ABSTRACT: In mountain Naxos, during the 1830s, villagers experienced recurrent dreams that directed them to the discovery of three buried icons. On Tinos a decade earlier, similar activities were positively viewed and a national pilgrimage was instituted. Government and Church authorities were not pleased with events on Naxos, however, because local activities broke new laws of the state. Ultimately, the authorities confiscated the Naxos icons and locked them away. This move reflected the Bavarian-led state’s rejection of indigenous archaeologies and the local modes of historicization that accompanied them. Rooted in Orthodox Christian ritual, and cyclical Romeic ideas of history, these local forms clashed with state-endorsed Hellenism and emergent professional historiography. This clash propelled these events into the historical record, and recently released sources from the Holy Synod now afford the opportunity to better understand, through this particular case, the nature of popular historical consciousness before national Hellenism.

As is generally known, before the nineteenth century the denizens of the region that would become Greece did not think of themselves as Hellenes in the sense of descendents of the ancients. The term ‘Hellene’ connoted a pre-Christian pagan, and the Orthodox Church had dedicated itself for a millennium and a half to wiping out ‘hellenic’ beliefs and practices among the population. As Kosmas o Aitolos told his eighteenth-century listeners, many of whom were Albanian speakers: 'You are not Hellenes! You are not unbelievers, heretics, atheists, but you are pious Orthodox Christians' (cited in *This paper grew out of numerous conversations with Yannis Hamilakis at the Getty Research Institute and elsewhere. I am grateful to him for his generosity in sharing ideas and research materials with me. I would also like to thank Yannis Koubourlis for his practical help with sources, and his inspiring discussion of the ideas presented here. Jenny Roussou translated this text into Greek.*
Ancient monuments did not at this time fit into ready-made narratives about glorious Ancient Greek ancestors and national heritage. When the English traveller Cockerell sought to remove antiquities from the Temple of Aphaea on Aigina in the early 19th century, the locals objected, but not on the grounds of protecting their patrimony. They thought that if these objects were removed, misfortune would be unleashed on the island. Around the same time, another British traveller noted that the villagers of Elefsina considered a statue of Demeter to insure the fertility of their crops, and they heaped up devotional piles of dung around it (Hamilakis 2007: 70). Scholars have been fascinated by the lack of a popular historical connection to the ancient Hellenes before independence (e.g. Clogg 1983), but the historical consciousness that ordinary people did possess in this period remains little understood.

In part this is because few existing sources document indigenous ideas about history, let alone popular historical narratives. To an extent such ideas may be discovered in folksongs that remember the fall of Constantinople, while at the same time maintaining a hope of recovering it. Stories circulated of interrupted liturgies that would one day be completed and priests or emperors who would reappear at the moment of the second coming of Byzantium. Much more research needs to be done on this topic by historians, but it appears that lay people did not trace their history further back than the Byzantine Empire, and they entertained cyclic ideas, consonant with Christian theology (Koumbourlis 2005:144-5). Divine providence directed the flow of events, and it was thought that grace, if not salvation, would be bestowed in the fullness of time.

1 ‘Δεν είστενε Ἕλληνες. Δεν είστενε ἁσεβείς, αἱρετικοί, ἀθεοί ἀλλ' είστενε ἕσεβείς Ὀρθόδοξοι Χριστιανοί.’
People treated pre-Christian inhabitants and their monuments in uncoordinated ways. Ancient artefacts were variously disdained, destroyed or made into building materials, and at other times embraced within a Christian framework. On Kythnos a local priest placed two ancient statues in his home, and censed them like icons (Lekakis 2006: 14), much as the people of Elefsina illuminated the aforementioned statue of Demeter with oil lamps on Christian holy days (Hamilakis 2008: 276). In these examples ritualized Orthodox Christian reverence mediated the relationship to the past. Recent studies in the anthropology of history have identified many parallel modes of engaging with and ordering the past thereby creating new sensitivities to what might count as ‘histories’. These alternative modes may be non-rational, non-conscious, non-volitional, non-narrative and non-literary. Examples would be spirit possession (Lambek 2003; Makris 1996), dancing (McCall 2000), dreaming (Stewart 2002) and cooking (Sutton 2008). In the case of pre-revolutionary Greece, as in these examples just cited, we are dealing with non-historicist conceptions of the past, and non-historiographical representations of this past. Because the standards of professional western historiography have conditioned general sensibilities about ‘history’ there remains a general reluctance to recognize such alternative histories as serious forms of historicization.

