own younger self would be hired to teach Greek language in a university are long gone, and I, for one, see nothing to regret in the new professionalism that has grown up in the world of language teaching, in which the teaching of Modern Greek seems now to be well embedded.

When it comes to undergraduate education other than language-teaching, while during the last decade student enrolments in dedicated modern Greek *programmes* have been in terminal decline, there has been an impressive increase in take-up for modular *courses* in which students are introduced to aspects of the history, language and literature of Greece and Greeks in modern times. To take just the example of my own institution, a suite of new modular courses, many of them introduced in 2012, has proved highly successful in recruiting students from across the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. From 2015, these and most other courses previously taught by the Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies have become fully integrated into the Department of Classics, whose remit has correspondingly been extended to include the medieval and modern periods. The resulting increase in student enrolments for courses involving an element of modern Greek studies has been spectacular: I estimate that I will soon have taught a larger number of undergraduates since 2012 than in all my previous thirty years at King's.

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How, though, can all this diverse energy and all these diversified activities across disciplines be sustained, co-ordinated and consolidated in a way that continues to make its mark, both in academia and with the wider public? That is the challenge that faces modern Greek studies today. Within institutions, I believe that the key now lies with senior positions, mainly named and established chairs. These were the nuclei around which the subject grew during the last century: the Bywater and Sotheby Chair at Oxford (1913), the Lewis-Gibson Readership at Cambridge and the Koraes Chair at King's (both 1918), the Chair of Greek at Birmingham in the 1960s during the tenure of George Thomson (who was many years ahead of his time in establishing a department and a curriculum devoted to the study of Greek ancient and modern), and lastly the Venizelos Chair at LSE (1996). Most of these positions have benefited from external endowment in the past, two of them are believed to be entirely or largely supported by Greek sponsors today. There must be potential for further partnership between charitable and educational foundations with an interest in the Greek world on the one hand, and these high-ranking UK universities on the other.

There is much that can be done, and is being done, outside universities too. The Society for Modern Greek Studies, established in 2008, provides a forum across all disciplines, both within and outside academia, including students, and its journal, *Modern Greek Studies Online*, began publishing in 2015.

Among all these ventures, of course, a special place must be accorded to the journal that today is celebrating its fortieth annual volume: *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*. It is surely yet another mark of peer-esteem, for the two fields represented in its title, that *BMGS* is now published by Cambridge University Press. Over the years, *BMGS* has been a beacon of academic rigour and breadth of coverage within the 'traditional' disciplines of history, language and literature, in a well-tried partnership with Byzantine studies. No journal devoted to modern Greek studies has lasted as long – and let us not forget that the *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, published since 1983 by the Johns Hopkins University in the US, is itself an offshoot of *BMGS*. Although the paths of the two journals have since diverged considerably, both were forged in the intellectual partnership of 1975 that created *BMGS* under its founding editor Donald Nicol, associate editor Peter Bien, and business editor Anthony Bryer, the dedicatee of this special issue. It was the last-named who oversaw the transition from a joint venture with the US-based Modern Greek Studies Assocation (MGSA) in 1983 to a stand-alone British publication. It was the energy and foresight of Professor Bryer that has ensured for *BMGS* an institutional home for more than thirty years at the University of Birmingham.

So, forty years on from the launch of *BMGS* and the Greek Month in London, there is surely much that can be learned from the developments of the past, most of them unexpected, and indeed unpredictable. There is also much to build upon. From being a 'niche' subject, circumscribed within small, dedicated departments and highly specialist programmes of study, modern Greek studies are today claiming a place in the wider world. The great potential strength of our subject-area is that it intersects with so many others.

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Greek is one of only two languages in the world that can boast a continuous spoken and written tradition stretching back more than three millennia (the other is Chinese). Modern Greek is therefore not just another modern language, a 'minority' or 'less widely used' language. The nation that speaks that language is not just a blot on the balance-sheet of the Eurozone, a 'geographical expression' at the end of the Balkans, or a mere 'modern sequel' to a long-vanished civilization. The Greek 'national myth', that has become standard since the work of Spyridon Zambelios and Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos in the mid-nineteenth century, of unbroken 'continuity' from ancient to modern, masks the far more radical achievement of Greeks in modern times, which has been to build, out of an interconnected series of communities, a modern nation and a modern culture at once Hellenic and modern. Since every nation and every human community, surely, *needs* a past (or pasts) and defines itself in relation to that past, the Greek experience and the Greek achievement really do deserve to be seen as paradigmatic.

The very phrase, 'Greek achievement', immediately conjures up a traditional rhetoric of reverence for the ancients. To recognize, and to understand, the achievement of *modern* Greece and modern Greeks should be the goal of modern Greek studies in the years to come. In a connected, global world, the academic study of modern Greece cannot and should not be a regional, or local, niche interest. The *modern* Greek achievement is far too important to be overlooked by all except those who directly have a stake in it. Anthropology and linguistics have shown the way. Literature, history, musicology, cultural studies – and why not other disciplines too? – are set to follow.

Greece and Greek do matter. More than ever before, they still deserve to punch above their weight.

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