

University Seminar #703: Modern Greek Studies

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Speaker: Efterpi Mitsi

Topic: "Representations of Greece in Early English Travel Writing"

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Summary of Presentation:

In her presentation, Efterpi Mitsi examined the first encounters between British travelers and the Greek people through the accounts of Thomas Dallam and William Lithgow, who traveled to Greece in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. These early travelers' experiences in the Ottoman Mediterranean were part of a larger movement of British interests - political and economic - beginning in the late 16th century, as England established the Levant Company in 1581 and attempted to engage Ottoman politically against rivals like Spain and Venice. At this time, increasing numbers of British merchants, sailors, clergymen and adventurers began to pass through the Eastern Mediterranean, among them Dallam and Lithgow, whose travelogues reflect new economic, political and cultural encounters between East and West.

Mitsi began her presentation by broadly comparing the two travelers and their accounts. Both Dallam, an organ-maker and musician, and Lithgow, a poet and professional traveler, pass through Greece on their way to or returning from destinations further east, and both display a limited knowledge of Greece - both of their accounts function more to chronicle the adventures and exploits of the "resilient male Protestant abroad", although both writers do comment on the character, appearance and customs of the Greeks they encounter. Both employ gendered metaphors in talking about the region, describing Greece as they do its women - simultaneously "alluring and dangerous", like the Ottoman Empire itself, threatening "capture, conversion and disempowerment". In her presentation, Mitsi emphasizes the "contradictions which unsettle the neat east/west divide, especially in Greece" which occupies an ambiguous geographical and cultural position, between East and West, past and present.

In their writings, neither Dallam nor Lithgow seem particularly interested in the material remains of Greece's "noble past" - Dallam simply chips away at a few marble pillars to take home as souvenirs, and Lithgow shows even less interest than Dallam. Mitsi explained that, in contrast to 16th-century French travelers like Pierre Belon, Pierre Gilles and Nicholas Nicolay, Dallam and Lithgow's apparent indifference to ruins might be explained by a number of factors, including the relatively late arrival of Greek antiquities to England, Britons' disillusionment with "the degenerate condition" of present-day Greece compared with its past splendor, and the tendency in English travel accounts - and in the 16th-century English language - to equate travel with travail, with daring adventure and adversity rather than scholarly antiquarianism. Indeed, Dallam

and Lithgow were writing at a time when the notion of foreign travel as full of dangers and risks of “contamination” was tempered only by the association of foreign travel with English colonial and commercial power.

Neither noblemen nor merchants, Dallam and Lithgow were both from the middle class - Dallam a blacksmith specializing as a skilled musician in the construction of organ pipes, and Lithgow a professional traveler who first began to travel at a young age upon receiving an inheritance. Dallam’s voyage to the East was occasioned by English diplomacy: he was assigned to present Sultan Mohamet III with an elaborate, ornately decorated organ, a gift from Queen Elizabeth and a symbol of “a new way of dealing with the Ottoman Empire and the Islamic world in general”, as gift-exchange and economic interests overcame religious hatred. While Dallam’s organ did not survive the passage of time, his travel diary did - after being lost for centuries, it reappeared in 1848 and was published at the end of the 19th century. His adventures as described in the diary are marked by an intriguing openness and curiosity towards the foreign world around him, as well as an ability to navigate easily in a strange culture and language. Writing in the first person, Dallam describes his own fearlessness as he ignores the warnings of his fellow travelers and walks up to strangers, trying the wine and food offered to him, observing a Greek Orthodox mass - the first Englishman to do so - and making gifts of small knives in return for the Greeks’ hospitality. Mitsi argued that these “intercultural encounters [of] mutual exchange” are not of a commercial nature, but rather are a way to forge affective relations.

Dallam also seems to take a certain pride in his ability to observe and adapt to the new cultures he encounters, and his writing lacks the prejudice and expectations that characterize other travelogues from this period. He also notes that he himself often became the spectacle, the novelty among the Greeks and often the object of women’s gaze. In fact, upon being given the opportunity to peek through the grate of the seraglio at the Sultan’s palace in Constantinople and to gaze upon the Sultan’s concubines, he immediately imagines himself being gazed upon by the women in return. Returning to England against the Sultan’s wishes, Dallam traverses the Greek mainland, narrowly escaping the Turks with the help of his dragoman, who turned out to be a converted Englishman. Dallam himself was constantly lured or threatened to “turn Turk”, to which his response was ambiguous, characterized by both “fear and fascination”. In Mitsi’s analysis, Dallam’s travelogue indicates “a constant renegotiation of subjectivity and undermines the oppositions between east and west”. Thus, Mitsi argued that Orientalism and post-colonialism are inappropriate models for reading travel writing from the early modern period, as they obscure the geopolitical fluidity that marks this period, as well as the political, economic and cultural power of the Ottoman Turks at the time, particularly in relation to England.