The following case study from 1830s Naxos offers a fairly detailed example of an indigenous exploration of ‘historicity’ (Hirsch and Stewart 2005), and also very much a case of what Yannis Hamilakis has termed ‘indigenous archaeology’ (2008). The people dreamed of icons and other objects, excavated them and instituted a pilgrimage to revere
them. This Romeic mode of historicization valued knowledge acquired from mystical forces (such as saints) in altered states of consciousness (trance, dreaming) in scenarios that assumed the unfolding of a preordained Christian teleology. Post-independence, the rise of Hellenism as national ideology necessitated the taming of such forms of historicization, and the re-education of the populace according to modern canons of archaeology and history, which ideologically stressed the importance of the ancient past. Precisely this conflict between modern, national archaeology on the one hand, and pre-modern indigenous archaeologies on the other, lay at the core of the conflict on Naxos. This paradigm clash played out as an actual political contest in which the new state rejected Orthodox Christian modes of relating to the land and the past. This conflict caused the events on Naxos to enter the historical record. The contemporary hesitation to recognize these practices as ‘history’ or ‘archaeology’ is consistent with the early Greek state’s reaction. Both assume historicism\(^2\) to be the only acceptable method for gaining true knowledge of the past.

The events of interest for the present study commence in 1831 when the Panagía began to appear to three shepherds from Kóronos, siblings named Maria, Geórgios and Nikólaos. She instructed them to dig for an icon depicting her. These events are described in two different accounts written by a village priest of the time,

\(^2\) Historicism has taken on multiple, and sometimes contradictory meanings over the years (Iggers 1995). Here I use it to index the professionalized conception of history as a ‘science’ (Wissenschaft) dating from 1825 when Leopold von Ranke began to convene his seminar in history at the University of Berlin (Iggers and Moltke 1973:xxxiii). This professional history was rigorously empirical in its use of primary sources; it strove for impartiality and objectivity; and it rejected the grand periodizations and teleological trajectories of philosophy and theology (Ranke 1973[1831-2]).
In 1835 the Panagía began appearing to two new visionaries. The first of them, Christódoulos Manolás, a young farmer, owned a plot of land at Argokoíli, a few kilometres from Kóronos. Christódoulos learned through visions that the icon had belonged to an Egyptian family that fled persecution during the period of iconoclasm (8th and 9th centuries AD). Rather than face further persecution this family prayed for the earth to swallow them up. The Panagía added that if people dug faithfully the first thing they found would be the bones of this couple and their child, which should be preserved as holy.

Hearing this, a crowd of people went to Argokoíli and began digging. Over the course of a long day, they found nothing. As they were gathering up their implements, Christódoulos saw a vision (ephotísthi) indicating where to strike with his pickaxe. With one blow he opened the way into a cavern. Digging inside people quickly found some bones. Reports circulated that the bones and surrounding earth had a pleasant smell, were warm to the touch, and could cure illness. Christódoulos asked the Panagía to reveal herself there and then on top of the dirt and bones. She replied, 'How can I possibly come out since you have not prepared my place? There is no throne for me should I come out now. Do not neglect the building of my house (oikós), but keep working with solid faith…' (Korrés 1962: 5 and Korrés 2002a: 24).

