Conclusion: Greece Reinvented

In his *Apology of an Anti-Hellene*, the Greek critic Nikos Dimou writes that, if any Western import has harmed Greece, it has been the idea of continuity of Hellenic civilisation. “Out of the blue”, he continues, “the Western ‘Philhellenes’ (and their mimics, our own ‘scholars’) stuck a helmet on their head, dubbed them keepers of the ancient flame, and injected them with a passion for purity.”¹ According to him, the modern Greeks thus appropriated essentially Western ideas and fantasies about Greece to serve as the backbone of ‘their’ Greek tradition. The continuous efforts of the Byzantine intelligentsia in Italy to restore continuity with ancient Greece sheds new light on the origin and implications of the notion of cultural continuity in Hellenism. It shows that the one-sidedly classicist appropriation of the Greek world cannot be traced back to modern philhellenism alone and has deeper historical and cultural roots. Although Romantic philhellenism largely shaped Western notions of Greece and the Greeks, the classicism of most Italian humanists shaped the classicist lens through which the West continued—and to some degree, continues—to regard the Greek world. The previous chapters suggest that, in the nineteenth century, the philhellenic imposition of Greekness did not come “out of the blue”. They show that the Byzantine intelligentsia reified the idea that the Romans of the East actually were Greeks, accelerating a process of transformation that had already started in the final years of Byzantium. This process of transformation did not simply rely on the mindless import of Western templates and models, but instead resulted from a more complex situation of cultural negotiation between Greeks and Latins about what it meant to be a *Graecus*.

Along these and similar lines, the previous chapters prompt some further general conclusions, organised in three pairs of contrasting terms that run through the previous chapters: disownment versus appropriation, assimilation versus distinctiveness, and unity versus diversity. Under the headings of these contrasting pairs, these final pages resume and address some of the issues raised in the first pages of this study, namely how and why the Byzantine intelligentsia in Italy identified with the ancient Hellenes. By relating these

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outcomes to the scholarly contexts in which Byzantine scholars have traditionally been studied, they also briefly explain how this study bears upon our understanding of the relationship between Latin humanism and Greekness, the Byzantines’ role in the humanist movement, and the common ways of thinking about ‘Greek identity’ in the interval between the decline and fall of Byzantium and the emergence of the nation state Hellas.

Disownment and Appropriation: Romans Becoming Greeks

In the footsteps of Plethon, and just like Laonikos Chalkokondyles, the Byzantine intelligentsia in Italy made the shift from traditional Hellenism towards Greekness, or from the literary and rhetorical study and imitation of ancient Greek literature to the ethno-cultural identification with the ancient Hellenes collectively as a people. The impression of continuity with ancient Greece was crucial for the construction of Greekness. The previous chapters showed the different ways in which this sense of continuity was achieved and how it overcame the rupture with the ancient Hellenes. The most important origins of rupture that the Byzantine intelligentsia also noted were the impact of Roman culture on indigenous Hellenic traditions in the remote past and, especially, the impact of the fall of Constantinople in their own time. They understood the impact of Roman civilisation in terms of cultural and linguistic alienation from what they perceived as original and native. On the other hand, they saw the fall of their capital not only as the ruination of their fatherland, but also of the ancient Greek tradition and what it constituted: European civilisation at large.

The Byzantine intelligentsia in Italy bridged the gap with the ancient Hellenes by creating various forms of quasi-contiguity with the ancient Greek past. They had various strategies at their disposal. First of all, they appropriated the ancient Greek past via the language they used (if they wrote in Greek) as well as via the names they applied to themselves. The fact that they called themselves Greeks was in itself a means of bridging the gap with the ancient Hellenes, especially in Greek, where the word Ἕλληνες distinguished the ancients from Γραικοί and Ῥωμαῖοι. Yet their Hellenism was hardly a matter of linguistic usage or naming practice alone. In this, it differed from the Hellenism of the majority of Byzantine intellectuals before the fifteenth century. In addition to naming, the most explicit strategies to secure their connection with ancient Greece were ethnic anchoring (which rooted their history in the remote and venerable past) as well as their claim to cultural preservation and imitation (which secured a sense of sameness over time). Sometimes they