Lithgow’s account of his travels are markedly different in tone and content from Dallam’s. While both present the voyages of their respective protagonists as adventures, Lithgow describes the East as a place full of dangers, thieves and bandits lurking in every corner, and he saves the most virulent of his attacks for what he describes as “women insatiably inclined to vengery”. Mitsi explained that Lithgow, a fervent Protestant, seems to view the Ottoman Empire and all its subjects as religious enemies, evil and depraved; this prejudice colors his writing, and it is

difficult to distinguish accurate descriptions of people, places and events from his own skewed concerns. Further complicating matters is the impressive amount of plagiarism in his travelogue, which for Mitsi “exemplifies the troubled genre of travel writing in the early modern period, marked by plagiarism, exaggeration, misrepresentation, and even deception”.

In his descriptions of Greece under the Ottoman Empire, Lithgow uses the words of other writers such as Sir Anthony Sherley to lament what he sees as its fallen state from a glorious, ancient past. While commenting positively on the hospitality he encounters in Athens, in general he views the landscape around him as deformed, decayed - but, true to his Protestant beliefs, according to God’s plan. For Lithgow, the places and people around him simply serve as a point of departure, a platform from which he can vent his own fears and obsessions. Thus, “Myceneia is presented as the place ‘from which unhappy Helen was ravished’”, and what follows is a tirade against women in general. Similarly, Lithgow views all Greeks - carefully distinguished from ancient Greeks - as degenerate, dishonest and cunning, and his often fantastic adventures, as recounted in his travelogue, bear out his beliefs, in contrast to examples of kindness and hospitality which he also describes. Lithgow is particularly vicious in his rants against women; for example, while other travelers of this period, including Dallam, describe the women of Chios as beautiful, alluring and even sexually uninhibited, Lithgow’s description is full of hostility and misogynist exaggerations, characterizing the women as whores, which contradicts his earlier observation of their “angelic appearance”.

In closing, Mitsi argues that Dallam and Lithgow, as travelers to Greece in the early modern period, found themselves as representatives of British economic and political expansion, as well as mediators between cultures. As such, they encountered a foreign place and people that were themselves located between East and West, between a glorious past and an ignoble present - “a confused version of western early modernity”. Challenging our expectations of east/west binaries and textual closure, “Dallam and Lithgow’s narratives reveal the complexity and fluidity of the Mediterranean world at the turn of the 17th century, in which Greece plays a puzzling yet meaningful role”.

Discussion:

Q: I have an initial question about Dallam. You’ve been talking about how he is in some ways overturning the gaze of the traveler. At the same time, it’s still being presented by an author, for an audience, who is in control of all that in a certain way. While within the text, you have this kind of negotiation of subjectivity - I know you’re trying to present this in the context of these sort of Orientalist kinds of perspectives - but still the author is presented to the audience as more in control.

A: Yes, of course. He is the voice representing the encounter. We don’t have the other side responding; we don’t have the women’s voice, we never know what the Zanteen women thought about Dallam. But I tried to show that this is a pattern - you can say that it’s a kind of narcissism,

because he's always turning the gaze upon himself. At the same time, it's strange because this account was never published; this was not made public. Dallam's diary remained a secret until the 19th century, and even in the 19th century - it was published in 1893 - people didn't pay attention to it.

Q: Did he write it intending it to be published?

A: Well, there are little comments like the one I mentioned, so I think that there is an intention. These are very detailed notes, and clearly there is this picaresque element, that he's always into those adventures, and he emerges victorious, where everybody else gets into trouble. He creates himself as a persona, clearly that of a hero, and I think that's why he wants the lights thrown on him. But I find this particularly interesting because his account also concerns the women he meets, and he talks very earnestly; in Zante the local women came near and they looked at him. I haven't found this anywhere else. Yes, at the end of the 18th century there are many travelers like that, especially in very exotic destinations, playing with that motif, that they are the spectacle. At the same time, I think he is powerful because he controls the narration, but he becomes very often disempowered, because even when he looks at the harem women through the grate, he thinks, "Oh, what would have happened if they looked at me?" It's not equal reciprocity, but there is still a fantasy of this reciprocal gaze.