---

3 I am grateful to Iánnis Khouzoúris for providing me with photocopies of Korrés' and other reports. The events at Argokoíli have been greatly illuminated by the release of archival documents from the Holy Synod of Greece in the mid-1990s. Khouzoúris has published these in his quarterly newspaper, Argokoíliótissa, and I cite them as 'Documents'. Seraídari (2007: 184ff) offers a good account of the 1836 discovery at Argokoíli on the basis of Korrés and a lengthy didactic poem by Khouzoúris (1996).
μου δεν ετοιμάσετε, ούτε τον θρόνον δεν έχω ως εάν έβγω τώρα. Θέλετε αμελήσετε την
dούλευσιν του οίκου μου, αλλά δουλεύετε με πίστιν στερεάν…

An itinerant monk named Gerásimos Mavromátis came to Kóronos to take
confessions and perform exorcisms. Once arrived in Vóthroi⁴, Gerásimos began to have
his own dreams. In one dream the Panagía appeared to Gerásimos and told him that she
would give a pledge (arravóna) to appear [θέλει του δώσει αρραβώνα της εμφανισέως
tης]. He went to Argokoíli the following day and discovered a silver coin with
Constantine the Great on it. Gerásimos took this coin with him and departed Vóthroi to
spread the word to other villages on Naxos.⁵

Soon thereafter the Panagía spoke via a new visionary, Manouíl Sakhás, like
Christódoulos, a farmer/shepherd from Vóthroi, married with children. She gave
instructions for building her 'monastery', which would be 'large enough to hold all the
inhabitants of the island' (Korrés 2002b: 21)[τόσον μεγάλο, οπού να χωρέσουν όλοι οι
κάτοικοι του νησιού]. In a separate vision around the same time the Panagía told
Christódoulos to tell everyone, 'that they should build me a dwelling, a spacious hotel
(evrýchoron xenodocheion), a special (xechóriston, 'separate') place to set me where those
coming to visit may rest'[να μου ετοιμάσουν κατοικίαν, ένα ξενοδοχείον ευρύχωρον,

⁴ Before the 20th century, Kóronos was known as Vóthroi. At that time the word vóthros
meant 'ravine', and the village is, indeed, built in a nexus of ravines. Over time vóthros
came to mean 'cess pit'. Embarrassed by this semantic shift, the villagers changed the
name to Kóronos after the nearby mountain in the 1920s.
⁵ Canon Marmarás to Holy Synod, 18 June 1836 (Documents 2000a: 22).
In February 1836 yet another visionary appeared on the scene, a man named Ioánnis Maggióros (nicknamed Doumbrogiánnis). Like Christódoulos and Manouíl, he was a poor, unlettered shepherd from Kóronos. After his first day digging for the icon he went home and during his afternoon nap he saw a vision (vlépei eis to oramá tou) of the Panagía. She told him that there were three icons in the cavern: one each of the Panagía, the Lament for Christ, and St. John the Forerunner.

Ioánnis saw a vision instructing him that all three icons would be found on the 25th of March, 1836. On that day a crowd numbering in the thousands assembled. Doumbrogiánnis descended into the cavern and found the three icons. These were passed among the priests and placed in a ‘cell’ (kellí) that had already been built. That very day, on the crest of these wondrous events, Ioánnis had a further vision -- that on 23 April, the day of St. George, one further icon of the Panagía would be discovered. This fourth icon was duly found. Claimed as a work of St. Luke, observers described it as being 1/8 the size of a sheet of paper, and executed as an impression (anáglypho) in the unusual medium of wax and mastich (kiromastíkha). This icon would appear to be the focus of the pilgrimage to Argokoíli today (see figure 1).

---

6 Korrés 2002b:21. In his account written several months later, Korrés attributed this vision to Manouil (1962: 10).

7 According to contemporary oral traditions he descended wearing only a robe so that no one could say that he planted the icons.
These events on Naxos overlapped with the birth of the Greek state. Among the first ecclesiastical reforms pursued by the regency government was the closure of all monasteries with less than six monks, with all property nationalized. Previously, itinerant monks had been prominent spiritual reference points in the countryside, often carrying with them sacred icons and relics. Furthermore, new laws aimed at protecting archaeological remains on Greek soil placed the very activity of digging under increased scrutiny. The first article in the section on antiquities (Article 61) stated that: 'All antiquities inside Greece, as works of the ancestors of the Greek people, are considered the national property (ktíma ethnikón) of all Greeks in general' (Petrákos 1982: 132)["Όλες οι αρχαιότητες εντός της Ελλάδος, ως έργα των προγόνων του ελληνικού λαού, θεωρούνται κτήμα εθνικόν όλων εν γένει των Ελλήνων."] And Article 100 decreed that
no one would be allowed to dig for antiquities without first obtaining an official permission. A fine of between 25 and 200 drachmas, and confiscation of any antiquities discovered, were to be imposed on offenders.

These laws redefined many of the activities then in process deep in the interior mountains of Naxos. What had begun as a local instance of a type of visionary practice familiar throughout the Orthodox world, suddenly stood in a different light. The voice of the Panagía instructing people to unearth her icon and build her a 'spacious hotel' could now be construed as an incitement to break the law on several counts.

* * * * * * *

After the discovery of the icons in early 1836, the inhabitants of Vothroi continued to have further dreams of icons, and on 25 March 1838 another icon was discovered. The ecclesiastical and civil authorities reached exasperation point upon learning of these events and they brought a court case against the main actors involved accusing them of fraud and of privately profiting from donations of the faithful. At the trial on Syros more than 50 character witnesses came from Naxos and testified that the accused were truly inspired by God. All were exonerated (Documents 2001d: 22).

---

8 Petrákos 1982: 139. In an encyclical issued under Capodistrias on 23 June 1830 the government had already taken steps to require permissions to dig for antiquities (Petrákos 1982:116). In September 1833 officials on Naxos (notably customs officials) had been informed that all commerce in, or excavation of, antiquities was forbidden (Documents 2000b:21).
Unable to jail the ringleaders the authorities decided to confiscate the icons. Ultimately the Naxos Police Chief gave the order in late 1838 and the icons were placed in two boxes and sent to the Metropolitan Church in Chóra for safekeeping. In one box they placed the icon of the Panagía Argokoiliótissa, mounted in a plating of gold and silver. The other box contained 'the various fragments of old icons, including a small relief'. Sceptics at the time did not think that these objects were icons at all. The police chief commented that the main icon, 'which does not have the least appearance of an icon, is actually an oblong rectangle of utterly rotted wood.' Finally, the authorities placed the icons inside a cabinet (doulápi) behind the icon screen of the Metropolitan church in Chóra. This cupboard was nailed shut and sealed with a special tamper-proof Episcopal seal. The power of the icons, and along with them the charismatic appeal of the cult of the Panagía Argokoiliótissa, were now, supposedly, contained.

The period of independence was one of mixed messages for the inhabitants of mountain Naxos, and no doubt many other parts of Greece as well. Dreaming of icons,

---

9 Naxos Police Chief to Church Committee of Naxos, 2 November 1838 (Documents 2001b: 16). Note that the small wax mastich relief icon (found on 23 April 1836) was not at this time recognized as the icon of the Panagía Argokoiliótissa.

10 I. Ambrosiádis, Police Chief of Naxos to the Royal Secretariat for Internal Affairs, 20 Feb. 1839 (Documents 2001c: 20): 'η Εικών, η οποία αληθῶς δεν ἔχει οὐδεμίαν μορφήν εἰκόνος, ἀλλὰ τετραγώνου εὐθείης σεσαθρωμένου ξύλου…'