Q: Can I ask you something about that? Because I'm intrigued, actually, much more by Dallam than by Lithgow. In some ways, I get the sense that he is apprehensive or in some way vulnerable because of the situation that he's been asked to partake in, which is that from what you said the Levant company hires him to take this his creation and offer it as a token to the Ottomans. He's very much a tool of this situation, these mercantile interests, these state interests, and therefore he must be very apprehensive and very sensitive to the fact that he may not be party to the whole story, and he has to be particularly alert and sensitive to the reaction that comes from the other side. So in some ways these scenes, which are scenes of gift-giving or exchange or transaction of tokens that takes place, with perhaps a weaker other, the woman, is a kind of playing-out of a certain anxiety at the heart of the situation here, and that's what I find so interesting. Also, you mentioned how this might not be peculiar when it's compared to later 18th century writing, this idea of making himself the spectacle. I don't know how it compares to scenes with natives in America, American natives and the ways in which the colonists presented themselves to them and how the transaction took place.

A: It's not unusual. I think you do have this bearing a kind of gift for some form of exchange, staged in similar ways. That definitely is a very familiar scene in early modern travel accounts.

Q: What about the gaze of the native on the subject? Is that detailed in the accounts? In the American case?

A: Sir Thomas Harriot has accounts of exchanging gifts and how the whole village comes to gaze at the travelers. I think they're different because the English travelers to America arrive as

the representatives, in a sense, of a power that is there to colonize or to explore. Or they write in a way so that it could be used at home to attract settlers, more so in the case of Harriot and the English. Whereas here - you said that you were interested in how the Zante incident is foreshadowing the actual exchange of the major gift - for a few days, Gerald MacLean writes that Dallam became the most important Englishman in Constantinople and he upstaged the ambassador, Sir Henry Lello, and actually Dallam includes in his diary his exchanges with Lello, the pressure the ambassador exercised upon him, because when they arrived, the organ was almost destroyed during this long journey at sea, so he had to reconstruct it, and they weren't sure if it was going to work. Until recently, there was a biography from the 1950s about Dallam that was a little bit fictional, and it was only after 2004, with Gerald MacLean's book that has a chapter on Dallam, that people started writing about this event; recently two articles have been published on Dallam's church organ. But they all focus on exactly that, on the meaning of that gift and of the scene at the seraglio, that the Greek part is not really analyzed in this chapter and in those two articles. So yes, there is definitely a relationship - he's building up his importance: he's an artisan, but he plays both in front of the queen and in front of the sultan, and comes within very close proximity to the sultan, he almost touches him. I think this is very much for somebody from a village in Lancashire, so yes he is more interesting than Lithgow. But I also find Lithgow and his amount of plagiarism interesting - here we have to take into account that the first travelogue is original while the latter is the product of citations mingled together of course with Lithgow's ideology. Dallam doesn't seem to have such a clear ideology - religious comments, misogynist comments, etc.

Q: I also like the reference that you have from Pamuk's book, because you read the first paragraph. The second paragraph goes on to say that, in Pamuk's account, the next sultan actually destroys the organ, not because of its music, but because of its representations. It's read in another way, as another civilization - the civilization reads it in another way and destroys it. It doesn't count in terms of its music or its sound, but visually.

A: Pamuk but also others have written about this destruction, and why Sultan Ahmed I destroyed it. In Dallam's account there's a scene in Rhodes where the music always wins. When everybody in Rhodes gets into trouble - it's a class issue: the people who are upper-class get into trouble, the chaplain ends in prison - but Dallam, because he played some music that the Ottomans had heard the night before, escapes. So this ability to play music, to create something, is very important. I think none of Dallam's organs actually survive. All of them were destroyed in some way or other, but the breaking of this organ by Ahmed was a very violent instance. And it was quite a few years after Dallam's visit, when this magnificent gift, all the symbolism that went with it, was destroyed because it was considered sacrilegious.

Q: Can I ask you another question about plagiarism? I've worked a lot in the philosophy of this period, and you have examples of people, British authors taking whole works and presenting it as their own work, or very famous philosophers of law just taking whole passages without any kind of citation. I'm just wondering what you make of this feature of the period? It's rife among the

philosophers, but no one seems to condemn it. It's like they're saying, "Here's a found object. I'm giving it to you along with the rest", but no one ever complains about it.