11 Η Επιτροπή σκεφθεῖσα, ενέκρινε και εκάρυφακε εὐθὺς το εν τω ιερῷ εμπεριεχόμενον αυτά δουλάπα και ασφαλίσας αὐτὸ δία τῆς σφραγίδος τῆς Ἐπισκοπῆς, ἔμειναν ἡσφαλισμένα δία τῆς σφραγίδος τῆς Ἐπισκοπῆς. Church Committee of Naxos to Holy Synod, 14 July 1839 (Documents 2001c: 21).
bones and other objects in the earth continued traditions rooted deep in the Byzantine past, which now conflicted with newly expanded state jurisdiction over the land. State suppression and popular expression locked into a spiralling reciprocal logic of social action. The villagers had not succeeded in building the magnificent church that the Panagía had spoken of in the dreams, and the icons remained confiscated. Indeed, at some point it emerged that the icons had disappeared altogether. The sealed cupboard had been violated.

The dreaming and digging in Argokoíli occurred during a period of transition in which the traditional popular imagination about the land, its past, and the nation's ancestors were rapidly replaced by a new mode of historicization. The stories of buried icons, some of which were considered works of the Apostle Luke, and/or possessions of early Christians, expressed a Christian historical identification that would now be marginalized as state-sponsored Hellenism took precedence. Research in Ancient History and Classics offered a different and deeper ethnic past to contemplate. These increasingly professionalized disciplines developed highly rationalist modes of historiography, notably Ranke's historicism, which informed works on Greek history published by German historians such as Zinkeisen and Droysen in the early 1830s.\(^\text{12}\) Maurer, Bavarian officials, Greek historians and archaeologists were familiar with these

historical works. Indeed Maurer invited Zinkeisen to teach History at Athens University, an offer he declined.

Following Rankean historicism, the emergent national history and archaeology insisted on basic Enlightenment research principles. These included the Cartesian distinction between fantasy and reality and subject and object. The historical researcher stood apart from the object of study (i.e. past events) and tried to understand them on the basis of evidence – sources of various types. Furthermore, historical time now came to be conceived as linear and progressive, which meant that the past was separated from the present. Indigenous archaeologies and historicizations, by contrast, focused on returning the past to the present in a more cyclical logic where the recovery of lost possessions restored divine grace to presence. The dates of all the icon discoveries were set to saints’ days, notably the Annunciation, and the finds were made in the company of priests after the performance of repeated prayer services. The engine of history in this Romeic view was divine will, not human-derived progress.

According to professional, Rankean tenets, the past could be understood through meticulous research, but historians had to be careful not to commit the sin of anachronism. They needed to hold their contemporary values and logical assumptions apart and not impute them as operating assumptions of past people. As Ranke put it: ‘There is not alive within us an interest similar to that of the past’ (1973[1831-2]: 41). Too close an identification with past actors also collapsed the subject – object distinction. Past protagonists could speak through objective source materials (e.g. documents), and
the imagination of the historian could work artfully to give these actors voice and context. They could not, however, legitimately speak to/through the historian by means of subjective revelations in dreams or states of ecstasy.

The opposition to anachronism tied historicism to the projects of rational governance and progress as Chakrabarty has argued (2000: 12, 237). Anachronism was not just about keeping the present out of the past, but also eliminating outmoded bits of the past from the present. Indigenous forms of historicization and archaeology were identified as just such retrograde forms of putative knowledge and rejected in the name of rational development (Chakrabarty 2000: 243). Post-Enlightenment, Bavarian-mediated ideas of government and rational knowledge de-legitimized local, haptic modes of historicizing in areas like mountain Naxos. Dreams or visions revealing information, the smell of bones, or the warm feel of the earth could not be accepted as methodology or as reliable evidence. The temporality of progressive science superimposed itself on popular Orthodox Christian apocalypticism. These different time perspectives generated variant ontologies, fundamentally different modes of being, in broad sections of the population.

To use the terminology of Marshall Sahlins (1985), this could be seen as a conjunctural period of paradigm clash, involving a phase of mutual misunderstanding between local people and state institutions. In the 'conjunction', which Sahlins has illustrated by reference to the 18th century encounter between the Hawaiians and Captain Cook, misunderstandings arose because the two parties held fundamentally different assumptions about the world. They did not, however, clearly realize that they were
operating at cross-purposes (Sahlins 1985: 125). The Hawaiians offered Cook precious objects, which they considered sacrifices because they viewed him as a god. The British interpreted these objects as trade overtures and responded in kind. The one group was operating with ideas of the sacred, the other on entirely economic assumptions.

Sahlins' example involved an early moment of cultural contact. In the case under consideration here, state Hellenism, formulated by Greek intellectuals in diaspora with the collaboration of northern European scholars, and then imported into the new Kingdom of Greece, clashed with village worldview. Out of such situations of creative misunderstanding culture emerged transformed. In this transformation indigenous archaeologies did not get wiped out altogether by 'modern archaeology'. Rather, the two merged over time into a hybrid Greek archaeology where monuments (such as the ‘exiled’ caryatids in London) can have feelings and archaeologists (such as Manolis Andronikos) could listen seriously to people's dreams of saints (Hamilakis 2007, 2008). Likewise, indigenous historical consciousness did not get totally steamrollered either. By the mid-19th century a historian like Zambelios could emerge 'like a saint from the local church who had, nevertheless, studied in a European university'. As Solomos once remarked of Zambelios: 'he dressed Hegel in the clothes of our priests' (entyse ton Egelο me to pheloni tou papa mas) [Έντυσε τον Έγελο με το φελόνι του παπά μας].

Dreams and visions of buried icons opened a relationship to past protagonists, objects, powers and promises. When excavated these various forces were restored as

---

13 Quoting Yannis Koubourlis, personal communication (5 Oct. 2007).
present and active in local society; they gave directions that people followed. The supporters of the Argokoiiótissa movement viewed excavated icons, bones and coins with St. Constantine on them in a Christian framework of grace and redemption. The new government claimed jurisdiction over the interpretation of buried objects as evidence of a linear Greek 'history', stretching back in a continuum to antiquity.

A change in historical consciousness underlay the misunderstanding between the Naxiote villagers and government agencies. Historical consciousness here does not refer solely to the body of stories one knows about the past; a willingness to go back to the Ancient Greeks as opposed to the beginning of Byzantium. It refers more broadly to a general consciousness of time, and of the past, as particular domains with certain properties (e.g. cyclical, linear, ruptured, connected). For the state the past was separate from the present, intelligible through objective scholarship based on tangible sources. The new state set about creating museums and protected sites for this past. The priest on Kythnos mentioned at the beginning of this paper, for example, gave his ancient statue to the new national museum rather than continue to light incense to it at home. The relic of the past went from being a liturgical object and living talisman to being an aestheticized objectified object, out of social circulation. Although the state wished to educate them otherwise, for the people of Kóronos the past had never died. The question was when and how it would return. Dreams and visions of buried icons such as those studied above indicated that the moment of redemption was at hand. Christian apocalypticism heightened anticipation about the immediate future while also activating knowledge of the past, which was a time of grace to which they might be restored. Dreams and visions
thus activated a mode of historicization and archaeological practice that accorded with a Romeic lifeworld.

References


Koumbourlis, I., 2005a, ‘Η ιδέα της ιστορικής συνέχειας του ελληνικού έθνους στους εκπρωστέους του ελληνικού Διαφωτισμού: η διαμάχη για το όνομα του έθνους και οι απόψεις για τους αρχαίους Μακεδόνες και Βυζαντινούς’, *dokiméz*, 13-14, 137-191.

Koubourlis, I., nd. a, "I epanástasi tou 1821 kai i dimiourgía tou ellinikoú ethnikoú krátous stis prótes megáles aphigíseis tis neóteris elliníkis istorías: apó tin polyparagontiki análysi sto skhima tis ethnikís teleologías'

Koubourlis, I., nd. b, 'European Historiographical Influences Upon Young Constantinos Paparrigopoulos (1843-1853): The Testimony of 'The 1846 Lecture', ms.