A: I think it's very surprising to us, especially when we talk about travel writing. I mean, one can argue that philosophy is theoretical and one builds on the work of others and so on and find a defense, but travel depends on experience. That's our idea, at least, behind the consumption of travel books. But here, obviously if Lithgow traveled to Greece, why didn't he describe what he saw? This is what I find fascinating. On the other hand, even his biographer - there's a recent biography that came out by the historian Clifford Bosworth - says that Lithgow borrows from others, but he quotes those passages without explaining, "This was from Sherley", "This was from Biddulph", "This was from Sandys". What I found interesting is that those other travel books were not as successful as Lithgow. His book, the comprehensive edition of 1632, went into many editions and was extremely popular, and I think this pattern continues well into the 18th century. In the 17th century, another traveler that I worked on and found interesting is George Wheler. His whole book, *A Journey into Greece* (1682), plagiarizes his companion's volume, *Voyage d'Italie, de Dalmatie, de Grece, et du Levant* (1678), by Jacob Spon, a French traveler. They traveled together to Greece, Spon wrote a book but went bankrupt because of that travel (that was at the end of the 17th century) and died soon after, very poor and sick. Wheler stole most of the book, added his own parts, and then dedicated the book to the king, to Charles II, and actually because of that book, he rose socially, becoming Sir George Wheler. Today critics dismiss him, but he actually wrote a defense of his plagiarism, explaining, "We traveled together, so for the things that I don't remember, I'm going to use my friend's memory. It all has to do with memory. Why should I write it in my own words, since somebody else saw it, and we shared the same sight?" I think it shows a very different perception of what we mean by originality and the first view of something. In the 18th century, the most popular book about the Levant was by Charles Thompson, Esq. - *The Travels of the Late Charles Thompson, Esq. ... 3 vols* (1752) - a fictitious traveler. I think he was a publisher's hack, who compiled quotes from other travel accounts. In Lithgow's case I think plagiarism was something that added to the account, rather than a negative thing. Yes, I should have said a little bit more about that. My point is that his representation of Greece is as legitimate as the others, but I didn't really pursue that idea.

Q: Is there anything ethnographic of interest, in terms of when they talk about the Greeks? Is there anything from the period that sticks out or is rather strange in the way they differentiate the Greeks from others?

A: Well, they clearly differentiate the Greeks from other ethnicities, from the Turks, the Ottomans, also from the Jews and the Armenians. Dallam and Lithgow mention differences, but they don't explore them. Other travelers who were more educated, like Sandys, devote different chapters to the specific national characteristics.

Q: Do they differentiate Greeks from the other Christians from the empire?

A: Well, they differentiate them from the Armenians. Still, I think what they're fascinated by is that the Greek women have a public life, they're unveiled. So when Dallam says "their faces and breasts naked", he means that the Greek women were not covered. They were women, Greek and Jewish, that either travelers can actually see or even have visual and verbal contact. However, Lithgow has very negative views of course of the Greek Orthodox religion. Dallam, writing about the liturgy in Zante, suggests that this is a religion that he doesn't even recognize. He recognizes that he's in a church, but everything is painted. We think of Dallam coming to a Greek church in the 16th century, from the iconoclastic Reformation - he's shocked. This isn't Christianity as he knows it. But he doesn't attempt to interpret it. The others English travelers do interpret it, and of course find it wrong. So I think we do get a lot of ethnographic information, and so far I feel that this element is not mentioned in most studies of the travel literature of that era. Generally, at least in the English-speaking world, in the analysis of the travel writing in the early modern period, always the focus is on the traveler - how does the traveler regard the cultural other, what does the traveler say about the English? And I think this is wrong, because we do learn a lot of things, not just about costume - we do learn about daily life, we see examples that are quite interesting, such as the way that the Greeks treat a stranger. I'm also interested in the conflict between stereotypes and experience in Lithgow - he complains that the Greeks are horrible, they're rascals, they're dissemblers, deceitful, and then he goes on to say how he was well-treated almost everywhere he went. So certain things are recognized as being Greek, or related to antiquity, language of course, or customs, but other things are seen as a mark of difference rather than connection.

Q: How was communication achieved? Were they speaking in Greek, with gesticulation? Did they try to speak to Ancient Greek when they got there?

A: I think that in the case of Dallam, there's clearly non-verbal communication. In most cases, the travelers had an interpreter, a dragoman or a guide, and it would be really fascinating to have an account by one of those people. What did they think? All travelers mention their guides - even Sandys says, "In Constantinople, I traveled with my dragoman, whom I had for months" - but Dallam is the only one who gives us their names.

Q: Would the dragoman have been an Ottoman official?

A: No. In Dallam's case they were Englishmen who had converted to Islam. There were many English renegades in the Mediterranean. In other cases, I know Sandys had a Greek interpreter, he said so. But in most accounts, the interpreter is silenced. Obviously, I think that the perception of Greeks is through the guides, through the interpreters' eyes. The interpreter has power, obviously, but he's curiously silenced in the traveler's account. Lithgow often complains that his guide was ignorant. Fynes Moryson says "We tried to go to the labyrinth [in Crete], but nobody could explain to us what it was". So we do have a presence of guides, and I think that's a very interesting issue, who were those people.

Q: I think we have an act of translation here. I think in reality these travel accounts are maybe translations of what the dragoman sees and what they saw through the words of the dragoman. My question had to do with ethnographic detail - when they give these ethnographic descriptions, are they describing them as Greek ethnographic details, or as, for example, “women of Chios”, “men of Athens”, “women of Crete”? Do these ethnographic details describe Greeks as a group of people, or in each case do we have a different local group or regional characteristics?

A: They clearly define them as Greeks. They use that word. Certainly historians - like Ioli Vigopoulou, who has written on early travelers - have argued that “Greek” did not denote such a nation for many travelers, but a religion (the Christians of the East). Yet, I think it’s clear, at least from Lithgow and Sandys and Moryson, that as also it denoted the ancient Greeks, the term is always used to define national identity. In Rhodes, it’s clear when the people the traveler meets are Greeks, Venetians, Ottomans - they’re always separated. I think that the idea of ethnicity is very important here. And we also see a world where there are people from all over. Travelers meet other Englishmen, French, and also many captives and slaves. Again, this is something that usually escapes from studies of travel writing - it’s always one foreigner and one “other”, but that is not true in the Mediterranean. Also, about the guides: Dallam, in Zante, Rhodes and Chios does not have a guide. You could say that the Zantean man who offers him the wine operates as a kind of guide, because he shows him the way to the church, and then to the cloisters, and invites him to lunch. But when Dallam comes back, everybody from the boat - even the gentlemen who were the passengers in the boat - they were all very worried, because they thought he was probably killed or lost. So Dallam comes back and tells them of his adventure, how he went to the monastery, he was given wine and shown the women, and they all want to go, too. And then Dallam becomes their guide - he’s really the first “tour guide”. In Zante, he gives a lot of ethnographic detail. He talks about the game of quintain (giostra) that the locals played on the first of May. He provides detail that we don’t see with most travelers.

Q: During this period, when “Ottoman” was used as a designation, did that indicate anyone who was a citizen of the Ottoman empire, or did that mean Turkish?

A: Well, the English travelers would use the term “Turk”. Now, in order to talk about that era, historians prefer to use the term Ottomans rather than Turks. But at that time, “Turks” referred to all Muslims. In the Ottoman Empire, travelers distinguished Turks from Greeks, Jews, Armenians - these were the main nationalities. The French traveler Nicolas Nicolay, in each of his pictures, of course says if it’s an image of a Greek woman, or a Turkish woman, - he distinguishes nationalities; Nicolay made very careful sketches of both men and women, and he also depicts Armenians and Jewish merchants in Istanbul. I think that the term that all Europeans would use would be “Turk”, and the expression “turned Turk” famously appears in *Othello*. The phrase, “to turn Turk” means to become Muslim.

Q: I think I missed your point about the two writers, about spies and foreigners being suspected for spying. Starting from that, I was wondering how we can also frame those travelers not just as

cultural mediators, but mediators between states and state relations and discuss them within that context. I don't know if you'd like to elaborate on what is the discussion at the time about spies, Westerners coming into the Ottoman empire, how they were perceived - from that perspective.

A: I think that those two particular travelers really wouldn't fall into that category, but there were others who spied, even the ambassadors themselves - there are detailed state papers where they give information on the Ottoman empire to the queen, and the same happened with the French and the Germans, because Europeans didn't know very much about the Ottomans at that time. So yes, there were spies, but I think in this case, Dallam always places himself in opposition to this kind of authority, to the state authority. There are always people in the account that are more important than him, that have the role of the spy or the official translator of the empire to the English, but he clearly doesn't want to play that game. For Dallam, boundaries are fluid.

Q: It's rare actually that we dip into Greece in the pre-17th century, in the United States. I know you're coming at it from English studies, but there isn't much opportunity to go to the pre-national period very often, so it's certainly been very useful for us, and also I'm particularly taken by Dallam.

Q: I think Lithgow is a fascinating character. Yes, Dallam is interesting, especially because of these different forces that he was representing - why he was going, this kind of mission, this object, these things are very fascinating. But Lithgow as just a character himself in his writing, and the kinds of things you're telling us about him, he seems like such a mystery. He almost sounds like someone that he himself would make up in his writing. You had said that his writing is kind of picaresque, and earlier on you had talked about how there was some kind of a scandal that perhaps led to his fleeing in the first place and taking advantage of an inheritance to go. I can't remember if in your talk you had mentioned if there was a specific goal or destination that he had in mind, or if like Dallam, his travels were motivated by something in particular, or if it was just to travel, for Lithgow?

A: Yes, travel for the sake of traveling.